

The growing threat of an Israeli war against Iran

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With the world media focused on the discussions in Washington between US President Donald Trump and his French counterpart Emmanuel Macron concerning the Iranian nuclear agreement, the Israeli government has adopted an increasingly provocative posture toward Iran while carrying out a buildup on its northern border in preparation for a military confrontation.

Macron bowed to Trump's demand for an aggressive policy toward Iran aimed at further curtailing not only the country's nuclear program, but also its conventional weapons, and rolling back its influence throughout the Middle East. Nevertheless, the reaction in Tel Aviv to the Franco-American summit was largely negative.

The Israeli perception is that Macron might succeed in brokering a deal that would deter the American president from the outright repudiation of the JCPOA (Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action), the nuclear deal reached between Iran and six major powers—the US, Russia, China, Britain, France and Germany—in 2015. Trump faces a May 12 deadline for deciding whether to scrap the agreement and reimpose unilateral US sanctions against Iran. This would place Washington on a direct trajectory toward war with Iran, the preferred outcome of the Israeli government.

Israeli Intelligence Minister Israel Katz said in a radio interview Wednesday that the Iranian nuclear deal had to be “fundamentally amended, and if not, cancelled.” He warned that Macron and other European leaders had to understand that “putting pressure on Iran today can prevent violence and perhaps war tomorrow.”

The warning of a potential war made by the Israeli minister was by no means hypothetical. Israel has sharply escalated the danger of an all-out military confrontation with Iran.

Largely overshadowed by the April 14 US-British-French missile strikes launched against Syria on the phony pretext of a chemical weapons attack was an Israeli

attack carried out against Syria six days earlier, with potentially even more far-reaching consequences.

The April 8 strike, a direct violation of international law and a violation of the sovereignty of two countries, was launched by US-supplied F-15 fighter jets flying over Lebanon against Syria's T4 Air Base in the central province of Homs. The victims of the Israeli missiles included over a dozen military personnel, including seven Iranian military advisers, apparently the intended targets.

Iranian personnel are in Syria to support the government of President Bashar al-Assad, Tehran's closest ally in the Arab world, against the bloody seven-year-old war for regime change orchestrated by the CIA and Washington's regional allies. Tehran responded to the Israeli attack with an implicit threat of retaliation. “When a regime assumes the right to violate another country's airspace in a planned move and also targets forces fighting with terrorism, it should definitely consider its consequences and retaliatory actions,” the secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council (SNSC), Ali Shamkhani, told reporters on Tuesday.

The Israeli government has answered Tehran with declarations that it is prepared for war. “The IDF (Israel Defense Forces) and the security forces are ready for any development,” Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu declared recently. “We will fight whoever tries to harm us. We are not put off by the price and will exact a cost from those who want to harm us.”

Israeli army units have reportedly been reinforced on the Syrian and Lebanese borders, and the country's air force has been placed on high alert.

The Western media has cast the escalating confrontation as pitting an aggressive Iran against a besieged Israel. This is nonsense. While Iran bowed to US and European pressure to limit its peaceful nuclear program, Israel remains the region's sole nuclear power, with an arsenal estimated at 200 to 400 warheads. With the backing of

Washington and its allies, Tel Aviv has steadfastly refused to sign the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.

Meanwhile, according to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, Saudi Arabia, which has emerged as the key regional ally in the US-Israeli axis against Iran, spent five times more than Tehran on military hardware in 2016.

Iran is a target because, as a regional power, it presents an obstacle to the US drive to exert undisputed hegemony over the oil-rich Middle East. Iranian influence, including in Iraq, Syria and Lebanon, has been strengthened by the catastrophic consequences of a quarter-century of US wars in the region.

The threat of an Israeli war against Iran has been underscored by a flurry of meetings between the US and Israeli military establishments. Gen. Joseph Votel, the chief of the US Central Command, which oversees military operations in the Middle East, paid a visit to Israel on Monday, the first ever by a Centcom commander. His mission was apparently to assure the Netanyahu government that the US would not be carrying out Trump's recent promise to withdraw American forces from Syria.

Israeli Defense Minister Avigdor Lieberman then flew to Washington on Wednesday for talks with US officials, including Defense Secretary James Mattis and National Security Adviser John Bolton. The agenda, according to the Israeli government, was countering Iran's "expansion" in the Middle East, and especially in Syria.

There are, no doubt, divisions within the ruling establishment both in Washington and in Europe over Israel's drive toward war with Iran. As the *Washington Post* reported, "[S]ome foreign policy figures in Washington seem keen on letting Israel continue its covert campaign against the Iranians. They see Israeli strikes as necessary at a time when Mr. Trump wants to disengage from the Syrian conflict..."

On Wednesday, the daily *Telegraph* published an article drafted by Gen. Richard Dannatt, former chief of the British general staff, titled "War between Iran and Israel is coming—and Britain must take a stand against the former's terrorist proxies."

General Dannatt argues that "we now face a situation where Iran, if left unchecked, will be the cause of a potentially devastating new war with Israel in the region."

The former British commander makes the case that Israel faces an "intolerable threat" in Syria and Lebanon, concentrating his fire on Lebanon's bourgeois Islamist Hezbollah movement, which he repeatedly charges with

embedding its arms and fighters "among the civilian population," providing a preemptive alibi for a future massacre of Lebanese civilians by the IDF.

"We must be prepared to expect Israel to defend its vital security interests robustly," writes the British general. "Many criticize the IDF for being heavy-handed, but having quizzed their chiefs of staffs personally, I believe they would act within acceptable legal and moral standards." These "standards" have found recent expression in the IDF's slaughter of unarmed demonstrators on the Israeli border with Gaza, where at least 40 have been shot dead and several thousand wounded.

A major factor driving Tel Aviv's escalation toward war against Iran is the growth of social tensions within Israel. The most socially unequal of the so-called advanced countries after the United States, Israel is gripped by unending corruption scandals. Under these conditions, the Israeli government has ample motive for directing internal tensions outward in the form of war.

Similar motives underlie the support in Washington and among the other major imperialist powers for Israeli aggression and a far wider war in the Middle East.

The reckless policies being pursued by Israel and its backers in Washington, London and elsewhere threaten to trigger a region-wide conflict that could quickly draw in all of the major powers, including the world's largest nuclear powers, the US and Russia. The only means of preventing such a catastrophe is the development of a mass movement of the international working class against war and the capitalist system that produces it.



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