Washington intensifies preparations for Middle East war with $20 billion arms sale to Israel

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The decision by the United States to supply arms worth $20 billion to Israel one day after announcing the deployment of a second aircraft carrier strike group to the region marks a further step towards a Middle East war. Backed by the entire ruling class, the Biden administration is determined to wage a catastrophic conflict targeting Iran, which it views as one front in a global eruption of imperialist violence against its rivals, which can only be stopped by the independent political mobilisation of the international working class.

This is the inescapable conclusion that must be drawn from a review of the contents of the arms sale. After facilitating Israel's genocide in Gaza for over 10 months, the Biden administration plans to deliver over 50 F-15 fighter jets, advanced medium-range air-to-air missiles, 120mm tank ammunition, high explosive mortars and tactical vehicles. The delivery of the full fleet of jets is anticipated to take five years to complete.

From the purely military point of view, there is no conceivable use for such a vast arsenal in Gaza, which has already been bombed to smithereens and where Hamas fighters possess at most rudimentary short-range rockets that rarely endanger any target inside Israel. Israel's urgent need for such weaponry only makes sense in the context of advanced preparations against more sophisticated opponents, such as the Hezbollah militia in Lebanon and Iran itself, which have the capacity to shoot down Israeli aircraft and strike the country directly with long-range missiles.

As Socialist Equality Party (SEP) presidential candidate Joseph Kishore explained in a statement condemning the arms sale,

> There is a sinister subtext to the Pentagon announcement. Israel already has unquestioned air superiority in the region. The sole purpose of this weapons sale is to replace anticipated losses in a war with Iran and its allies, which could erupt at any moment. The Biden-Harris administration wants to ensure that Israel can continue pulverizing the people of the Middle East without missing a beat.

The latest arms sale was preceded by unmistakable signs that Washington wants a region-wide war. From the outset of Israel's genocide last October, US government officials have made clear that their endorsement of the "final solution" of the Palestinian question is bound up with plans to fight Iran, a key ally of Russia and China in the Middle East.

After Israel bombed Iran's consulate in Damascus in April, killing seven senior Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps members, American and other NATO military assets helped ward off Iran's retaliatory attack on Israel with drones and missiles. Israel's latest outrageous provocation, the assassination of Hezbollah commander Fuad Shukr in Beirut and Hamas political leader Ismail Haniyeh in Tehran within hours of each other in late July, prompted Washington to announce the $20 billion arms deal and grant Israel $3.5 billion from the $14 billion aid package passed by Congress in April to purchase US-made weaponry immediately. In addition, the Biden administration lifted a three-year arms embargo on Saudi Arabia, Iran's arch rival in the region.

With Iranian officials, including Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, having reaffirmed their right to retaliate against Israel's assassination of Haniyeh, the Biden administration is goading Tehran into launching a strike that can then be used to justify further escalation.

American and Israeli politicians no longer make any secret about the fact that Iran is a target for attack. During his address to a joint session of Congress in July, Netanyahu openly proclaimed his intention to wage war in alliance with US imperialism against Iran, for which he received

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bipartisan standing ovations. “If you remember one thing, one thing from this speech, remember this: Our enemies are your enemies, our fight is your fight, and our victory will be your victory,” he declared to rousing cheers. “Iran understands that to truly challenge America, it must first conquer the Middle East … Yet in the heart of the Middle East, standing in Iran’s way, is … the State of Israel.”

Netanyahu discussed a war throughout the Middle East in a closed-door meeting the following day with Vice President and Democratic presidential candidate Kamala Harris, who opened her briefing to the press afterward with the statement, “So, I just had a frank and constructive meeting with Prime Minister Netanyahu. I told him that I will always ensure that Israel is able to defend itself, including from Iran and Iran-backed militias, such as Hamas and Hezbollah.”

American imperialist strategists hope through war to fundamentally restructure the Middle East in Washington’s interests at the expense of its rivals. Eliminating Tehran-aligned Hezbollah in Lebanon and pushing Iranian forces out of neighbouring Syria would undermine the pro-Iranian Assad regime and open up Russian forces at their only Mediterranean naval base in Tartus to direct attack. Washington also hopes through war to undermine China’s increasing influence in the region, as shown by its brokering of a truce between Iran and Saudi Arabia last year, and its growing economic presence.

But these hopes are delusional. American imperialism has already killed millions of people across the Middle East and Central Asia during three decades of uninterrupted war, and laid waste to entire societies. The devastation of Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya, and Syria did nothing to reverse American imperialism’s precipitous economic decline vis-a-vis its competitors but exacerbated great power conflicts. A new war would therefore quickly spiral into a direct clash between the major powers on a global scale.

These past disasters act as an accelerant rather than a brake on American imperialism’s unleashing of new military adventures. Washington’s determination to provoke all-out war with Iran is inseparable from its global strategy of world war, which it views as the only viable means to retain its hegemony against rivals and nominal “allies” alike.

In addition to the Middle East, which is seen as a critical front in this war due to the region’s high concentration of energy resources and its geostrategic significance for control over Europe and Asia, Washington is at war with Russia in Ukraine and preparing for one with China in the Indo-Pacific.

Explaining at an earlier stage in this process that “no part of the globe is outside the interest of American capitalism,” the International Committee of the Fourth International wrote in its 2016 statement Socialism and the Fight against War, “Every continent and every country is viewed through the prism of US imperialism’s economic and geopolitical interests. The American ruling class is focused on developing a strategy to counter every real and potential challenge.”

This redivision of the world involves all of the imperialist powers of North America, Europe, and Japan. It arises from the intractable contradictions of world capitalism: between globalised production and the division of the world into antagonistic nation states, and between the mass social character of production and its concentration in a few private hands. The only resolution open to the imperialists is to plunge humanity into the barbarism of a global conflagration, even though this raises the prospect of nuclear armageddon.

The same capitalist contradictions are propelling the working class into revolutionary struggle. Workers around the world are outraged by the barbarism of the Gaza genocide and the hypocrisy of its imperialist defenders, and by the drive of the ruling class to place the full weight of militarism and war on the backs of workers through wage cuts and austerity. The urgent task is to unify these struggles into a global anti-war movement led by the working class on the basis of the programme of world socialist revolution since imperialist war can only be stopped by ending the capitalist system in which it is rooted.

This necessitates the construction of a mass socialist and internationalist party of the working class. That party is the Socialist Equality Party in the US and other national sections of the ICFI throughout the world.

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