

Ankara plane incident shows panic and disorientation of Trump White House

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A report published by the *Washington Post* Monday, detailing how President Donald Trump secretly switched planes for his July 8 flight out of Ankara, Turkey, after the NATO summit, has touched off a political uproar in Washington.

Trump boarded Air Force One, then left the plane surreptitiously with a handful of close aides and was taken in a catering truck to a military C-32A jet. This action was supposedly proposed by the Secret Service after intelligence reports suggested a credible threat from an Iranian shoulder-fired ground-to-air missile. A subsequent report in the *New York Times* claimed that Iranian agents had identified the building where Trump was staying during the NATO meeting, including the exact floor.

Nothing disclosed by the White House and Pentagon, as well as “leaked” to corporate media outlets like the *Post* and the *Times*, can be taken at face value, above all, the claim that Iran was seeking to shoot down Air Force One.

It is more than likely that this claim originates in the Netanyahu regime in Israel, which has been raising claims of Iranian assassination plots against Trump as a reason for resuming full-scale bombing of Iran. The Trump administration could use this allegation as the pretext for all-out invasion.

But the sequence of events involving Trump’s own movements reveals, first and foremost, the panic and hysteria now gripping the administration.

If Trump truly believed his life was in danger if he flew out of Ankara on Air Force One, what could justify a decision to allow the press corps and numerous high-ranking officials to take that risk? Why was the flight not canceled entirely and alternate means of secure transportation developed?

Instead, Trump and a few personal aides were rushed

out of danger. These included Natalie Harp, whose role as executive assistant is to print out flattering press commentaries for Trump to read; Walt Nauta, his valet; and Dan Scavino, a White House deputy chief of staff, whose principal job is to write up and post Trump’s screeds on Truth Social and X.

Except for Secretary of War Pete Hegseth, who joined Trump on the military jet, all other top officials who attended the NATO summit flew out of Ankara on Air Force One. These included Secretary of State Marco Rubio and Secretary of the Treasury Scott Bessent, as well as top White House aides like Stephen Miller, deputy chief of staff and counter-terrorism chief, and Steven Cheung, the communications director.

As for the traveling press pool, consisting of dozens of reporters, producers and technicians, their lives were treated with complete contempt. Those aboard Air Force One were not simply left in danger through negligence. In effect, they were assigned a military function: to serve as unwitting decoys, to draw enemy fire, to be the target in the president’s place.

What if the plane *had* been hit by a missile and destroyed, taking more than a hundred people with it, while Trump made a cowardly escape? The political repercussions for the president, the man who has, in the media parlance, “his finger on the nuclear button,” would have been catastrophic. Even the belly-crawling Democratic Party leaders would not have been able to save him.

As it is, the episode is a political humiliation for American imperialism. If the press accounts are true, the president of the United States had to steal away from the capital of a NATO country like a thief in the night. This shows the bogus character of Trump’s claim that Iran has been destroyed militarily and is

eager to negotiate on US terms.

As for the faux outrage over Iran's alleged threats to assassinate Trump, it should never be forgotten that the first action of the joint US-Israeli sneak attack on Iran was to use bomb and missile strikes to exterminate the top leadership of the Islamic Republic, including Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei and most of his family, children and grandchildren among them. This was followed by the deliberate bombing of a school near the Strait of Hormuz, in which more than 160 schoolgirls and their teachers were killed.

Yet Iran did not surrender to these terrorist attacks, as Trump predicted, and it found, by closing the Strait of Hormuz, a point of economic leverage which the most powerful imperialist government has been unable to offset. The war has dragged on, with intermittent ceasefires to allow the US to replenish its weaponry. The US ruling elite and the European imperialist powers increasingly regard the war as a misbegotten failure. Recent press reports indicate that the military brass is becoming more concerned that stockpiles of anti-missile systems and other weapons are on the brink of exhaustion, rendering the US less able to launch wars against more powerful countries than Iran, such as Russia and China.

This is not merely a matter of Trump's personal cowardice and callousness, revolting as they are. It exemplifies the outlook of the entire ruling class. The oligarchy that orders wars in which thousands are killed—more than 3,400 Iranians, among them hundreds of children; more than 73,000 Palestinians in Gaza; 18 American soldiers whose deaths the Pentagon then tried to erase from its records—regards human life as the cost of doing business. What the plane episode reveals is the relationship of the parasitic financial aristocracy to the population as a whole: Their own safety is paramount and inviolable; everyone else is expendable.

In the aftermath of the exposure, the Trump administration has returned to the policy of lies and stonewalling demonstrated so grotesquely in Ankara. The Secret Service referred questions to the White House and Pentagon. The Pentagon referred questions to the White House. The communications director of the White House, Steven Cheung, defended the actions taken, writing: "As the President has said recently, there are many enemies of America who have their sights on him, and we use every tool at our disposal to

address those threats."

It should also be recalled that on the day after he returned to the United States from Ankara, Trump declared that he had given orders that if he were to be assassinated, Iran was to be destroyed by bombing on an unprecedented scale, a scarcely veiled threat of the use of nuclear weapons. He claimed that 1,000 missiles were "Locked and Loaded and aimed at the Islamic Republic of Iran, with thousands of [sic] more to immediately follow."

At the same time, the White House denounced the *New York Times* for reporting problems with the Qatari jet that has been given to Trump to serve as his new Air Force One, going so far as to have the FBI issue subpoenas to all the reporters involved, with agents visiting their homes and even accosting family members. The Pentagon also revoked the security clearance of former Secretary of the Air Force Frank Kendall for allegedly sharing information about Air Force One with the media.

What really happened in Ankara remains unclear. But the crisis of the Trump administration—and of American imperialism as a whole—is unmistakable. The US ruling class faces both a geopolitical debacle in the war with Iran and a mounting social confrontation with the working class at home.



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