

Are Trump and Netanyahu plotting war against Iran?

Bill Van Auken
14 January 2021

A massive US-backed Israeli airstrike in Syria and a flurry of anti-Iranian measures introduced by the US State Department over the past week have fed growing concerns that the Trump administration may still launch a war against Iran during the week leading up to the scheduled inauguration of Democratic President-elect Joe Biden.

Israeli warplanes struck multiple targets between the city of Deir Ezzor and the town Bukamal near a major border crossing with Iraq on Tuesday. It was the fourth round of Israeli airstrikes against Syria in the last two weeks, but by far the largest.

Reports from the region indicate that this was the most punishing attack carried out by the Israelis since Tel Aviv began air strikes in conjunction with the CIA-orchestrated war for regime change in Syria that began nearly a decade ago. According to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, Tuesday's raids killed 57 people, including Syrian government soldiers and members of Iranian-backed militias, while wounding another 37.

While Israel routinely refuses to confirm or deny responsibility for these attacks, Tuesday's airstrikes were also different in that a "senior US intelligence official," speaking on condition of anonymity, told the Associated Press that Israel had carried out the raid based on intelligence provided by Washington.

Moreover, according to the AP report, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo had discussed the planned airstrikes while dining Monday night with Yossi Cohen, chief of Israel's spy agency Mossad, at the posh Georgetown restaurant, Cafe Milano.

Also apparently under discussion between the two was the speech to be delivered by Pompeo at the National Press Club on Tuesday in which he claimed that Al Qaeda, Washington's ostensible Enemy Number One over the course of the more than two-decade-old "war on terror," is today headquartered in and supported by

Tehran.

"I would say Iran is indeed the new Afghanistan—as the key geographic hub for Al Qaeda—but it's actually worse," Pompeo said. "Unlike in Afghanistan, when Al Qaeda was hiding in the mountains, Al Qaeda today is operating under the hard shell of the Iranian regime's protection."

Pompeo offered no evidence whatsoever to support this claim, which is absurd on its face. Al Qaeda, a movement that got its start in the CIA-orchestrated war against the Soviet-backed government in Afghanistan in the 1980s, bases itself on a Salafist-jihadist ideology that regards Shia Muslims, which account for 95 percent of Iran's population, as heretics. It and its offshoots are responsible for multiple attacks on Shia mosques and civilian populations as well as an assault on Iran's parliament building in 2017 that killed 12 people.

It is Washington which backed Al Qaeda-linked forces in the US-NATO campaign to overthrow the Libyan government of Muammar Gaddafi, and then armed and funded Al Qaeda's affiliate in Syria in a bloody war for regime change against the government of President Bashar al-Assad, which in turn received military support from Iran.

The attempt by Pompeo, who insisted following the US election that there would be a "smooth transition to a second Trump administration," to link Al Qaeda with Iran is not merely slanderous propaganda bluster. The US invaded Afghanistan in 2001 on the pretext of pursuing Al Qaeda, and then launched its war against Iraq in 2003, based on the lie that Saddam Hussein was prepared to give non-existent "weapons of mass destruction" to Al Qaeda, a virulent enemy of the Iraqi government.

The fabrication of a similar Tehran-Al Qaeda axis is a calculated effort to build a pseudo-legal justification for employing the 2001 Authorization for the Use of Military Force (AUMF) yet once again as a legal fig leaf for

another and even more catastrophic war of aggression in the Middle East, without having to seek a new authorization from the US Congress.

Both the US and Israel have staged relentless provocations and a steadily escalating military buildup against Iran. This includes the US drone missile assassination of senior Iranian leader Qassem Suleimani little more than a year ago at Baghdad's international airport and the Mossad assassination of the country's top nuclear scientist Mohsen Fakhrizadeh in November.

Massive military firepower has been deployed in the Persian Gulf. In addition to the USS Nimitz carrier strike force, which was abruptly recalled to the region last month after being ordered back to its US port, the Pentagon has sent the nuclear-powered submarine USS Georgia into the Gulf, armed with 154 Tomahawk Cruise missiles, capable of destroying targets across Iran. Like the Nimitz, it is accompanied by warships that are also equipped with such missiles.

The Pentagon has conducted four overflights of the Persian Gulf in barely a month by pairs of B-52 heavy bombers capable of delivering both nuclear and conventional weapons against Iranian targets.

For its part, Israel has sent a Dolphin class attack submarine equipped with both land attack and anti-ship missiles into the region.

The *Washington Post* reported Wednesday that Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has "pressed Trump, who has strongly supported Israel's campaign, to put pressure on Tehran's nuclear program, to deliver a final military blow to the program before turning Iran policy over to President-elect Joe Biden."

Israel is pressing for action, ostensibly to preempt any return by the incoming Biden administration to the 2015 Iran nuclear accord, which the Trump administration unilaterally abrogated in 2018, imposing a "maximum pressure" sanctions regime against Iran tantamount to a state of war.

The Trump administration has carried out a series of actions aimed at impeding any such rapprochement, including the criminal designation this week of the Houthi rebels in Yemen as "terrorists" on the grounds of their allegedly enjoying Iranian support. The measure threatens to cut off aid to the 70 percent of the Yemeni population living in areas controlled by the Houthis, condemning millions to starvation.

Biden has given a conditional pledge to rejoin the 2015 agreement, while indicating that his administration would seek new concessions from Iran on its conventional

missiles as well as its influence in the Middle East, issues that Tehran has insisted are not open to negotiation. With Biden vowing to pursue a policy of bipartisan unity, it is highly unlikely that he will make overturning the anti-Iranian sanctions regime, supported by the Republicans as well as right-wing Democrats, a priority.

Both Trump, who in the wake of the fascist siege of the US Capitol continues to claim to have won the presidential election, and Netanyahu, who has been indicted on corruption charges and faces an uncertain election in March, as well as mass protests demanding his resignation, have political motives for provoking a war with Iran.

In Trump's case, he floated the idea of bombing Iran's main nuclear facility of Natanz shortly after the US election, a war crime that could have claimed the lives of thousands and sickened many more. While top aides talked him out of the idea, the threat of war remains on a hair trigger.

The danger of the US president launching a war to overturn the results of the presidential election was underscored by a letter last Friday to Congressional Democrats from House Speaker Nancy Pelosi. She reported that she had spoken to Gen. Mark Milley, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, on what could be done to prevent "an unstable president from initiating military hostilities or accessing the launch codes and ordering a nuclear strike."

The war danger will not pass with a successful inauguration of Biden. His administration is bringing back into power all of the foreign policy establishment responsible for the US-orchestrated wars for regime change in Libya and Syria, as well as the "pivot to Asia" in preparation for military confrontation with China.

If anything, a Biden administration can be expected to escalate US militarism in the Middle East and across the globe. With the fascist cabal installed by Trump in the White House and the Pentagon threatening a military conflagration in the Persian Gulf, the sole concern expressed by Biden's transition team is that there be a seamless handoff of Washington's war machine.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

[wsws.org/contact](https://www.wsws.org/contact)