

Amid Israeli war on Gaza, Iran blocks IAEA nuclear inspectors

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As the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) wage war on Gaza with the full-throated support of the US-NATO powers and Israeli officials threaten to drop a nuclear bomb on the besieged enclave, a confrontation is escalating between Iran and the imperialist powers over Tehran's expulsion of a number of International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) inspectors who were monitoring its nuclear energy program.

This points to the urgent necessity for the mass protests against the IDF's genocidal war in Gaza to oppose imperialist military escalation against Iran. It is increasingly likely that Washington could attack Iran and that the war in Gaza could engulf the entire Middle East.

The US has already surged two aircraft carrier groups to the region, and in a very rare move recently let it be known that it has also deployed a nuclear-powered and potentially nuclear-armed submarine to the region.

US officials have repeatedly threatened over the past two decades that they could launch a first strike, potentially with nuclear weapons, in order to prevent Iran from acquiring a nuclear bomb.

On Wednesday, IAEA officials complained that Iran was refusing to certify several of its inspectors, including French and German citizens, while continuing to produce highly enriched uranium. The Iranian government withdrew the inspectors' accreditation as retaliation for what it called "political abuses" by the US, British, French and German governments.

"Iran's stance is not only unprecedented, but unambiguously contrary to the cooperation that is required," wrote IAEA head Rafael Grossi. Grossi also pointed to the increasingly large stockpiles of highly enriched uranium that Iran has built up since 2018, when then-US President Donald Trump unilaterally cancelled the UN-backed 2015 Iranian nuclear accord and imposed devastating economic sanctions on Iran. Washington has used its domination of the world financial system to bully its European allies and much of the rest of the world to enforce these sanctions, which are themselves tantamount to an act of war.

IAEA officials found in September that Iran has 128.3 kg

(282.9 pounds) of uranium enriched to 60 percent. It is a relatively straightforward technical operation to turn uranium enriched to the level for weapons-grade uranium, enriched to 90 percent, that can then be used to make nuclear bombs. The IAEA indicated that on this basis Iran has sufficient uranium enriched to 60 percent to make three nuclear bombs in a few weeks, once this uranium is enriched to 90 percent.

In May, IAEA officials in Iran said they had detected trace amounts of uranium that had been enriched to over 83 percent, or very near to weapons grade.

Iran initially decertified the IAEA inspectors in September, after the European powers announced that they would continue to enforce a set of sanctions that were soon set to expire under terms of the 2015 Iran nuclear accord. Tehran's actions prompted a protest from the IAEA at the time. The Vienna-based UN agency issued a statement that declared, "This measure, while formally permitted ... was exercised by Iran in a manner that directly and seriously affects the Agency's ability to conduct effectively its verification activities in Iran, in particular at the enrichment facilities."

However, this week after the outbreak of the Israel-Gaza war in October and as questions mounted over the state of the Iranian nuclear program and uranium stockpile, the IAEA issued another statement denouncing the decertification as "extreme and unjustified."

The Iranian government responded by sending a letter to the IAEA on Wednesday declaring that it was "within its rights" to decertify the inspectors. However, it added that it was "exploring possibilities to address the request" made by the IAEA.

Arms control officials are stressing that if Iran continues enriching uranium, there is an increasing risk that Washington and Tel Aviv will seize upon this as a pretext to attack Iran. Moreover, one of the main facilities of Iran's nuclear program, a new underground processing plant under a mountain near Natanz that is over 80 meters underground, is thought to be buried deep enough to survive attacks by all

conventional US bombs. This increases the danger that Washington could choose to bomb it with nuclear weapons.

Completion of such a deeply buried facility “risks igniting a new escalatory spiral,” warned Kelsey Davenport, the director of nonproliferation policy at the Washington-based Arms Control Association. “Given how close Iran is to a bomb, it has very little room to ratchet up its program without tripping U.S. and Israeli red lines. So at this point, any further escalation increases the risk of conflict.”

Contacted by the Associated Press in May, the Biden administration confirmed that it was prepared to attack Iran, including potentially with nuclear weapons, to prevent Iran from developing the ability to build its own nuclear bomb. “We believe diplomacy is the best way to achieve that goal, but the president has also been clear that we have not removed any option from the table,” the White House told AP.

Washington and its European imperialist allies have never forgiven the 1979 Iranian revolution that toppled the bloody, US-backed dictatorship of the Shah of Iran. In the over 30 years of imperialist war in the Middle East since the 1991 Stalinist dissolution of the Soviet Union, Iran has found itself surrounded by US-led wars in Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria and beyond that altogether have claimed millions of lives. And despite repeated overtures to the US, Tehran has found itself in the Pentagon’s crosshairs time and again.

The Iranian regime has viewed its nuclear program, begun under the Shah, as a useful bargaining chip in its relationship with Washington.

The Iranian government’s nuclear brinkmanship does not work to develop the struggles of the working class in Iran or internationally. It is not progressive and does not deserve working class support. Indeed, polls in Iran indicate that only 33 percent of the population supports the program, up from around 10 percent before the Israeli-Gaza war. The most aggressive role in this crisis, however, is played by the imperialist powers plundering this oil-rich region.

US officials, in particular, have repeatedly threatened that they would consider the most draconian actions, including genocidal acts of mass murder, to block Iran’s nuclear program. After having threatened to invade and occupy Iran immediately after the illegal 2003 US-led invasion and occupation of Iraq, Washington and its European allies launched a campaign denouncing Iran’s nuclear program and its opposition to Israel. In 2008, then-US Democratic presidential candidate Hillary Clinton threatened to “obliterate” Iran.

Tensions surged between the NATO imperialist powers and Iran after the NATO alliance launched a war for regime change in Syria in 2011 that continues to this day. Iran and Russia both intervened to prop up the Syrian government

after Washington, London and Paris threatened to bomb Syria in 2013. After Washington cancelled the 2015 Iranian nuclear treaty, Iran’s nuclear program became the focus of US attempts to use control over the US dollar, the world’s main trading currency, to lock Iran out of the world financial system and crush its economy.

Iran has developed closer ties with both Russia and China, especially in the recent period, which intensifies the danger that a US or NATO strike on Iran would inflame wars that have spread across not only the Middle East but the entire world. In 2021, Iran signed a 25-year, \$400 billion friendship treaty with China that reportedly included a promise of mutual military assistance in case of war. Last year, Russia and Iran developed close ties for the manufacturing of drones, ammunition and other military supplies that Russia is using in its war with NATO in Ukraine.

A US-led war with Iran in the 2020s, amid an emerging Third World War, would rapidly involve far more powerful forces than those that opposed Washington in Afghanistan, Iraq and other wars in the 2000s.

Last month, as Washington deployed two aircraft carrier battle groups to the Middle East in response to the eruption of the Israel-Gaza war, the *South China Morning Post* reported that China would send its own flotilla of six warships to the Persian Gulf region.

With its war with NATO in Ukraine, Moscow is also reportedly discussing providing Iran with modernized fighter jet aircraft in exchange for the drones and ammunition it is receiving from Iran. Moscow is also in negotiations with Libyan warlord Khalifa Haftar to set up a military base in the eastern Mediterranean, at the eastern Libyan city of Tobruk, from which it could conduct surveillance of Europe and European military forces in the Mediterranean.



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