US, Israel and Saudi Arabia meet amid mounting war threats against Iran

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Both Israeli and Saudi officials have confirmed an unprecedented secret trip by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, accompanied by US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and Yossi Cohen, the head of the Israeli spy agency Mossad, to Saudi Arabia on Sunday.

Israel Army Radio first reported the trip and meeting between the US and Israeli officials and Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, which was confirmed by a senior Saudi official speaking to the *Wall Street Journal*. This marks the first publicly reported talks of this kind, though meetings between Israeli and Saudi military and intelligence officials are believed to have taken place with greater frequency in recent years.

Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan subsequently tweeted a denial of the report, saying, "No such meeting occurred. The only officials present were American and Saudi." The denial reflects the controversial nature of the meeting within Saudi Arabia, where the ruling House of Saud has postured as the guardian of Islam and has formally insisted that "normalization" of ties between Riyadh and Tel Aviv are contingent on the implementation of a Middle East peace deal and the creation of an independent Palestinian state.

The Sunni oil monarchies of the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain dispensed with such conditions, however, in signing onto a US-brokered deal in August to recognize Israel. The monarchy in Bahrain, which rules over an oppressed Shia majority population, depends upon Saudi Arabia for its survival and could not have entered the agreement without its approval.

The meeting between Pompeo, Netanyahu and bin Salman in the Red Sea city of Neom, like the August deal, was aimed not at achieving Middle East peace, but rather solidifying an alliance between Washington, Israel and the Saudi monarchy, the linchpin of reaction and imperialist domination in the Middle East, in preparation for a war against Iran.

This has been the main objective of Pompeo's extraordinary 10-day foreign tour, conducted barely two months before inauguration day, and what, according to the election results, should be the swearing in of a new administration headed by Democrat Joe Biden.

While it is traditional for "lame duck" secretaries of state to use this interregnum to prepare the handover of power and coordinate policy decisions with their incoming replacements, Pompeo has made it clear that he intends to do nothing of the kind.

On the eve of his trip, he told a reporter asking whether he anticipated a "smooth transition" at the US State Department that there would indeed be "a smooth transition to a second Trump administration," openly aligning US foreign policy with the post-election coup attempt being staged from the White House.

Pompeo has announced plans to continuously escalate Washington's "maximum pressure" sanctions campaign against Iran, an economic blockade tantamount to a state of war, over the next two months, announcing new measures at least weekly.

During the course of his trip, he and State Department officials have repeatedly stated that the option of military action against Iran remains "on the table."

While the US Secretary of State has refused to take any questions from accompanying representatives of the US media during his tour, he gave an interview to *The National*, an Abu Dhabi-based daily controlled by the UAE's monarchical rulers, in which he was asked if a US military strike against Iran was under consideration.

Pompeo responded: "The President of the United States always retains the right to do what's needed to ensure that Americans are safe. It's been our policy for four years. It'll be our policy, so long as we have the responsibility to keep America protected."

That such plans are under discussion was confirmed by the *New York Times*, which cited senior administration

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officials reporting on a Nov. 12 meeting between Trump and his national security cabinet in which the US president raised the possibility of airstrikes against Iran's main civilian nuclear site at Natanz. The pretext for such an attack was Tehran's having exceeded limits on its stockpile of low-enriched uranium set by the 2015 nuclear agreement between Iran and the major powers, which the Trump administration unilaterally abrogated in 2018.

While the *Times* reported that senior advisors persuaded Trump against striking the nuclear facility and "left the meeting believing a missile attack inside Iran was off the table," there are ominous indications that preparations for war are continuing.

The US Central Command confirmed over the weekend that US B-52H Stratofortress bombers, capable of deploying up to 20 nuclear cruise missiles, as well as conventional munitions, have been redeployed from Minot Air Force Base in North Dakota on a "short-notice, long-range mission" to the Middle East.

According to a press release by US Central Command, the purpose of the mission was "to deter aggression and reassure US partners and allies."

This marked the first time that the long-range strategic bombers have been deployed in the region since last January, in the wake of the US drone missile assassination of Gen. Qassem Soleimani, one of Iran's top officials, after he arrived at Baghdad's international airport for an official state visit.

The dispatch of the B-52s to the Middle East follows the redeployment last week of 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.

Meanwhile, Israel has been carrying out increasingly provocative airstrikes against Iranian-linked forces in Syria, while offering unprecedented public claims of responsibility for the attacks. The latest such strikes were reported on Saturday in the eastern region of Deir Ezzor, near the Iraqi border, hitting as many as 10 targets and reportedly killing 14 militia fighters.

The Israeli government has for years pressed the US to carry out a war with Iran, and its latest actions are no doubt meant to provoke such a confrontation before the end of the Trump administration.

The conventional wisdom within the corporate media and the Democratic Party is that the anti-Iranian campaign being waged by Trump and Pompeo is aimed at boxing in an incoming Biden administration, impeding its stated aim of rejoining the Iranian nuclear agreement, albeit while demanding even further concessions from Tehran.

Increasingly, however, more ominous possibilities are being considered. The *Washington Post* reported Sunday that "speculation that the Trump administration was preparing for military action against Iran nuclear capacities in its waning days has been rising. Some considered Netanyahu's apparent visit to the [Saudi] kingdom and the presence of Pompeo as further evidence that a strike was possible."

The protracted and bitter conflict between the US and Iran dates back nearly 40 years to the overthrow of the US-backed dictatorship of the Shah. Its objective source lies in US imperialism's drive to impose its hegemony over the oil-rich Middle East and deny its strategic resources to its principal global rival, China. Whatever the tactical differences, this drive will continue whether the Democrats or the Republicans hold power next year.

In the context of the explosive political crisis unfolding within the US, however, the Trump administration's launching of a precipitous military confrontation with Iran—and the inevitable Iranian retaliation—could serve a definite and sinister political purpose. It would provide the pretext for the declaration of a national emergency, blocking the transfer of power and imposing martial law.

Between now and January 20, any provocation can be seized upon to justify the launching of a catastrophic new war in the Middle East with the potential of igniting a global conflagration. The fight against this threat can be waged only by the working class mobilizing its independent strength against both the Trump administration and the Democrats and in unity with workers all over the world in the struggle against the source of war, the capitalist profit system.

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