

Pompeo escalates Iran war threats in trip to Israel

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US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo began the most important leg of his extraordinary 10-day, seven-nation international tour Wednesday, arriving in Israel in the immediate wake of provocative Israeli air strikes against Iranian targets in Syria.

With barely two months to go until the scheduled inauguration of Democratic president-elect Joe Biden on January 20, Pompeo's tour amounts to an extra-constitutional conspiracy aimed at preparing a potentially world-catastrophic war in the Middle East.

Traditionally, during the "lame duck" period between US elections and presidential inaugurations, Washington's foreign policy establishment is engaged in preparing the handover of power, with officials of the incumbent administration consulting on major policy questions with their incoming replacements.

In this case, Pompeo launched his tour with a press conference in which he answered a reporter's question as to whether there would be a "smooth transition" in the State Department by declaring that there would indeed be "smooth transition to a second Trump administration."

It has since emerged that last Thursday Trump met with his national security cabinet to discuss whether he could initiate a war on Iran by bombing Natanz, Iran's largest uranium enrichment facility, located south of the capital Tehran. While the *New York Times* reported that Trump's top advisors talked him out of such an attack—a war crime that could claim the lives of tens of thousands of victims, while sickening hundreds of thousands more with radiation poisoning—the conspiracies against Iran continue apace.

The *Washington Post* quoted an unnamed senior administration official as saying, "No orders have been given ... There's no imminent threat of preemptive strikes against Iran for their nuclear or missile programs." The unspoken word left hanging in the air by this hardly reassuring statement is "yet."

Pompeo landed in Israel in the immediate wake of early morning air strikes by the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) against eight separate Iranian-connected targets in Syria. Damascus reported that they had killed at least three soldiers, wounded several others and caused material damage.

While in the past the IDF has been circumspect about

claiming responsibility for its air strikes against Syrian targets, it openly claimed credit for the latest attacks, asserting that they had been launched in retaliation for the discovery of improvised explosive devices in the buffer zone separating the Israeli-occupied Syrian Golan Heights and Syria itself. Israeli officials claimed that the devices had been planted by Syrian militiamen under the instructions of the Iranians.

In a demonstrative show of support for Israeli aggression, Pompeo used the trip to Israel to become the first top-level US official to visit both the occupied West Bank and Golan Heights. He did so as the government of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu announced plans for a major expansion of the Zionist settlement in Givat Hamatos on the southern outskirts of Jerusalem. The expansion would effectively wall off East Jerusalem, designated as a future capital for any new Palestinian state, from the West Bank cities of Bethlehem and Ramallah, driving a final nail into the coffin of the so-called "Two state solution" envisioned in the long and fruitless line of US-brokered Middle East "peace" plans.

Upon arrival in Israel, Pompeo announced yet another round of sanctions against Iran, targeting a government-linked charitable organization as well as state security and intelligence officials.

In a statement issued to the media titled, "The Importance of Sanctions on Iran," Pompeo warned: "Throughout the coming weeks and months, we will impose new sanctions on Iran, including using our nuclear, counterterrorism, and human rights authorities, each reflecting the wide range of malign behavior that continues to emanate from the Iranian regime."

The US Secretary of State claimed that Washington's "maximum pressure" sanctions regime, an economic blockade tantamount to an act of war, has been "extraordinarily effective."

There is no indication, however, that US sanctions have accomplished anything outside of driving millions of Iranians into poverty and hunger, while killing many thousands denied life-saving medicines, which Tehran has increasing trouble importing because of Washington's blanket threat of secondary sanctions against anyone trading with the country or financially facilitating such trade. This criminal policy has become even more "effective" under conditions in which Iran, like the

United States itself, is being ravaged by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The aim repeatedly stated by Pompeo of compelling Iran to become a “normal country,” by which he means a return to the kind of US puppet dictatorship that existed prior to 1979 under the Shah, has yet to materialize. Nor has Washington managed to significantly alter Iran’s regional influence or prevent its increasingly close economic, political and military ties with US imperialism’s main global rival, China.

