

This might be Trump's worst lie ever

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The U.S. Embassy at the Green Zone in Baghdad on Jan. 7. (Stringer/Reuters)

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In recent days, President Trump has come up with a new twist on his justification for killing Iranian general Qasem Soleimani, namely that four embassies were targeted. From everything we know now (and from what Congress was told), this is simply made up. [The Post](#) reports that embassies themselves were not warned of any such imminent threats:

Trump is “totally obsessed with not letting something like Benghazi happen to him,” the official said, referring to the 2012 attack on a U.S. facility in Libya that has achieved totemic status among Trump allies, who see it as evidence of former president Barack Obama’s alleged weakness in the face of terrorism.

The embassy in Baghdad did not receive an alert commensurate to the threat Trump described, said a person familiar with the situation, who was not authorized to comment publicly. When the U.S. government has specific information about threats to embassies, warnings or alerts are often sent to embassy personnel to be vigilant.

On the Sunday shows, administration officials were pressed on Trump’s dubious claim that four embassies had been under threat. Defense Secretary Mark T. Esper conceded he had not seen such intelligence. He [offered](#) that Trump only said he “believed” his unsupported claim, not that it was true. It is small comfort to know even Trump’s senior advisers understand that Trump believes things that just are not true.

Lawmakers were not told about an imminent threat to an embassy, let alone to four of them. Rep. Justin Amash (I-Mich.) was blunt in his assessment:

The administration didn’t present evidence to Congress regarding even one embassy. The four embassies claim seems to be totally made up. And they have never presented evidence of

imminence—a necessary condition to act without congressional approval—with respect to any of this. <https://twitter.com/facethenation/status/1216359717607481350> ...

Amash's conclusion was bolstered by an [NBC News report on Monday](#) that “President Donald Trump authorized the killing of [Soleimani] seven months ago if Iran's increased aggression resulted in the death of an American, according to five current and former senior administration officials.” That suggests it was a long-standing option for retaliation, which would “undermine the Trump administration's [stated justification](#) for ordering the U.S. drone strike that killed Soleimani in Baghdad on Jan. 3.”

The ever-shifting explanations for Trump's conduct are emblematic of how his utter lack of credibility in the national security realm has come back to haunt him. He has gone from smearing the intelligence community, to praising it, to inventing intelligence. The media too often pretend that there is credence to his assertions or that maybe there is some super-secret intelligence that cannot be shared with them.

Trump has a consistent pattern of misleading the public and out-and-out lying. He has ignored uncontroverted intelligence, hyped false allegations and now given what seems like false justification for launching offensive military action without congressional authorization.

Trump repeatedly denied the conclusive findings of the intelligence community regarding Russian interference with the 2016 election, thereby parroting Russian President Vladimir Putin's propaganda. He continued his Putin PR offensive by smearing Ukraine, falsely accusing its government of interfering with our election. By disregarding conclusive intelligence and baselessly contradicting our own findings, he facilitated the interests of a hostile foreign power. (One could also add to this category of offenses his and Secretary of State Mike Pompeo's insistence that there was no conclusive evidence of Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's involvement in the gruesome murder and dismemberment of Jamal Khashoggi.)

Trump has also hyped internal Justice Department investigations, only to see his elaborate conspiracy theories and wild accusations debunked by their findings. Inspector General Michael E. Horowitz last August concluded his investigation into alleged wrongdoing by former FBI director James B. Comey. [Horowitz found](#) that Comey violated various department policies but found no lawbreaking and no illegal leaking of classified material as Trump charged. [As I pointed out at the time](#), Trump had accused Comey of illegally leaking classified material. Horowitz repeated in his report that there had been no basis for prosecutions of Comey.

Horowitz also knocked down another monster conspiracy theory that was the centerpiece of the Trump and right-wing media echo chamber's talking points for three years: The “deep state” initiated an investigation into the Trump campaign's interactions with Russia based on insufficient evidence and out of political bias. Horowitz found wrongdoing in the FBI's applications to the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Court, a serious matter that deserves scrutiny, but the central Trump narrative that the deep state was out to get Trump for political reasons was wrong.

Again, Trump's false accusations in the national security realm damaged the reputation of the FBI and gave credence to Putin's claims that there was no there there.

Trump's and Pompeo's assertions of fact in the national intelligence realm should be viewed as mere allegations until independent verification of their claims has been obtained. When sources of information routinely lie, the press should warn the public, if it chooses to air their information, that the sources historically have been unreliable. The president and secretary of state are no different.

Congress has an important role here. While habitual lying is rarely impeachable, it should prompt a heightened oversight in national security, including a full accounting of the president's and secretary of state's misstatements. There is more than enough reason to restrain an impulsive and dishonest president from acting unilaterally. If need be, Congress can deny funding for purely offensive action against Iran absent appropriate consultation with the Gang of Eight.

At Tuesday's Democratic presidential debate, the candidates need to stand shoulder to shoulder in denouncing Trump's lying, reiterating the need for Congress to restrain him and explaining the danger he poses to our national security. Any moment spent bickering among themselves in an effort to relitigate past votes would be a gift to Trump. Democrats would be foolish to waste a unique opportunity to educate the American people. They should take the fight to him, not each other, on this one.