

Is Trump plotting a war against Iran?

Bill Van Auken
14 November 2020

Is the Trump White House preparing to launch a war of aggression against Iran as part of its attempted coup to nullify the results of the 2020 elections and establish a presidential dictatorship?

This is question that is being asked with increasing urgency in both Washington’s and Israel’s military-intelligence circles, as US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo embarks on a seven-nation trip centered on Israel and the Arab Gulf oil monarchies, which comprise the anti-Iranian axis cultivated by the Trump administration.

On the eve of the visit by Pompeo—who answered a US reporter’s question this week by saying there would be a “smooth transition to a second Trump administration”—Israel’s two major English-language dailies, *Haaretz* and the *Jerusalem Post*, led their digital editions with the threat of a war against Iran.

“Will Netanyahu Strike Iran? Unlikely, but Trump Might,” was the *Haaretz* headline. The *Jerusalem Post* asked, “Are Israel and the US planning to attack Iran?”

The growing speculation is driven not only by Pompeo’s visit to Israel, which is to include the first-ever appearance by a US secretary of state at a Zionist settlement in the occupied West Bank. Earlier this week, the former Iran-Contra conspirator Elliott Abrams, who is the Trump administration’s special envoy on both Iran and Venezuela, arrived in Israel for talks with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. And the *Jerusalem Post* reported that US Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman Gen. Mark Milley held a video call Thursday with his counterpart, Israel Defense Forces Chief of Staff Aviv Kochavi.

The Trump administration and the Netanyahu government in Israel oppose any easing by an incoming Biden administration of the “maximum pressure” sanctions regime imposed against Iran following Washington’s unilateral abrogation of the 2015 nuclear accord reached between Tehran and the major powers.

While invoking claims of Iranian support for “terrorism” and a supposed continuing threat from its civilian nuclear program, US imperialism is determined to eliminate Iran as a rival for hegemony over the energy-rich Persian Gulf region and as an economic and military ally of China.

The extraordinary flurry of US-Israeli contacts in the immediate aftermath of Trump’s defeat at the polls has unfolded in the context of a wholesale purge of top officials at the Pentagon, beginning with Defense Secretary Mark Esper, who was dismissed with a tweet and replaced by a little known ex-Special Forces colonel and Trump loyalist, Christopher Miller.

Other right-wing Trump loyalists, known for extreme anti-Iranian positions, have been placed in top positions. These include retired general and Fox News commentator Anthony Tata, who is taking the number three post at the Pentagon, undersecretary of defense for policy. Trump had been forced to rescind his previous nomination of Tata to this position in the face of his previous statements denouncing Barack Obama as a “terrorist leader” and calling for the execution of former CIA Director John Brennan. Also installed were Ezra Cohen-Watnick, a 34-year-old far right-wing operative, and Kash Patel, who played a key role in Trump’s campaign to dig up dirt against Joe Biden in Ukraine, as undersecretary of defense for intelligence and chief of staff to the defense secretary, respectively.

In addition, Miller, the new defense secretary, hired as his senior adviser retired Army Colonel Douglas Macgregor, who is known for advocating martial law on the US border and the extra-judicial execution of migrants and refugees.

Far more circumspect than the Israeli press, the *New York Times*, while acknowledging the unprecedented character of the Pentagon purge, stated: “There is no evidence so far that these new appointees harbor a secret agenda on Iran or have taken up their posts with

an action plan in hand.” It added, however, “It is not impossible that the shake-up could presage some volatile and dangerous period, to include even overt or covert operations against adversaries like Iran.”

That such a cabal of fascistic militarists has occupied key policy positions at the Pentagon in the midst of Trump’s attempts to overturn the results of the presidential election poses the direct threat that the US armed forces will be used to suppress an inevitable eruption of mass popular opposition to the unfolding coup attempt, as well as to any new war.

Trump’s hostility to Esper has its roots in the events of early June, when the now ousted defense secretary disassociated himself from the president’s threats to invoke the Insurrection Act and deploy regular Army troops in the streets to attack anti-police violence demonstrations.

Following Esper’s ouster, General Milley convened a meeting of the Joint Chiefs, and later the same day held a conference call with the US combat commanders. There is no doubt that he and others are putting out feelers to see who among the military brass would support Trump’s coup, and who would oppose it.

At a Veterans Day ceremony marking the opening of a new Army museum, Milley delivered a speech in which he pointedly stressed, “We are unique among militaries. We do not take an oath to a king or a queen, a tyrant or a dictator. We do not take an oath to an individual... We take an oath to the Constitution.”

An attack on Iran, whether against its civilian nuclear program or other strategic targets, could provide Trump with a kind of “December surprise” designed to shock public opinion and create political conditions for the consolidation of a presidential dictatorship.

That such an attack would undoubtedly provoke Iranian retaliation, threatening the lives of thousands of US troops deployed in the region, would be the desired outcome of such a provocation. Representing the most ruthless sections of the US ruling oligarchy, Trump has presided over the unnecessary deaths of a quarter of a million Americans from the COVID-19 pandemic. Mass casualties among American military personnel in the Persian Gulf region would be a small price in terms of the administration’s political calculations.

Given such events, Biden and the Democratic Party could be counted upon to subordinate themselves the newly minted “wartime president.” The Democrats

have consistently opposed the Trump administration from the right, charging that it has been “too soft” on Russia and China, while their reaction to the ominous shake-up at the Pentagon has been to warn that it could leave US imperialism vulnerable to “our enemies.”

In an interview with Germany’s *Der Spiegel*, retired Admiral James Stavridis, who held the post of NATO supreme allied commander Europe and worked as a senior Pentagon adviser, warned of “the great danger in this situation.”

The US president, he said, “has all options in his hands.” He continued: “He can order any kind of military operation, even an attack with nuclear weapons. In addition, there are now people at the top who have no experience and who will not stop him even from dangerous ideas. For example, Trump could escalate by having the US Navy patrol the international waters off China. He can even order targeted military strikes against his declared arch-enemy Iran.”

Underlying this danger, however, is not merely the plotting of Trump, but rather the insoluble crisis of US imperialism. At home, what remains of its democratic institutions is collapsing under the weight of unsustainable social inequality, while abroad, it has attempted over the course of decades—under Democratic and Republican administrations alike—to reverse the decline of its global hegemony by means of military aggression. These tendencies of development are coalescing into the unprecedented political crisis surrounding the 2020 election and its aftermath.

The fight against the threat of war and dictatorship cannot waged within the framework of the conflict between the Democrats, a party of Wall Street and the military-intelligence apparatus, and the Trump administration. It requires the independent political mobilization of the working class in the fight for a political general strike to defeat Trump’s dictatorial conspiracy and take forward the struggle for the socialist transformation of society.



To contact the WSWWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

[wsws.org/contact](https://www.wsws.org/contact)