

Amid Israeli genocide in Gaza, Washington threatens Iran with nuclear war

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After millions worldwide protested against Israel's genocidal war on Gaza this weekend, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken visited Baghdad Sunday. In the Iraqi capital, he denounced pro-Iranian militias that have been active in Iraq since Washington illegally invaded the country, toppled its government and occupied it from 2003 to 2011.

Blinken accused these militias of firing on US military bases in Iraq and Syria after the Gaza war began. He said, "(T)o anyone who might seek to take advantage of the conflict in Gaza to threaten our personnel here or anywhere else in the region: Don't do it. ... (T)he threats coming from the militia that are aligned with Iran are totally unacceptable, and we will take every necessary step to protect our people. We're not looking for conflict with Iran—we've made that very clear—but we'll do what's necessary to protect our personnel..."

Blinken's argument is a political lie: Iran is not looking for war with the United States, but Washington is looking for war with Iran. Blinken is unmistakably threatening Iran or pro-Iranian forces in Iraq, Syria and across the Middle East.

The Palestinian uprising against Israel's illegal blockade of Gaza began a month ago. Since then, over 10,000 Palestinians, mostly women and children, have been killed. Israel has bombed Gaza's refugee camps, hospitals and schools; cut off its food, water and electricity; and destroyed half its buildings.

Washington did not try to urge restraint to calm the crisis, but inflamed it, setting the course for war. While the Iranian regime warned that it might intervene militarily to try to protect the Palestinians from genocide if Israel invaded Gaza, Washington treated global anti-war protests with contempt, embracing Israel's genocidal policies and claiming Israel has a

"right to defend itself." It also sent to the Middle East two aircraft carrier battle groups and anti-missile batteries, weapons useful only against other major powers like Iran.

US threats to Iran emerged clearly this week, with the unusual public announcement of the sending of a US nuclear missile submarine to the Central Command, which oversees the Middle East. Such a ship can carry either 154 nuclear-tipped Tomahawk cruise missiles or 20 nuclear ballistic missiles. This gives it a total destructive power of either 23 or 28 million tons of TNT—about 1,900 or 2,300 times the power of the atom bomb that destroyed Hiroshima in 1945.

The US news channel CNN commented, "The announcement is a clear message of deterrence directed at Iran and its proxies in the region."

Let us speak plainly: Washington is threatening Iran and its allies with nuclear war. The support of Washington and its European imperialist allies for Israel's genocidal war on Gaza not only implicates them in Israeli crimes against humanity. It is also a warning: The imperialist powers will not hesitate to take similar action against Iran or any other power in the region.

US officials see this war as a part of a world conflict for global hegemony and will stop at nothing to dominate the Middle East.

An example of the criminal war hysteria infecting imperialist ruling circles is an article, "The China-Russia-Iran Axis Is a Clear Threat to America," by Ariel Cohen of the influential Atlantic Council. Denouncing Russian and Chinese ties to Iran, Cohen treats Israel's war on Gaza as a golden opportunity to destroy Iran in order to intimidate Russia and China: "The current crisis provides a unique opportunity for Washington to send an unequivocal message to

Moscow and Beijing: Back off—or lose Iran.”

Action by Iran, Cohen insists, should lead to the annihilation of its armed forces, major industries and government. “If Iran does not heed warnings from Washington and (causes) unacceptable damage to Israeli civilians, it needs to be severely punished, and its nuclear program, military posture, and possibly oil terminals destroyed. The kleptocratic Shia jihadi dictatorship is unlikely to survive this. That will be the message Moscow and Beijing will not be able to ignore.”

While this policy is insane and criminal, it nonetheless describes the course Washington and its European imperialist allies are taking, as well as their fascination with nuclear weapons. This is rooted in the deep crisis of American and world imperialism that has developed over decades since the time of the 1991 Stalinist dissolution of the Soviet Union.

By going to Baghdad to threaten Iran, Blinken took a well-worn path of US imperialist diplomacy. After the 1979 Iranian revolution, US officials repeatedly traveled to Iraq to encourage Iraqi President Saddam Hussein to wage war on Iran. Donald Rumsfeld, the future US defense secretary during the 2003 invasion of Iraq, went to Iraq in 1983-84 as a US envoy to encourage Hussein to use poison gas against Kurdish troops allied to Iran in the 1980-88 Iran-Iraq war.

Today, US imperialism and its European allies face very different conditions, however, than during that war or the 1991 US-led Gulf War on Iraq. In the intervening decades, freed from the military and political obstacle posed by the existence of the Soviet Union, they launched regime-change wars across this resource-rich region—in Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya, Syria, Ukraine and beyond. But despite the deaths of millions and the spending of trillions of dollars, these unpopular wars ultimately undermined Washington’s position.

First of all, Washington is today in a desperate military crisis. Its Ukrainian allies have suffered a defeat in the war on Russia in Ukraine. US forces in the Middle East face a network of hundreds of bases that Iran, Russia or their allies built in Syria and across the region—as Moscow and Tehran intervened against the war for regime change NATO launched in Syria in 2011. Moreover, China’s 25-year \$400 billion treaty and infrastructure plan with Iran in 2021 also reportedly offers Iran a military alliance.

The military crisis, however, by itself only provokes greater recklessness in Washington. With 40,000 troops left in the Middle East, far from the 200,000 that invaded Iraq in 2003, Washington cannot, for now, invade and occupy Iran, a country four times larger than Iraq, or fight Iranian, Russian and Chinese forces in conventional wars. This underlies Washington’s politically criminal resort to threats of nuclear war, even though this risks provoking a conflagration between the world powers.

The decisive issue is that imperialism faces a rapidly growing global movement of workers and youth against war and Israel’s genocide in Gaza. In the weeks since the Israeli onslaught began, millions have protested on every continent. The key question is on what perspective this vast movement can be unified and politically armed to stop the genocide and the emerging third world war before it escalates into nuclear Armageddon.

US threats against Iran reveal how the bombardment of Gaza is part of a global war, led by the imperialist powers, to re-divide and plunder the world’s resources and markets. These wars cannot be stopped by appeals to one or other capitalist government or politician. The problem is rooted in the world capitalist system itself. The genocide in Gaza can be halted, as can the threat of a global conflagration. But that requires the development of a consciously united, international movement to transfer power to the working class, abolish capitalism and replace it with socialism.



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