The Trump administration is packaging its waves of new sanctions as a response to alleged “terrorist” or “human rights” offenses by Iran. This is widely seen as an attempt to make it politically costly for an incoming Biden administration to rescind the measures in the face of accusations that it is encouraging terrorism and human rights violations.

Conventional wisdom within US foreign policy circles and the corporate media is that, much like Netanyahu in the West Bank, the Trump administration is working to establish “facts on the ground” that will make it difficult if not impossible for an incoming Biden administration to fulfill its campaign pledge to rejoin the 2015 Iranian nuclear accord that the Trump administration unilaterally abrogated in 2018. Biden and the Democrats have conditioned this pledge on the demand for further concessions from Tehran, while swearing their “ironclad commitment to Israel’s security.”

There may, however, be another, far more threatening motive for the highly unusual frenzy of activity by the “lame duck” secretary of state. That is, Pompeo is carrying out the foreign policy side of the open conspiracy of Trump and his backers to overturn the results of the November 3 election and establish a presidential dictatorship.

Washington is pressing Iran on a whole number of fronts in a manner which suggests preparation for and provocation of a military confrontation. This involves not only escalating sanctions and air strikes by Israel, but also a range of cyberattacks and sabotage, the latest of which has been aimed at the Iranian national gas company, with the apparent aim of cutting off heat to Iranians as the winter months arrive.

The Pentagon last week redeployed an F-16 fighter squadron from Germany to Al-Dhafra Air Base in Abu Dhabi, while the US Navy’s Nimitz Carrier Strike Group remains deployed in the Persian Gulf.

Both Trump and Pompeo have signaled that the death of a single American caused by a militia connected to Iran can provide the casus belli for a US attack. The senior US official who assured the *Washington Post* that there were no “imminent” plans for a strike against Iran’s nuclear facilities added that Trump had been “extraordinarily forceful” in insisting that “If the Iranians kill Americans, the U.S. response will be swift and painful.”

The Trump administration brought the region to the brink of all-out war with its drone assassination of Gen. Qassim Suleimani, one of Iran’s top officials, along with Abu Mahdi al-

Muhandis, a top leader of the Popular Mobilization Committee, the coalition of predominantly Shia militias that has been incorporated into Iraq’s military.

The slightest provocation can serve as the pretext for launching a US war on Iran between now and January 20, US inauguration day. Iran has vowed that it will retaliate against such an attack, with the target being the 35,000 troops stationed at multiple US bases ringing Iran.

Mass US casualties resulting from a deliberately provoked military confrontation could provide the Trump White House with the pretext for overturning the transfer of power and imposing martial law.

Trump has carried out a purge of top officials at the Pentagon, beginning with former Defense Secretary Mark Esper. A lobbyist for the arms industry and subservient to Trump, Esper nonetheless drew the president’s ire for his opposition both to a war on Iran and to Trump’s attempt to invoke the Insurrection Act and send troops into the streets against anti-police-violence demonstrations last summer.

Esper’s replacement, Christopher Miller, a retired colonel and 30-year special forces operator, announced on Wednesday what is, again, an extraordinary change in policy for a Pentagon chief who will supposedly pass the baton in barely two months. He is designating the Special Operations Command as what amounts to a new branch of the armed services, on a par with the Army or the Navy, and reporting directly to the defense secretary.

The chain of command for the US special forces will now pass to Miller from their newly appointed civilian head, Ezra Cohen-Watnick, a 34-year-old extreme right-wing ideologue, who was brought into the National Security Council by the ousted and indicted former national security advisor Gen. Michael Flynn on the basis of his connections to Steve Bannon and Jared Kushner.

Trump has curried favor with the military’s special operations forces, including through his highly-publicized intervention in favor of former Navy Seal Edward Gallagher, who was charged with war crimes in Iraq.



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