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Trump's aborted strikes on Iran: Ten minutes to World War III

Thursday night's confused and profoundly dangerous events surrounding the Trump administration's ordering and then cancelling US air strikes against Iran have exposed how close the world is to a catastrophic new war that could ultimately threaten the entire planet.

According to Trump's own account, he called off the bombing of Iranian missile and radar installations only 10 minutes before US Tomahawk cruise missiles were set to fly.

In a set of barely coherent and internally contradictory tweets on Friday, the US president claimed that he had ordered the strikes in retaliation for the Iranian shootdown Thursday of a Navy RQ-4 Global Hawk spy drone that Tehran charged had violated its airspace.

While Washington countered that the drone was flying over international waters and that the missile attack was "unprovoked," Iran bolstered its claims on Friday by exhibiting shattered parts of the drone—whose price tag is estimated at up to \$200 million—that had fallen into its territory.

"We were cocked & loaded [sic] to retaliate last night on 3 different sights when I asked, how many will die," Trump tweeted. "150 people, sir, was the answer from a General. 10 minutes before the strike I stopped it."



A US Carrier strike group [credit: US Navy]

The US president went on to assert that he had qualms that such a death toll was “not proportionate to shooting down an unmanned drone.”

Aside from his “cocked & loaded” rhetoric, a militarist malaprop that has provoked a wave of mockery on Twitter, Trump’s claim that he was concerned about a disproportionate number of Iranian deaths is hardly credible.

The Trump administration continued and escalated the US wars in Iraq and Syria begun under Obama, overseeing the bloody sieges that razed the cities of Mosul and Raqqa to the ground, killing tens of thousands with US bombs and shells in battles that claimed a grand total of two US fatalities.

Moreover, it has armed the Saudi monarchy to the teeth and provided it direct logistical and military support in a near genocidal war against Yemen, the poorest country in the Arab world, claiming the lives of some 80,000 civilians and leaving millions on the brink of starvation.

The concept of proportionality has hardly been operative in any of the bloody conflicts waged by US imperialism in the Middle East, from the first Gulf War nearly three decades ago onward.

Trump called off the airstrikes not out of any concern for Iranian lives, but rather because his military advisers warned him that such a number of deaths in Iran would inevitably lead to retaliation that could claim the lives of even more US troops, setting off a spiral of

military escalation, culminating in a full-scale war that would make the US interventions in Iraq and Afghanistan look like child's play by comparison.

While the US has dispatched a carrier battle group and a bomber strike group led by nuclear-capable B-52s, as well as another 2,500 US troops, joining the 20,000 already deployed in the region, it is still not prepared for such a war.

Preparations will now be made. As Trump tweeted Friday, "I am in no hurry, our Military is rebuilt, new, and ready to go, by far the best in the world. Sanctions are biting & more added last night."

The White House has repeatedly indicated that it wants to use the sanctions that it imposed over a year ago, blowing up the 2015 Iranian nuclear accord with six world powers, to compel the Iranian government to enter a new round of negotiations.

What Washington is demanding from such talks is that Iran end its civilian nuclear program entirely, give up its ballistic missiles and sever all ties and influence in the broader Middle East. In essence, the aim is to reduce Iran to a semi-colony, more under the boot of US imperialism than even the US-backed dictatorship of the Shah, overthrown by a popular revolution 40 years ago.

Such aims cannot be realized peacefully; they lead inexorably to war. The "diplomacy" advocated by US officials recalls nothing so much as that practiced by Adolf Hitler in the Nazis' march toward the Second World War.

Through its assault against Iran, US imperialism is attempting to reverse the disasters that it has wrought in the Middle East and Central Asia through wars and regime change interventions that have claimed well over a million lives, but have failed miserably in achieving the goal of establishing stable US puppet regimes. Rather, they have resulted in growing influence in the region for its rivals, including Iran, Russia and China.

A war against Iran, a country with three times the population of Iraq at the time of the 2003 invasion and four times its territory, will inevitably draw in the entire region. On Wednesday, the Israel Defense Forces completed war games involving thousands of troops to prepare for a confrontation with Hezbollah, the Shia-based movement in Lebanon, which is aligned with Iran.

Moreover, a war on Iran would inevitably escalate the US confrontation with China, which cannot cede to US imperialism a stranglehold over the oil resources of the Middle East

that sustain its economy, and which sees Iran as a strategic link in its One Belt, One Road strategy to deepen the integration of Eurasia.

In an unmistakable indication that the US military is preparing for an “unthinkable” conflict involving the US and its “great power” rivals, the Pentagon’s Joint Chiefs of Staff last week released a new doctrine on **Nuclear Operations** for the first time in 14 years, touting the use of nuclear weapons as a means of creating “conditions for decisive results and the restoration of strategic stability” and ending conflicts “on the best achievable terms for the US, its allies, and partners.”

The document cites Herman Kahn, the Cold War theorist who in the 1960s posited a “winnable” nuclear war and provided one of the inspirations for Stanley Kubrick’s film *Dr. Strangelove*.

The great danger facing the working class in the United States and internationally is that decisions with catastrophic implications are being made entirely behind their backs, with the extent of the war preparations and their consequences far exceeding what has been made known to the public.

There exists no opposition to imperialist war within the existing political establishment. The differences of the Democrats with Trump on his Iran policy are of an entirely tactical character, with Obama having paved the way with his own punishing sanctions and war threats. As for the pseudo-left organizations that trace their origins to the Vietnam-era anti-war protests, all of them have made their accommodations with US imperialism, promoting US aggression in the name of “human rights.”

A new and catastrophic war can be stopped only by means of the independent intervention of the working class. This requires conscious political action by workers, students and youth, taking the question of war out of the hands of the ruling class and its political representatives and making it a central focus of the escalating class struggle in the US and every country.

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