

# Middle East teeters on brink of region-wide war after US withdrawal from Iran deal

By Jordan Shilton  
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Tuesday's decision by President Donald Trump to withdraw from the Iranian nuclear agreement has pushed the Middle East to the brink of a catastrophic regional conflict that could rapidly draw in the major powers.

Within minutes of Trump's announcement, Israeli fighter jets violated Syrian airspace to launch a missile strike on a government base close to Damascus. The strikes caused the deaths of 15 people, including at least seven Iranian military personnel stationed in the country to support the regime of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad.

The situation escalated further late Wednesday, as reports emerged of Israeli shelling of Syrian army positions from the Golan Heights. Rocket sirens sounded in the north and explosions were heard. According to the Golan Regional Council, several towns in the region were targeted by rocket fire.

The Israeli military released a statement early Thursday accusing Iran's Revolutionary Guard Corps' Quds force of firing 20 rockets at army border posts in the Golan. It claimed several projectiles had been intercepted and reported no injuries.

According to the Syrian state news agency, Sana, Israeli war planes began firing missiles at targets near Damascus early Thursday, soon after the alleged Iranian attack. As of this writing, the extent of these air raids and whether they caused any casualties remain unclear.

Tel Aviv justified Tuesday's air strike with the unsubstantiated claim that Tehran was preparing to strike Israel in retaliation for a raid on the T4 airbase in April that claimed the lives of nine Iranians. The absurdity of such allegations is obvious, given that Iran would have nothing to gain from being the first to launch an attack just as Trump was set to announce his decision on the Iran nuclear agreement.

Everything points to the Israeli attack having been closely coordinated with the US. On Sunday, Israeli

media began reporting unverified allegations of an Iranian plot to strike targets in Israel. Then on Tuesday, CNN reported that the Pentagon was concerned about alleged preparations for an Iranian strike.

In light of this, it is all but certain that the right-wing government of Benjamin Netanyahu, informed in advance of Trump's decision, planned the aggressive strike on the Syrian airbase to coincide with the US announcement, with the aim of provoking a response from Iran that would serve as the pretext for a wider military assault.

The air strike was accompanied by a campaign to whip up a war fever in Israel. Amid the reports of an imminent Iranian attack, the military revealed that it had deployed additional batteries for Israel's Iron Dome missile defence shield in the north, while the US embassy in Tel Aviv prohibited US government employees from traveling to the Golan Heights without prior authorization.

Speaking from Moscow, where he traveled to secure Russian assent to Israel's continued targeting of Iranians in Syria, Netanyahu preposterously compared the Tehran regime to the Nazis. He belligerently asserted Israel's right to "defend itself" from "Iranian aggression," and alleged that Iranian forces were using Syria as a base to move troops and lethal weapons into position for an attack.

Underscoring that Tuesday's air strike is merely a foretaste of what is to come, an Israeli government defence official told *Haaretz*, "The strikes on the Iranian missiles in Syria are a drop in the ocean. Even the army understands that this won't prevent missiles and other systems from arriving in the area and we're seeing that happen."

Trump's abandonment of the Iranian deal is only the latest in a long line of reckless actions by US imperialism that have emboldened the unstable Zionist regime to provoke a military conflagration across the Middle East.

Israel's bombing of Iranian targets inside Syria has been intensified following the US air strike on pro-Assad forces in early February that killed dozens of Russian military personnel in Deir Ezzor province.

Over the past month alone, Israel has struck inside Syria on at least three separate occasions, including Tuesday's strike, killing dozens of Iranians.

Washington is encouraging Israel to go on the offensive as it prepares for war with Iran. In Syria, where the US has sought, in collaboration with Islamist "rebels," to overthrow the pro-Iranian Assad regime for over seven years, killing hundreds of thousands of Syrians in the process, American forces are focused on thwarting attempts by Iran to open up a land bridge from Tehran to Damascus. To this end, US air power and ground forces have been directed towards holding territory in the east of Syria near the Iraqi border—territory that is also home to much of the country's oil reserves.

In its drive to consolidate control over the energy-rich Middle East, Washington is determined to confront Russia in Syria, even at the risk of inciting a conflict fought with nuclear weapons.

Trump made clear in Tuesday's White House address announcing Washington's withdrawal from the Iran nuclear agreement that plans for war with Iran are far advanced. He announced that the highest level of economic sanctions would be imposed against the country, indicating that the next step in an escalation of the conflict would involve military force.

That Trump is aware of this fact was clear from the tone of his speech. The president of a country that has waged virtually uninterrupted war over the past quarter-century in the Middle East and Central Asia denounced Tehran as the leading "state sponsor of terror" in the world. In language usually reserved for enemy nations during a war, Trump ranted against Tehran's "malign and sinister" influence across the Middle East.

On Wednesday, Trump issued a bellicose threat to Iran, warning that it would face "very severe consequences" if it restarted its nuclear programme.

Under these conditions, the bourgeois-clerical regime in Tehran, confronting a deepening crisis, may conclude that its only option is to fight back. Representatives of the hard-line faction, including the head of the powerful Revolutionary Guard Corps, have already proclaimed the nuclear accord dead and dismissed claims by the European powers that it can be revived without Washington.

While a clash between Israel and Iran poses the most

immediate war threat in the Middle East, Trump's torpedoing of the Iran deal has further destabilised an already explosive region. Apart from Israel, his announcement received endorsements from Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, two countries bitterly hostile to Iranian influence in the Persian Gulf. Riyadh has waged a genocidal war in Yemen since 2015 against Houthi rebels it claims are backed by Tehran.

In a speech last May, Trump called for Saudi Arabia to take a leading role in the formation of an anti-Iranian alliance across the region. His administration, following from where Obama left off, has supplied weaponry and intelligence to enable Saudi aircraft to continue their murderous bombing raids in Yemen, which have killed tens of thousands of civilians.

Just days prior to Trump's announcement, it was revealed that US special forces have been operating in Yemen since December 2017.

As oil rose to over \$77 in the wake of Trump's Iran announcement, Saudi officials declared they would consult with the UAE on increasing oil production to stabilise prices, a move that would severely impact Iran.

Seizing on missiles fired into Saudi Arabia by Houthi rebels Wednesday, Saudi Foreign Minister Adel Al-Jubeir blamed Iran for the attack, which he said amounted to a "declaration of war." Iran has to be "held accountable for this," he ominously declared. "We will find the right way and at the right time to respond to this ... We are trying to avoid at all costs direct military action with Iran, but Iran's behavior such as this cannot continue."

Al-Jubeir also vowed that should Tehran restart its nuclear programme, Riyadh would take steps to acquire nuclear weapons.

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