

US generals tour Middle East to prepare military escalation against Iran after Haniyeh assassination

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General Michael Kurilla, the head of the US Central Command, which controls US forces in the Middle East, arrived in the region this weekend to plan military operations after Israel's targeted assassinations of Hezbollah commander Fuad Shukr and Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh.

After Israel's brazen murder of Shukr in Lebanon and Haniyeh in Tehran, the Hezbollah militia in Lebanon and the Iranian government have pledged to retaliate by striking targets in Israel, and the entire region now stands on the brink of war.

Washington and its NATO imperialist allies, having inflamed the region by backing Israel's genocide in Gaza and its program of targeted assassinations, are continuing to ratchet up military pressure on Iran, Lebanon and the entire region. On Friday, the Pentagon deployed a fighter squadron and several cruisers and destroyers to the region to join two naval battle groups already in the region. Yesterday, US officials said General Kurilla would assemble a coalition of US forces and NATO and Middle East allies to block retaliation by Iran or Hezbollah.

US and Israeli officials told *Axios* that Kurilla would use the trip to "try to mobilize the same international and regional coalition that defended Israel against an attack from Iran" after Israel bombed the Iranian embassy in Syria this April, killing several top Iranian officers. Kurilla will be traveling to Jordan and to several Persian Gulf oil sheikdoms.

In April, US, British and French forces, as well as regional US allies including Jordan, assisted the Israeli regime in shooting down the missiles Iran fired at targets in Israel. Though Iran warned US officials in advance of their strike plans and fired a relatively small salvo of largely older missiles, it nearly swamped the combined defenses of Israel and its imperialist and regional allies.

Israel alone fired over \$1 billion worth of missiles to shoot down Iranian targets.

Warning that Iranian or Hezbollah strikes could come as soon as today, US officials said they "expect any Iranian retaliation to be from the same playbook as their April 13 attack on Israel—but potentially larger in scope—and it could also involve Hezbollah in Lebanon." They are also "concerned it may be more difficult to mobilize the same international and regional coalition of countries that defended Israel from the previous Iranian attack because Haniyeh's assassination is in the context of the Israel-Hamas war" and Israel's genocide in Gaza.

In NATO government and corporate circles, it is well understood that the Shukr and Haniyeh assassinations threaten to trigger a regional conflagration. Delta, United, the Lufthansa group and Aegean Airlines have suspended flights to Israel, while NATO countries, including France and Italy, have issued warnings to their citizens to avoid travel to the Middle East or return to their home countries if they are there.

Amid its support for Israel's genocide in Gaza and targeted assassinations, Washington's claims that the escalation it is carrying out in the Middle East is "defensive" are flagrant political lies.

"The overall goal is to turn the temperature down in the region, deter and defend against those attacks, and avoid regional conflict," White House Deputy National Security Advisor Jonathan Finer told CBS News' "Face the Nation" program yesterday. Finer said there had been a "very close call" with the Middle East almost going up in a regional conflagration in April. Now, he said, the United States and Israel are preparing for "every possibility."

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken spoke to Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammed Shia al-Sudani to stress "the importance of all parties taking steps to calm regional

tensions, avoid further escalation, and advance stability,” according to the US State Department.

European officials joined in this fraud, as French President Emmanuel Macron placed a telephone call to Jordanian King Abdullah II. The two heads of state “expressed their greatest concern over rising regional tensions and stressed the need to avoid regional military escalation at all costs,” the Elysée presidential palace stated in a communiqué. It called for “great restraints and the greatest responsibility to guarantee the security of the peoples,” claiming France would “contribute to de-escalation on the diplomatic level.”

The reality is that the NATO imperialist powers, backing the Gaza genocide, play the central role in inflaming tensions in the region, constantly provoking Iran and its allies towards military action with potentially devastating consequences. Indeed, the leadership of the US Congress invited Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to address a joint session shortly before the assassinations. It is difficult to believe that Israel could have undertaken such a killing, fraught with the potential for a devastating war with Iran, without consulting US authorities.

Whatever the specifics of what US officials were told, their noisy, fascistic and degraded welcoming of Netanyahu amid the Gaza genocide amounted to a tacit endorsement of the Israeli government’s openly stated plans to murder every member of Hamas. As Netanyahu was in Washington, moreover, Macron personally declared he would support inviting Netanyahu to see the Paris Olympics.

International media openly speculate that the NATO military escalation can facilitate Israel’s genocide in Gaza, which has already claimed over 186,000 lives, by intimidating Iran and its allies in the region from giving more support to Hamas. Thus, the *New York Times* wrote: “Iran is a major source of Hamas’s money and weapons—its attack drones were used by Hamas on October 7. But now Iran is also struggling to keep itself from being dragged into regional war.”

There is an enormous danger that such a war can erupt, but it comes overwhelmingly from the NATO imperialist side. Hezbollah yesterday stated that it had launched dozens of rockets at the northern Israeli village of Beit Hillel, facing the Lebanese border. However, this is only a tiny percentage of Hezbollah’s missile forces, which it is largely holding in reserve. It has an arsenal of 150,000 to 200,000 missiles and is expected to fire over 1,000 missiles per day in a full-scale war with Israel, potentially

devastating Israeli cities and oil infrastructure.

Iran’s great-power allies, Russia and China, are similarly appealing for caution. “I would say that this clock is now showing something like two minutes to (midnight), but this does not mean that the clock is irreversible and the ‘Doomsday Clock’ will begin to strike,” Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergey Ryabkov told Russian state broadcaster Rossiya-1. The Russian military has to “keep its powder dry,” however, because, as Ryabkov euphemistically noted, the different military situations that may emerge can be “very different.”

China’s state-run *Global Times* cited Professor Wang Jin of the Institute of Middle Eastern Studies of Northwest University of China, who said: “What should be done now is mediation and coordination, especially persuading Israel not to take such extreme actions. The US should do more than just send troops, it should engage deeply and fulfill its obligations in the Middle East.”

But bankrupt appeals for the imperialist powers to see reason and moderate the slaughter inevitably fall on deaf ears. Throughout the post-Soviet era, the imperialist powers have sought to use their military might to conquer and dominate this strategic, oil-rich region. The Gaza genocide and the risk of regional war across the Middle East flows inexorably from decades of imperialist wars or proxy wars, since the 1990s, against Iraq and Afghanistan, then later against Libya, Syria and Yemen.

Amid escalating global geopolitical competition between the major powers, and particularly by US imperialism targeting China, it is impossible to resolve these conflicts peacefully on the basis of the capitalist nation-state system. The only way to prevent a further, catastrophic escalation of the bloodbath is to mobilize the mass opposition to genocide and imperialist war in the working class, in an international, socialist anti-war movement.



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