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US imperialism setting Middle East ablaze

Nuclear-armed Pakistan carried out air-launched rocket and drone-missile strikes on at least seven separate locations inside neighbouring Iran on Thursday, targeting what it said were bases of Balochi secessionist insurgents.

Iran, which vehemently condemned the strikes as a violation of its state sovereignty, said they had killed nine foreign nationals, including four children. The Baloch Liberation Army—which has waged a decades-long cross-border insurgency in Pakistani Balochistan, the country’s poorest, sparsely-populated westernmost province—confirmed that its forces had come under attack.

Although Pakistan did not say so explicitly, Thursday’s strikes were in part retaliation for an attack Iran had mounted some 48 hours before inside Pakistan.

According to Iran, its Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) used missile and drone strikes to hit camps of the Jaish al-Adl, a Balochi armed secessionist group that has carried out attacks in Iran’s predominantly Balochi south-east. Following that action, Tehran emphasized it did not want to disrupt “brotherly” relations with Pakistan. But in a message clearly intended for Washington and Israel, Iran said that it reserves the right to take all necessary measures to defend itself.

The tit-for tat attacks between Iran and Pakistan add further combustion in a region already set ablaze by US imperialism and its allies, which are using Israel’s genocidal war on the Palestinians of Gaza to prepare and provoke a wider war with Iran.

On Wednesday and Thursday evenings, the US carried out its fourth and fifth waves of missile strikes on Yemen in a week, hitting what it claimed were Iranian-backed Houthi

positions in disparate areas across the country. Speaking to reporters earlier Thursday, US President Joe Biden had vowed the US-British campaign of air strikes against the Houthis would continue.

With the support of broad sections of the Yemeni people, Houthi fighters have disrupted Red Sea shipping to press for an end to Israel's onslaught on Gaza.

Also on Wednesday, the Biden administration labeled the Houthis a "Specially Designated Global Terrorist group," opening the door to the imposition of sweeping sanctions. Aid groups immediately responded with warnings that the designation threatens to greatly intensify Yemen's humanitarian crisis. As a result of the almost decade-long war the Saudi regime has waged on Yemen with US arms and logistical support, more than half of the country's population—over 18 million people—need food and other assistance.

The European Union, meanwhile, is in the advanced planning stage for its own naval operation in the Red Sea that would support the US/British attacks on Yemen, while asserting its own role as a regional policeman. The German government is leading the charge in launching the mission, which it will support by dispatching a frigate to the region in early February, according to a report in the *Welt am Sonntag* newspaper. Underscoring German imperialism's major military expansion into the Middle East, Berlin is readying a shipment of 10,000 artillery shells to back Israel's genocide in Gaza.

Emboldened by the to-the-hilt support Israel is receiving from the North American and European imperialist powers, Israel's fascist Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu baldly reasserted his goal of a Greater Israel in perpetuity Thursday, saying his government would never agree to ceding sovereignty over any part of the West Bank.

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For his part, Israeli President Isaac Herzog told the Davos summit of the world's corporate and political elite that a "very strong coalition" was needed to confront the "empire of evil emanating from Iran" and their "proxies all over the region." Under conditions where Israel is poised to launch an all-out invasion of Lebanon, having mounted repeated incursions and missile strikes over the past three months, Herzog railed against "attacks" by Hezbollah, "armed up to its neck by Iran, financed by Iran."



Israeli soldiers fire a mobile howitzer in the north of Israel, near the border with Lebanon, Monday, Jan. 15, 2024. [AP Photo/Ohad Zwigenberg]

Day after day, the western media churns out lies about Biden seeking to “restrain” Israel’s slaughter of the Palestinians, although his administration is arming it to the teeth and, at his orders, the US military is providing the Israel Defence Forces with direct targeting assistance. No less fraudulent are their claims that Biden and his henchman and

consigliere, Secretary of State Antony Blinken, are working to prevent a wider war in the Middle East.

