

US B-52 bombers threaten Iran for second time in three weeks

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For the second time in three weeks, Washington has sent a pair of B-52 heavy bombers to the Persian Gulf in a provocative threat of military aggression against Iran.

The two B-52H Stratofortress bombers carried out a 36-hour round-trip flight from Barksdale Air Force Base in Louisiana. The previous deployment of the bombers, which are capable of carrying both nuclear and conventional weapons, was from Minot Air Force Base in North Dakota, meaning that both B-52 wings of the US Air Force Global Strike Command have conducted rehearsals for airstrikes against Iran.

The deployments of the same massive warplanes that were used to devastate Vietnam half a century ago have been conducted in the context of mounting war threats and provocations against Iran from both the Trump administration in Washington and its closest ally in the region, the Israeli government of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

On November 12, Trump convened a White House meeting of his national security cabinet to discuss a proposal for bombing Natanz, Iran's main nuclear facility. Top aides, including Vice President Mike Pence and Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, reportedly talked the president out of an act that would represent a world historic war crime, potentially killing thousands, while sickening many more.

This was followed by Pompeo's extraordinary tour of the Middle East, which he preceded by telling a State Department press conference that he was committed to a "smooth transition" to a second Trump administration, making it clear that his foreign policy operations are directed at furthering the US president's bid to overturn the results of the November elections.

Pompeo's trip, which included extensive talks with Netanyahu and a semi-secret flight by himself and the Israeli prime minister to Saudi Arabia for talks with de facto Saudi ruler Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman,

was directed entirely against what he repeatedly described as the "malign influence" of Iran.

Within four days of this meeting, on November 27, Israel's spy agency, Mossad, carried out the assassination of Iran's top scientist, nuclear physicist Mohsen Fakhrizadeh. This criminal provocation rivaled that of the US at the beginning of this year with the drone missile murder of top Iranian leader Qassem Suleimani after he had arrived at Baghdad International Airport for an official state visit. It is inconceivable that such an assassination would be ordered without the full support of Washington and preparations for an overwhelming military response to any Iranian retaliation.

Indeed, within hours of the murder of Fakhrizadeh, the USS Nimitz aircraft carrier strike group sailed into the Persian Gulf in a highly unusual back-to-back deployment in the region by warships that had been scheduled to return to their US homeport. The US Navy has announced that the length of the latest deployment is indefinite.

The Navy's top commander in the region, Vice Admiral Sam Paparo, told a press conference last week that an "uneasy deterrence" supposedly created by US forces in the Gulf has been "exacerbated by world events and by events along the way." Summing up the Navy's operations against Iran, Paparo quoted former US Defense Secretary Gen. James Mattis: "Be polite, be professional and have a plan to kill everyone in the room. That's how we conduct ourselves at sea."

Amid the steady drumbeat of military provocations, the Trump administration is rolling out a continuous series of new anti-Iranian sanctions as part of its "maximum pressure" campaign, an economic blockade tantamount to a state of war.

Among the cruelest of these are blanket financial sanctions against the entire Iranian banking system, which has been used deliberately to block Tehran's buying medicines and medical supplies, which are supposedly

exempted from sanctions on humanitarian grounds. The Iranian government had accused Washington of committing “medical terrorism” even before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, as thousands of Iranians were left to die because of their inability to obtain imported medicines.

The pandemic has hit Iran the hardest of any country in the Middle East, with over a million cases and nearly 52,000 recorded deaths. The daily death toll is once again on the rise, now averaging 325. Health officials readily acknowledge that the real toll is probably twice these figures. The country is bracing for a “winter wave” of the pandemic that could bring its cash-strapped healthcare system to its knees.

The governor of Iran’s Central Bank charged Thursday that Washington is blocking Tehran’s efforts to secure vaccines to combat the pandemic. “The US pretends that food and medicine are not subject to sanctions but in practice (it) is stonewalling (the payments),” he said.

Kianoush Jahanpour, the spokesman for Iran’s Food and Drug Administration, said that announced plans to purchase 21 million coronavirus vaccine doses from four countries had been blocked by US sanctions. “While deals have been made for pre-orders, sanctions are casting a shadow over the banking transactions,” Jahanpour said.

At the outset of the pandemic in March, Iran applied for a \$5 billion emergency loans from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to combat the virus. Intense US pressure blocked the body’s executive board from even considering the request.

Far from dampening US imperialist aggression, the pandemic has only served as a trigger for its escalation, while being utilized as a weapon for regime change by inflicting death and suffering upon the Iranian population. Underlying this murderous policy is the drive by US imperialism to counter the decline of its global hegemony by military means, particularly in the Middle East, where Washington’s principal rival, China, is securing energy supplies, including from Iran.

The danger that the Trump administration will launch a war against Iran in the final weeks of its four-year term has by no means receded. The potential pretexts for such an attack include Iran’s exceeding the limitations on its civilian nuclear program imposed under the international accord, known as the JCPOA, that the White House reneged on two years ago.

Washington has also threatened to retaliate against Iran for attacks by predominantly Shia militias in Iraq. While at Tehran’s insistence, these militias had ordered a

ceasefire, there have been sporadic attacks claimed by previously unknown groups, including a rocket attack last month on the sprawling US Embassy compound in Baghdad that did little damage.

On Thursday, US sources reported roadside bomb attacks on two convoys transporting supplies for US forces in Iraq, one near the border with Kuwait and another on the outskirts of Baghdad.

Pompeo has stated that the death of an American in such an attack would be a “red line” triggering a US military response against Iran. Washington has recalled much of the staff of the US embassy in preparation for such a conflict.

Meanwhile, Israel continues to bomb Iranian-linked targets in Syria, while the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) have been placed on a state of high alert, reportedly because of a possible US attack on Iran. Netanyahu, who faces the collapse of his government and criminal prosecution, has his own reasons for welcoming a war crisis and could stage a provocation to bring one about.

The conventional wisdom within the corporate media and Democratic Party circles is that Trump’s aggression against Iran is designed to create new facts on the ground that would block an incoming Biden administration from fulfilling its pledge to rejoin the Iran nuclear accord. For his part, Biden’s commitment to this agreement is highly conditional, with likely demands that Iran make even further concessions, including on its missile program

There is, however, a more sinister explanation for the launching of war provocations in the supposed “lame duck” period of an outgoing administration. With Trump’s multiple pseudo-legal challenges to the presidential election failing, a war in the Persian Gulf, and with it the potential for mass casualties among the tens of thousands of US troops deployed in the region, would provide Trump a pretext for realizing his threats to impose martial law and upend the transfer of power.

In the face of this clear and present danger, Biden and the Democrats have worked to conceal the gravity of the situation, fearing an eruption of resistance by the working class far more than the prospect of war and dictatorship.



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