Pompeo blasts UN report on assassination of Iranian arch-terrorist

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U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo slammed a United Nations report claiming that an American drone strike that killed a top Iranian general in January represented a violation of international law.

The report was presented on Thursday by Agnes Callamard to the U.N.-backed Human Rights Council, which counts among its members states with human rights records, such as Libya, Venezuela, and Sudan.

The report chronicles events around the death of Iranian Gen. Qassem Soleimani and the legal implications of his killing as part of a broader look on the use of drone strikes.

Callamard, the special rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions who has been commissioned by the council, called the January strike in Iraq “the first known incident in which a state invokes self-defense as justification for an attack against a government official outside a declared armed conflict.”

Pompeo said in a statement late Thursday that the U.S. rejected her report and “opinions.”

“Ms. Callamard’s conclusions are spurious,” he said. “The strike that killed Gen. Soleimani was in response to an escalating series of armed attacks in preceding months by the Islamic Republic of Iran and militias it supports on U.S. forces and interests in the Middle East region.”

Pompeo said the strike on Baghdad International Airport was carried out “to deter Iran from launching or supporting further attacks against the United States or U.S. interests, and to degrade the capabilities of the Qods Force.” He said Callamard “gives more cause to distrust U.N. human rights mechanisms.”

Pompeo added, “The United States is transparent regarding the international law basis for the strike.​ As we outlined in a January 8, 2020, letter to the UN Security Council submitted in accordance with Article 51 of the UN Charter​, the strike was undertaken in the exercise of the United States’ inherent right of self-defense. As the President said on January 2, ‘We will always protect our diplomats, service members, and all Americans.'”

The Trump administration pulled the United States out of the rights council two years ago, based on its lengthy history of anti-Israel bias and the fact that it accepts autocratic regimes that regularly abuse human rights.

Callamard is perhaps best known for leading an investigation into the killing of Washington Post columnist Jamal Khashoggi, a Saudi national, and issuing a scathing report on the actions of Saudi officials.

In her new report, Callamard acknowledged that international humanitarian and human rights law can provide “diverging answers” on the legal validity of some drone strikes, and the one against Soleimani raised “genuine uncertainty as to how to interpret its lawfulness.

According to Callamard, “It is hard to imagine that a similar strike against a Western military leader would not be considered as an act of war, potentially leading to intense action, political, military and otherwise, against the state launching the strike.”