From the outset of the Gaza war—when Washington dispatched two aircraft carrier groups, soon to be joined by nuclear-powered and likely nuclear-armed submarines—the US has pursued a policy of escalating military pressure on Iran and its allies. In conjunction with Israel, it has sought to “degrade” the firepower of Iran’s allies and the IRGC across the region, including with repeated strikes in Iraq and Syria, and now a rapidly expanding air war against Yemen.



The aircraft carrier USS Dwight D. Eisenhower and the fast combat support ship USNS Supply transit the Strait of Hormuz, Dec. 14, 2023. [Photo: Navy Petty Officer 2nd Class Keith Nowak]

These actions are preparatory to a head-on clash with Iran that could come at any time. Not only has the Pentagon planned for such war for decades, but, from the standpoint of US imperialism, its strategic aims—securing unbridled dominance over the world’s principal oil-exporting region, a region uniquely positioned to project geopolitical power across Eurasia, Africa and the entire Indian Ocean region—have never been more vital than today, when the US is in a de facto war with Russia and plotting for war with China. That Moscow and Beijing have forged closer ties with Iran, in response to the US strategic offensives that target all of them, has only increased Washington’s determination to confront Iran.

Biden and Blinken have themselves drawn the connection between the Gaza war, the war in Ukraine and the developing US-China confrontation. The reality is that these are different arenas in a rapidly developing global conflict, as US imperialism desperately seeks to offset the decline in its relative economic power and establish global hegemony

though war, plunder and the revival of colonial subjugation. For the same essential reasons, the British and EU powers follow Washington, while trying to establish the basis, including in military forces, to aggressively assert their own interests.

The tit-for-tat Iran-Pakistan missile strikes, as well as the strikes Turkey carried out earlier this week against Kurdish fighters in northern Iraq and Syria, underscore that the escalating imperialist war in the Middle East is intersecting with various regional conflicts, adding to them all a further explosive dynamic. These conflicts are themselves historically rooted in imperialist oppression, including the arbitrary borders imposed on the people of the Middle East at the conclusion of the first and second world wars.

Both Pakistan and Iran have sought to cast their respective strikes as wholly targeted against foreign-based insurgents. But such explanations can only go so far.

Pakistan's military, the most important player in its political establishment, would no doubt have been concerned about the impact that a failure to respond to Iran's violation of its borders would have on its strategic rivalry with India and on its domestic standing. In 2019, India and Pakistan came perilously close to war when Pakistan responded to an Indian cross-border attack with one of its own.

According to press reports, Iran was nonetheless surprised that Pakistan retaliated. There is every reason to believe that Washington, whose relations with Pakistan are largely mediated through its military, would have given encouragement and advance approval.

In their latest statements both Tehran and Islamabad have signaled they want to patch up relations, while China has offered to mediate.

Be that as it may, the dynamic across the Middle East is one of rapid escalation toward a regional conflagration led by Washington, its imperialist allies and their principal regional client, Israel.

Workers in the United States, Europe and around the world must unequivocally oppose and mobilize in opposition to the attacks on Yemen and the escalating campaign of imperialist aggression against Iran, both historically oppressed countries.

Iran's bourgeois nationalist regime, like the capitalist restorationist regimes in Russia and China, led respectively by Putin and Xi, is organically incapable of offering any progressive answer to the drive of the imperialist powers to reassert their hegemony through a bloody repartition of the world.

This offensive—whose domestic component is a drive to dramatically intensify the exploitation of the working class to finance imperialist war and sweeping attacks on

democratic rights—is taking the form of a war against the workers and toilers of the world.

As the *World Socialist Web Site* explained in its statement at the beginning of the year, the answer to capitalist barbarism—to the “normalization” of genocide, nuclear war, fascist reaction and unparalleled levels of social inequality—must be “the normalization of socialism in the political outlook of the working class.” There is mass opposition to the genocide in Gaza alongside the global upsurge of the working class against the unrelenting assault on its living standards and social and democratic rights. This must be infused with a revolutionary socialist perspective aimed at developing a unified struggle to put an end to capitalism and establish workers’ power.

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