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Biden administration steps up war threats against Iran

Washington's special envoy for Iran, Robert Malley, warned Monday that if diplomatic efforts to resuscitate the Iran nuclear accord fail, the US "will use other tools to prevent Iran from acquiring a nuclear weapon."

Malley claimed that talks on the accord, which are moribund, were at a "critical stage" and that Washington's patience was "wearing thin." He vowed that the US was prepared to "pursue other steps, if we face a world in which we need to do that."



Robert Malley, Special Envoy for Iran, US Department of State (Credit: Dean Calma / IAEA)

This thinly veiled threat of US military action came amid rising tensions in the Middle East and ever more open threats by Washington's chief ally in the region, Israel, to carry out air strikes against Iranian nuclear facilities.

Echoing US bellicosity, Liz Truss, the foreign minister of the UK, Washington's closest ally among the signatories to the Iranian nuclear accord, told Parliament that if Iran failed to "meaningfully" negotiate, "all options are on the table."

Talks in Vienna on reviving the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), the 2015 agreement between Tehran and the major powers, have been stalled since June, when Iran's new President Ebrahim Raisi was elected. Iran has demanded that the US return to compliance with the JCPOA. Under the Trump administration, Washington abrogated the agreement in 2018, reimposing and escalating draconian unilateral sanctions.

The Biden administration, which came into office pledging to rejoin the JCPOA, has kept the "maximum pressure" sanctions regime in place, continuing US efforts to strangle Iran's economy and starve its population into submission. The economic blockade has inflicted a catastrophic loss of over \$100 billion in oil revenues, while cutting off Iran's access to the US-dominated world financial system.

The sanctions have drastically limited Iran's ability to secure vital medical supplies, even as it confronts a sixth wave of the COVID-19 pandemic, which, according to official figures, has claimed 125,000 lives. Their economic impact has been inflicted on the working class, not on Iran's clerical-bourgeois ruling elite. Government officials have acknowledged that some 60 percent of the population now lives below the poverty line.

The US has conditioned a return to the nuclear accord on Iran first resuming its full compliance with the terms of the agreement, rolling back increases in uranium enrichment levels and stockpiles that it undertook in response to both Washington breaking the agreement in the first place, and the failure of the Western European powers to counter the reimposed US sanctions regime. This turned the deal, which traded stringent limits on Iran's nuclear program for sanctions relief, into a dead letter.

Iran has consistently maintained that its nuclear program is strictly dedicated to peaceful purposes.

The Biden administration has also demanded that Iran accept not only additional restrictions on its nuclear program but also a curtailment of its development of ballistic missiles and the ceding of its influence in the broader Middle East to the drive for US hegemony in the region.

After six rounds of talks in Vienna that have produced no progress for reinstating the JCPOA, Tehran has insisted on a “result-oriented negotiations,” meaning a return to sanctions relief. The country’s chief nuclear negotiator, Deputy Foreign Minister for Political Affairs Ali Bagheri Kani, is to meet in Brussels today with the European Union’s negotiator, Enrique Mora, for talks on resuming negotiations.

In a state television interview last week, President Raisi insisted that Iran “never left” the JCPOA negotiations and that “lifting sanctions” was necessary as “an indication of seriousness” on the part of Washington.

Continuing military tensions between Washington and Tehran were laid bare Monday with the report of a drone strike on the US military base at al-Tanf in southern Syria. The US has maintained its illegal military occupation there both to control a strategic border crossing with Iraq and to train Islamist militia forces opposed to the Syrian government of Bashar al-Assad. The drone strike hit both the section of the base housing US troops and the area occupied by the militiamen.

US military officials speaking on condition of anonymity told the Associated Press (AP) that Washington holds Iran responsible for the attack, while acknowledging that it was not launched from Iranian soil. Pentagon spokesman John Kirby refused to comment on the AP report but declared that Washington would respond to the attack “at a time and a place and a manner of our choosing.”

Iranian sources have stated that the drone attack was carried out by a pro-government Syrian militia in retaliation for an airstrike on the ancient city of Palmyra, killing one Syrian government soldier and three militiamen, while wounding several others. The attack was one in a long series carried out by Israeli warplanes against Syrian targets.

This exchange threatens to ratchet up war tensions between the US and Iran to a level not seen since the Trump administration carried out the January 2020 drone missile

assassination of Qassem Suleimani, one of Iran's most senior leaders, as he arrived in Baghdad on a diplomatic mission. Iran retaliated with a missile strike on a US base in Iraq, leaving over 100 US troops with traumatic brain injuries.

The implicit threats of military action from Washington coincide with the Israeli regime's explicit statements on its preparations for bombing Iran. The Israeli media has reported that the government is preparing to allocate \$1.5 billion to prepare for waves of strikes against Iran's nuclear facilities, with the funds going to pay for stepped-up intelligence, aircraft, drones and bunker-busting munitions to destroy underground facilities, such as the Natanz fuel enrichment plant in Esfahan.

Israeli Finance Minister Avigdor Liberman indicated his support for the funding, which must be approved by the Knesset before November 14. A military confrontation with Iran "is only a matter of time, and it is not much time," he told the media last week.

Israel is responsible for a protracted campaign of sabotage of Iranian nuclear facilities and assassinations of Iran's nuclear scientists, including the remote-controlled murder of Iran's top nuclear physicist, Mohsen Fakhrizadeh last November.

The country has also been the target of a series of cyberattacks in which Israel has been involved, since the 2010 Stuxnet malware attack on the uranium enrichment facility at Natanz. Iran was hit again on Tuesday with a cyberattack on its fuel distribution system that crippled gas stations across the country.

The threat of war with Iran is driven by both geo-strategic considerations, including Iran's alignment with China and its growing influence in the Middle East, as well as internal ones.

In November 2020, following his defeat in the US presidential election, Donald Trump had to be dissuaded by his advisors from ordering a US airstrike against the Natanz nuclear facility, an action that was clearly planned as part of Trump's campaign to overturn the election results.

Today, the Biden administration confronts growing class struggle within the United States, amid unprecedented levels of social inequality that have deepened as the ruling elite has enriched itself amid the mass death of the COVID-19 pandemic.

War, whether with Iran or China, provides a means for directing the contradictions of US capitalism outward in an explosion of military violence, while serving as a justification for the forcible imposition of “national unity” at home.

Workers in the United States and all over the world are being driven into struggle to defend their jobs, living standards and very lives under conditions of an uncontrolled deadly pandemic. These struggles must be joined with the fight against imperialist war and its source, the capitalist system.

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