

To support teachers and families with tough topics in the classroom and at home, we've written the following guide as a resource. The guide is not intended for students but as a resource to inform adults about the topic and help them develop talking points.

Teaching Tough Topics: U.S.-Iran Tensions

By Jaime Joyce

On January 3, the U.S. military carried out a drone attack in Iraq. The attack killed Qasem Soleimani, a top military leader from Iran. The action comes after increased tensions between the U.S. and Iran, and has fueled anxiety about what might happen as a result. The situation is dominating the news, and children who hear about it are likely to have lots of questions.

We realize this is a difficult topic to explain to kids. *TIME for Kids* is here to help. The guide below offers talking points for how to answer questions about this tough topic. It's not intended to be used as a script. It's meant to arm you with the information you need if you choose to bring up the topic or if students ask questions about it.

Trust your instincts. You know your students best. Use that knowledge to gauge the depth and breadth of your discussion.

Who was Qasem Soleimani?

Qasem Soleimani was a top military leader in Iran, a country in the Middle East.

Why did the U.S. take action against Soleimani?

President Donald Trump has called Soleimani a terrorist. Trump says Soleimani ordered attacks on American military and diplomats and was planning attacks against Americans in the Middle East. For this reason, Trump ordered the U.S. military to kill Soleimani. The drone attack took place at an airport in Baghdad, in Iraq. An Iraqi leader was also killed.

The U.S. strike came after a series of recent attacks by Iran against Americans in Iraq. On December 27, a rocket strike killed one American civilian and wounded several U.S. service members. There was also a December 31 attack on the U.S. embassy in Iraq. Trump says Soleimani ordered these attacks.

U.S. military leaders gave Trump several choices for how to respond to Iran's actions. Killing Soleimani was considered the most extreme. Some top U.S. military and government officials have expressed surprise and concern about Trump's decision. But the president insists it was in America's best interest. "We will always protect our diplomats, service members, all Americans, and our allies," Trump said in a January 3 address from his resort in Palm Beach, Florida.

How has Iran responded following Soleimani's death?

Iran has called for three days of national mourning. Thousands of people gathered in the streets of Iran's capital, Tehran, to protest Soleimani's killing. Funeral services were held in Iran on Sunday and Monday. Iranian leaders say they will take action against the U.S. At this time, however, it is unclear how or when they will do so. Still, some kind of action is expected. Majid Takht Ravanchi is Iran's ambassador to the United Nations. "We cannot just remain silent," he told CNN.

What will the U.S. do if Iran retaliates?

On January 3, President Trump warned Iran not to retaliate. If it does, he said, the U.S. is "ready and prepared to take whatever action is necessary." A day later, Trump wrote on Twitter that the U.S. had targeted 52 Iranian sites, including places that are important to Iranian culture. But according to international law, strikes on cultural sites are illegal.

Why don't the U.S. and Iran get along?

The U.S. and Iran have a difficult relationship. It's been this way for many years. In 1979, Iran took 52 American diplomats and citizens hostage. They were released after 444 days.

In 2018, tensions increased again after President Trump said the U.S. would no longer participate in a 2015 deal with Iran. This international agreement set strict limits for 15 years on Iran's ability to create nuclear weapons. In return, the U.S. and countries in the European Union agreed to end trade restrictions. When Trump pulled out of the agreement, the U.S. put trade restrictions back in place. This has hurt Iran's economy.

Does the killing of Soleimani mean the U.S. and Iran are going to war?

Many people worry that the latest tensions between the U.S. and Iran could lead the U.S. to war in the Middle East. Following Soleimani's death, the U.S. sent troops to the region. But President Trump has said he does not want war. "We took action last night to stop a war," Trump said in his January 3 address. "We did not take action to start a war."

Others wonder if Americans will be required to join the U.S. military if the U.S. and Iran do go to war. But the U.S. ended the draft in the 1970s after protests against the Vietnam War. Neither the president nor Congress have indicated they would bring back the draft.

The United Nations (U.N.) says steps should be taken to avoid war and decrease tensions between the U.S. and Iran. António Guterres leads the U.N. "This is a moment in which leaders must exercise maximum restraint," he said in a January 3 statement.