

Israel strikes Syria as Trump coup attempt stokes war threat in Middle East

Bill Van Auken
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Israeli warplanes attacked targets near Damascus Wednesday, reportedly striking bases linked to Shi'ite militias and the Iranian Revolutionary Guards. Conflicting reports indicated casualties ranging between three and 15 dead, as well as substantial material damage.

This was the third time in just 10 days that Israel has carried out such a provocative attack against Syria. These strikes are part of a broader escalation of military tensions with Iran that have been at a high pitch since Mossad's assassination of top Iranian nuclear scientist Mohsen Fakhrizadeh last November.

The threat that these tensions will ignite a catastrophic new war in the Middle East that could involve not only Iran, but also nuclear-armed Russia and China, which both have geo-strategic interests in the Persian Gulf, has never been greater.

This threat has been intensified by the parallel political crises of the supposedly lame duck administration of President Donald Trump in the US and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who faces his fourth election in the last two years in Israel. Both may seek a war as an instrument for clinging to power.

After his attempted coup in Washington, with the storming of the US Capitol by a fascist mob, there is no reason to doubt that Trump will use his last dozen days in office to provoke a catastrophic new conflict in the Middle East.

In the aftermath of the November 3 election, Trump convened a meeting of his security cabinet to discuss a proposal to launch US airstrikes against Iran's main nuclear facility at Natanz, an attack that could claim the lives of thousands and subject many more to radiation poisoning.

While Trump was dissuaded by his top aides from carrying out this war crime, Washington has carried out

a continuous escalation of military threats against Iran, claiming that it was responding to threats that Tehran would use the first anniversary of the January 3, 2020 drone missile strike assassination of senior Iranian leader Qassem Suleimani to stage a retaliation against US forces and facilities in Iraq.

US B-52 heavy bombers were sent over the Persian Gulf three times over the course of a month in what amounted to dry runs for bombing Iran, while a US Navy armada, consisting of the USS Nimitz carrier strike force as well as the nuclear-powered and cruise-missile-armed submarine USS Georgia, together with their accompanying warships, has been deployed in the Persian Gulf, prepared to unleash massive firepower against Iran.

Trump's extraordinary order last Sunday to reverse a decision to return the Nimitz carrier strike group to its home base and send it back into the Persian Gulf for an indefinitely extended deployment exposed the extreme tensions within the administration and the military command as Trump attempts to cling to power while staging a buildup to war in the Middle East.

Multiple media reports have cited senior US uniformed commanders voicing concerns that Trump will try to draw the military into his coup plotting by invoking the Insurrection Act and imposing martial law, potentially using a war in the Persian Gulf and mass US casualties as a pretext.

In Israel, meanwhile, the Netanyahu government has not only ordered the continuous attacks on Syria, but also dispatched an Israeli Dolphin class submarine, armed with cruise missiles, potentially tipped with nuclear warheads, through the Suez Canal en route to the Persian Gulf.

The Netanyahu government seized upon Iran's announcement that it had resumed enriching uranium to

20 percent purity at its underground Fordo facility to claim that this was evidence that Tehran was pursuing a path to nuclear weapons and threaten a military response.

Tehran has insisted that it has no such ambitions and that its nuclear program is entirely civilian in nature. The increased enrichment is part of a series of measures taken by Tehran in response to the Trump administration's unilateral abrogation of the 2015 nuclear agreement between Iran and the major powers, as well as the failure of Europe's governments to challenge the crippling US "maximum pressure" sanctions regime. It is also seen as a bid by Tehran to improve its bargaining position with an incoming Biden administration in the US.

Meanwhile, Benny Gantz, Israel's defense minister and Netanyahu's erstwhile electoral ally turned rival, has protested Netanyahu's bid to assume exclusive control over Israeli policy toward Iran, according to Israel's *Walla* news website.

The prime minister's monopolization of control over Israel's Iran policy was announced in a letter to Gantz from National Security Council head Meir Ben-Shabbat, with copies sent to the heads of the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) and Mossad, as well as Israeli Foreign Minister Gabi Ashkenazi and Israel's ambassador to the US, Ron Dermer.

According to *Walla*, Gantz responded angrily to the letter, declaring, "The issue of security and specifically on Iran is not the personal business of one man."

Like Trump, Netanyahu has ample political motives for provoking a war with Iran. If he is ousted from his position, he will be far more vulnerable to prosecution on a series of corruption charges. A major military conflict could provide him the means to run for re-election as a "wartime" prime minister. His government has the additional motive of using war to create "facts on the ground" that would prevent an incoming Biden administration from rejoining the Iran nuclear treaty.

While the danger of war is intensified by the political calculations of Trump and Netanyahu, its source lies in the insoluble crisis of US imperialism and its attempt to reverse its declining global hegemony by military means. Domination over the Persian Gulf is a geo-strategic imperative in Washington's conflict with its principal global rival, China, which depends upon the

region for much of its energy resources.

This militaristic policy will continue and intensify if and when Joe Biden is inaugurated as president on January 20. The incoming administration, which will include all of the architects of the US regime change wars in Libya and Syria, as well as the 2014 coup in the Ukraine, will be committed to an escalation of US war threats abroad, combined with an intensification of the assault on the rights and conditions of the working class at home.



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