

Top scientist assassinated as Israel and US stage war provocations against Iran

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The brutal assassination Friday of top Iranian nuclear physicist Moshen Fakhrizadeh marks a major escalation of the US-Israeli campaign to provoke a war with Iran in the less than two months before the scheduled end of Donald Trump's presidency.

The Iranian scientist was ambushed by a team of assassins Friday morning in Absard, an eastern suburb of Tehran. His vehicle was attacked with automatic weapons fire, and then a pickup truck loaded with lumber covering explosives blew up next to the scientist's car.

Photographs of the scene posted online showed the damaged vehicle surrounded by shattered glass, bits of wood, car parts and a puddle of blood.

Three to four of the terrorists were reported killed in the incident. Fakhrizadeh and his wounded bodyguards were rushed to a nearby hospital, but doctors were unable to revive him.

Iran's Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif confirmed the killing, writing on Twitter: "Terrorists murdered an eminent Iranian scientist today. This cowardice—with serious indications of Israeli role—shows desperate warmongering of perpetrators. Iran calls on the international community—and especially EU to end their shameful double standards & condemn this act of state terror."

While officials in Israel and the US refused to comment on the assassination, the response in both countries left little to the imagination as to the authorship of this extraordinary act of international lawlessness. Trump triumphantly retweeted a comment by an Israeli journalist that the murder represented "a major psychological and professional blow for Iran."

Israel's *Jerusalem Post*, reflecting the views of the right-wing government of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, commented that the assassination was "a major signal that Israel and the United States will not give up on preventing the country from obtaining such weaponry. The message is clear: Remember, no nuclear scientist is safe."

The *New York Times*, meanwhile, reported that "One American official—along with two other intelligence officials—said that Israel was behind the attack on the scientist." It added that "It was unclear how much the United States may have known about the operation in advance, but the two nations

are the closest of allies and have long shared intelligence regarding Iran."

Fakhrizadeh, 63, was a professor of physics at the Imam Hussein University in Tehran and a former head of Iran's Physics Research Center (PHRC). An expert on nuclear technology, as well as missile production, he led a previous Iranian nuclear program known as Amad (Hope), which was terminated in 2003. Israel and the US alleged that the program was directed at determining the feasibility of building an Iranian nuclear weapon. Tehran has insisted that the program, like all of its nuclear operations, was for civilian purposes only.

Iran's Defense Minister Brig. Gen. Amir Hatami reported that Fakhrizadeh had, in addition to his work on nuclear and military technology, been the leader of the team that developed one of the first Iranian kits for diagnosis of coronavirus.

In 2018, in a presentation of alleged nuclear documents stolen from a Tehran warehouse, Netanyahu showed a slide bearing a photograph of Fakhrizadeh, while making the unsubstantiated allegation that the scientist was involved in a covert operation aimed at pursuing an Iranian nuclear weapon. In what amounted to a clear threat of assassination, Netanyahu declared that Fakhrizadeh's was "a name to remember."

Tehran had rebuffed requests by the (International Atomic Energy Agency) IAEA to interview Fakhrizadeh for fear that information would be passed on to Tel Aviv to assist in organizing his murder.

In the period preceding the signing of the nuclear accord between the major powers and Tehran, known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), Tel Aviv organized a string of assassinations of prominent Iranian scientists, killing five and wounding several others.

The killings were combined with acts of sabotage, including the use by both the US and Israel in 2010 of the "Stuxnet" computer worm to destroy about 1,000 of Iran's 5,000 centrifuges operating at the country's main nuclear center at Natanz.

In July of this year, a major fire at Natanz caused extensive damage to the facility, in particular its workshops and laboratories dedicated to assembling and testing newly developed centrifuges for the enrichment of uranium. Israeli intelligence officials, speaking on condition of anonymity,

confirmed that the fire had been caused by a bomb smuggled into the facility.

These attacks have been joined with the “maximum pressure” campaign launched by the Trump White House after it unilaterally abrogated the JCPOA in 2018. This regime of ever-tightening economic sanctions, tantamount to a state of war, has ravaged Iran’s economy, while condemning millions of Iranians to hunger and disease, choking off vital medicines and medical supplies in the midst of the raging COVID-19 pandemic.

The assassination of Fakhrizadeh is the highest-profile attack on Iran since the January 3 US drone missile murder of Iranian general Qassem Suleimani, one of the country’s top officials, after he arrived at Baghdad’s international airport for an official state visit.

It comes less than a week after Prime Minister Netanyahu and US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo made a semi-secret trip to the Saudi city of Neom for a meeting with Saudi Arabia’s de facto ruler, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, whose principal topic was Iran. While bin Salman was reportedly less than enthusiastic about a military strike against Iran—no doubt fearing Saudi oil installations would be a likely target for retaliation—both the Netanyahu and Trump governments have been pushing relentlessly toward confrontation.

There is no doubt that the latest assassination was discussed with and approved by Pompeo and the Trump administration. It is the latest and most serious in a series of provocations being carried out by both the US and Israeli governments with the objective of igniting a war.

In addition to the latest assassination, Tel Aviv has carried out increasingly aggressive and openly declared airstrikes against Iranian and Iranian-connected targets in Syria, including three in the last week alone. The latest, on Friday, reportedly killed at least 19 people in Syria’s embattled eastern region of Deir Ezzor.

For its part, the Trump administration has vowed to introduce new sanctions aimed against Iran on at least a weekly basis over the next two months to tighten the economic stranglehold over the country.

At the same time, the Pentagon has steadily built up offensive forces in the Persian Gulf, dispatching B-52s and a squadron of F-16s to the region, while deploying the USS Nimitz Carrier Strike Group in the Gulf.

According to both the *New York Times* and Reuters, Trump met with his national security cabinet on November 12 to discuss a proposal to conduct airstrikes against Iran’s Natanz nuclear facility, a war crime that could claim the lives of thousands. While Trump’s top aides reportedly talked him out of launching such an attack, there are still mounting fears that military action is being prepared, with Pompeo and his aides insisting during the secretary of state’s Mideast tour that the option remains “on the table.”

Israeli journalist Barak Ravid, in an article on *Axios*, cited

unnamed Israeli officials as saying, “The Israel Defense Forces have in recent weeks been instructed to prepare for the possibility that the U.S. will conduct a military strike against Iran before President Trump leaves office.” Such preparations no doubt include an escalation of Israel’s own plans to attack Iran.

Why would the Trump administration launch a military attack on Iran, unleashing a potentially world catastrophic war in the Persian Gulf, in what are ostensibly its last few weeks in office?

Bourgeois foreign policy analysts have suggested that the aim is to sabotage any attempt by an incoming Biden administration to rejoin the JCPOA and lift sanctions against Iran.

While Biden’s statements along these lines are highly conditional, indicating that he would demand significant new concessions from and continue military aggression against Iran, there are elements within the US ruling establishment that see an immediate war as the only means of achieving US hegemony over the Middle East and denying its strategic energy resources to American capitalism’s chief rival, China.

Under conditions in which Trump still refuses to concede the election, a war and potential mass casualties for US troops deployed in the Middle East could be seized upon -- much as the 9/11 attacks were -- as the pretext for carrying out far-reaching extra-constitutional measures, including the declaration of a state of emergency, imposing martial law and nullifying the transfer of power.

The danger of war and dictatorship, which will continue whatever the final outcome of the 2020 election, can be answered only by means of the independent political mobilization of the working class in a struggle to break the control of society by the financial-corporate oligarchy and restructure economic life on a socialist basis.



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