

Washington continues war buildup against Iran

By Bill Van Auken
17 January 2020

With a series of new US military deployments, Washington is escalating its preparations for a full-scale war with Iran. The buildup is continuing despite what has been universally described in the media as an easing of tensions following the January 3 US drone missile assassination of Iran's Gen. Qassem Suleimani and a largely symbolic Iranian retaliation in the form of a casualty-free missile strike against two US-occupied bases in Iraq.

The Pentagon has dispatched a squadron of F15-E fighter jets to Saudi Arabia, the newspaper *Stars & Stripes*, which covers the US military, reported Thursday. Deployed at the Prince Sultan Air Base, the warplanes are in easy striking distance of ground targets inside Iran. Their deployment follows that of another F15-E squadron to the Al Dhafra Air Base in the United Arab Emirates last October. The US Air Force last month issued a statement announcing that its 378th Expeditionary Air Wing had resurrected what had been a major US air base in Saudi Arabia 15 years ago and that it “grows daily.” The head of the unit's operations group, Col. Robert Raymond, said, “We turned what was just a patch in the desert to a full-up operating location.”

Army Secretary Ryan McCarthy said on Wednesday that the Pentagon is preparing to ship new missile defense systems and other assets to the Middle East in preparation for a confrontation with Iran. “They're a very capable enemy,” McCarthy said. “They have capabilities that can strike and kill Americans.”

He added, “It could be a variety of enablers, like missile defense and others, so we're looking at that.”

Meanwhile, the Norwegian military has revealed that Washington has pulled some 3,000 troops out of war games dubbed “Cold Response” that are scheduled from March 2 to March 18, citing the need to shift forces toward the conflict with Iran. The biannual exercise, which includes Norwegian forces as well as soldiers from

the UK, the Netherlands, Germany, France, Belgium, Denmark, Latvia, Finland and Sweden, is aimed at preparing for war against Russia.

The Pentagon has already sent 4,000 soldiers from the 82nd Airborne Division into the region as well as deploying to the Persian Gulf 2,000 Marines aboard the amphibious assault ship USS Bataan. This has been joined by the repositioning of a bomber strike force consisting of six B-52 heavy bombers to the US military base on the island of Diego Garcia in the Indian Ocean, a British colonial possession that is within striking distance of Iran but beyond the range of Iran's longest-range missiles.

President Donald Trump said that the January 8 Iranian missile strike, which hit the Ain al-Asad Air Base in Iraq's Anbar province and a second base at the Erbil airport in Iraqi Kurdistan without killing or wounding a single American, was a sign that Tehran was “standing down.” He responded by announcing a new round of draconian economic sanctions and demanding that Washington's NATO allies become more involved in the campaign against Iran.

On the one hand, this approach was designed to intensify US imperialism's “maximum pressure” campaign against Iran, an effective economic blockade tantamount to war, and to enlist Washington's erstwhile allies in Europe to ratchet up pressure on Tehran.

The governments of the UK, France and Germany—spurred on by fears of US military action as well as economic blackmail in the form of a threatened 25 percent tariff on automobile exports—fell into line this week, threatening to reimpose United Nations sanctions against Iran that were ostensibly lifted as part of Tehran's 2015 agreement with the major powers to accept limits on its civil nuclear program in exchange for normalization of economic relations. In the face of the three European powers' failure to counter the sanctions regime imposed

by Washington after Trump unilaterally abrogated the nuclear accord in May of 2018, Tehran has progressively reduced its commitments under the accord. President Hassan Rouhani stated on Thursday that Iran is now enriching more uranium than before signing the 2015 agreement.

US imperialism seeks to exploit this gang-up against Iran to compel the country's Shia cleric-led bourgeois nationalist government to capitulate and accept a new "Trump deal." This would entail not only effectively ending Iran's nuclear program, but also disarming the country by scrapping its ballistic missiles and rolling back its influence throughout the Middle East. Washington and its allies are calculating that they can manipulate divisions within Iran's ruling establishment and, above all, the Iranian bourgeoisie's fears of a social revolt from below, to force Tehran to capitulate.

At the same time, however, the Pentagon is actively preparing for the escalation of a war that has already been initiated with the murder of Suleimani together with nine other Iranians and Iraqis at Baghdad's international airport, a killing spree that constituted both an act of war and a war crime.

It has since been revealed that the killing of Suleimani had been adopted as US policy last June, following the Iranian downing of an American spy drone over the strategic Strait of Hormuz. Trump's order to execute this policy following the storming of the US embassy in Baghdad by Iraqi protesters, however, caught the US military unprepared for an uncontrolled spiral of retaliations and counter-retaliations. The latest deployments indicate that preparations for all-out conflict are now well underway.

Whether achieved through "maximum pressure" or all-out war, US imperialism's aims are the same: the imposition of a pliant puppet regime in a geostrategically critical country that links Europe and Asia, commands the crucial "choke point" of the Strait of Hormuz through which 20 percent of the world's traded oil flows, and possesses the world's fourth-largest proven reserves of oil and second-largest of natural gas. The conquest of Iran is viewed by Washington as an indispensable strategic preparation for direct conflict with its "great power" rivals, China and Russia.

The extent to which US imperialism is prepared to go to achieve this aim was indicated in a chilling article by longtime military analyst William Arkin published this week by *Newsweek* titled "With New Weapon in Donald Trump's Hands, the Iran Crisis Risks Going Nuclear."

Arkin cites previously classified information that in 2016, before Trump's inauguration, the US military carried out an exercise dubbed "Global Thunder 17" that simulated a US nuclear response against Iran in retaliation for the sinking of an American aircraft carrier and the use of chemical weapons against US troops. He cites a government contractor who helped write the war scenario as saying that it was chosen because it "allowed the greatest integration of nuclear weapons, conventional military, missile defense, cyber, and space into what nuclear strategists call '21st Century deterrence.'"

Since those war games, Arkin writes, the Pentagon "has deployed a new nuclear weapon which increases the prospects for nuclear war. The new nuclear weapon, called the W76-2, is a 'low yield' missile warhead intended for exactly the type of Iran scenario that played out in the last days of the Obama administration."

These weapons, deliverable by Trident II missiles fired from submarines, are considered a more "credible deterrent" because they are more "usable" than larger warheads.

"As the current nuclear war plans are written," Arkin warns, "the use of such a weapon could also be justified almost Hiroshima-like, as a shocking thunderclap to forestall a wider and theoretically more destructive all-out war."

Arkin's article cites four unnamed senior military officers as expressing concern over a "Donald Trump" factor, i.e., "that there is something about this president and the new weapons that makes contemplating crossing the nuclear threshold a unique danger."

The reality is that the doctrine providing for a "preemptive" nuclear strike against Iran was inherited by the Trump administration from the Democratic administration of Obama. The criminality of US imperialism, expressed in the Suleimani assassination and on a far wider scale in the threat of a "preemptive" nuclear strike against Iran, is a measure of the crisis of US imperialism, which is driven to offset the decline of its global hegemony by a resort to devastating military force.

To contact the WSWWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

<http://www.wsws.org>