Another act of war: Israel sabotages Iranian gas pipelines

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Amid the escalating conflict throughout the Middle East fuelled by its genocide in Gaza, Israel carried out a major act of sabotage inside Iran this week, calculated to further inflame tensions and goad Tehran into responding.

In the early hours of Wednesday morning, Israel conducted covert attacks that ruptured two gas pipelines in the provinces of Chaharmahal-Bakhtiari and Fars, disrupting supplies to homes, offices and factories in the middle of winter.

Iranian Oil Minister Javad Owji told state TV that the aim was to cut gas to major provinces in the country, but "except for the number of villages that were near the gas transmission lines, no province suffered a cut."

His comments were contradicted, according to the *New York Times*, by "the comments of local governors and officials from Iran's national gas company, who had described widespread outages of service in five provinces, forcing the closure of government buildings."

While Israel has not commented, yesterday's *New York Times* article, based on two Western officials and an Iranian military strategist, declared that Israel was responsible for the sabotage. They noted that "the gas pipeline attacks by Israel required deep knowledge of Iran's infrastructure and careful coordination, especially since two pipelines were hit in multiple locations at the same time."

Previously, Arab separatists in southwestern Iran have claimed responsibility for attacks against oil pipelines. However, strikes on oil and gas infrastructure elsewhere in the country have been rare, and not on this scale.

Citing the Iranian military strategist, the *New York Times* wrote that "the Iranian government believed Israel was behind the attack because of the complexity and scope of the operation." And it "almost certainly required the help of collaborators inside Iran to figure out where and how to strike."

The two affected pipelines, each of about 1,200 kilometres, provide gas to major cities, including Tehran, Isfahan and, in the north, Astara. Together, they supply about 15 percent of Iran's daily gas production.

"The level of impact was very high because these are two significant pipelines going south to north," Homayoun Falakshahi, a senior energy analyst at Kpler, told the newspaper. "We have never seen anything like this in scale and scope."

The Israeli sabotage is a deliberate provocation aimed at adding further fuel to a war led by Israel and the US that is rapidly expanding throughout the Middle East. As the Zionist regime has carried out its genocidal onslaught in Gaza, backed to the hilt by Washington, the US and Israel have exploited the military action by militia sympathetic to Palestinians to wage wider attacks throughout the region.

The Biden administration's chief target is Iran, which US imperialism regards as the main obstacle to its hegemony in the Middle East. The US and Britain are already carrying out air and missile strikes against Houthi militia in Yemen that have sought to disrupt supplies for Israel passing through the Red Sea.

In response to an attack on a US military base in Jordan that killed three American soldiers, the White House vowed revenge on Iranian-backed militia. In early February, US forces already carried out strikes on 85 targets in seven locations in Iraq and Syria against "Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) Quds Force and affiliated militia groups."

Likewise, Israel has conducted multiple attacks in Lebanon and Syria against Hamas and Hezbollah—both

aligned with Iran—as well as killing two senior IRGC commanders in Syria. Already waging a bloody assault in Gaza and the West Bank, the Israeli military is preparing for a full-scale onslaught on Hezbollah forces in southern Lebanon.

Iran has repeatedly declared that it does not want war with the US and Israel, and has denied any direct involvement in the military actions of Hamas, Hezbollah and the Houthis. Nevertheless, the Biden administration and its Israeli ally continue to ramp up their provocations against Iran, aimed at inciting a response that could be used as a casus belli for all-out war.

Washington may not have been directly involved in Wednesday's attack on Iran's gas pipelines but certainly would have given it the green light. American forces may well have provided assistance with logistics and intelligence. An attack on the vital civilian infrastructure of any country is an act of war.

Moreover, both the US and Israel have repeatedly carried out covert operations in the past against Iran—directed against its nuclear facilities. During the Obama administration, unnamed White House officials gave detailed accounts of, and bragged about, its cyber-attacks on Iran's uranium enrichment plant at Natanz. The US infected the plant's high-speed centrifuges with the Stuxnet worm, causing them to spin out of control and self-destruct.

In tandem with the US, Israel carried out a murderous campaign against top Iranian nuclear scientists. In 2021, the *New York Times* provided details of the assassination the previous year of Iran's top nuclear physicist Mohsen Fakhrizadeh by a remote-controlled drone in an operation jointly organised by Israel and the United States. From 2007 up to that point, the article pointed out, Israel had killed five nuclear scientists, wounded another and assassinated the Iranian general in charge of missile development.

The US has not limited its attacks to covert operations. In 2020, the Trump administration authorised an attack at Baghdad's international airport that killed Iranian General Qassem Suleimani and seven others in a blatant act of war. While President Joe Biden may have tactical differences with Donald Trump over foreign policy, he is no less ruthless in pursuing the interests of US imperialist interests.

Already at war with Russia in Ukraine and widening the conflict against Iran in the Middle East, the US is accelerating its military build-up and provocations against China, which it regards as the existential obstacle to its global hegemony.

Biden's unqualified backing for Israel's genocide gives the lie to his claims to not want a wider war in the Middle East. The White House has refused to rule out direct attacks on Iran, supposedly in retaliation for the three American deaths. Indeed, the *New York Times* reported this week that the US had carried out a cyberattack in early February on an Iranian military vessel it claimed was supplying information to Houthi fighters about ship movements in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden.

The attacks on Iranian gas pipelines on Wednesday are one more indication of the speed with which the US and Israel are plunging the entire region into war.

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