

The Israel-Hezbollah ceasefire in Lebanon and American imperialism's drive for hegemony in the Middle East

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US President Joe Biden announced a 60-day ceasefire between Israel and Hezbollah Tuesday afternoon from the White House. Aimed at setting the stage for a stepped-up region-wide confrontation with Iran, the agreement comes after the far-right Zionist regime has killed upwards of 4,000 people in its onslaught on southern Lebanon and Beirut over the past two months, and largely wiped out Hezbollah's leadership.

The manner in which the ceasefire deal was unveiled underlined that its terms were effectively imposed on both sides by Washington. Rather than Netanyahu's fascist regime and Hezbollah declaring publicly that they had reached an agreement, a standard procedure when ceasefires in a conflict are concluded, the parameters of the arrangement were presented from the Rose Garden by Biden alone. The President announced that the Israeli and Lebanese governments "accepted" a "proposal" by Washington that will see Hezbollah withdraw its forces from south of the Litani River and Israel "gradually" withdraw its military from southern Lebanon over the next 60 days. Hezbollah is not even a formal party to the agreement, since Washington designates it a "terrorist organization" with which no direct negotiations can take place.

Biden's remarks made clear that, far from marking a step towards "peace," the decision was all about setting the stage for an intensification of Washington's relentless push to topple the Iranian regime. The 60-day ceasefire runs out conveniently with the coming to office of Trump, who has filled his cabinet with anti-Iran war hawks.

"Israel has been bold on the battlefield," Biden declared. "Iran and its proxies have paid a very heavy price. Now Israel must be bold in turning tactical gains against Iran and its proxies into a coherent strategy that secures Israel's long-term safety and advances a broader peace and prosperity in the region."

For Biden and the warmongers in Washington, Israel's butchering of upwards of 200,000 people in Gaza and decimation of Hamas, as well as the significant damage inflicted on Hezbollah's capabilities at the cost of thousands of Lebanese civilian lives, amount to mere "tactical gains." Made possible by a constant supply of high-powered US weaponry, these conflicts have not only enabled Washington and its Israeli client to significantly weaken Iranian-aligned Hezbollah and Hamas, but also strike the Islamic Republic's interests in Syria and Tehran

itself. The Iranian regime's perilous position was graphically exposed with the provocative July assassination of Hamas political chief Ismail Haniyeh while he was the official guest of the Iranian regime in Tehran and the 26 October missile strike on Iranian military facilities.

The "strategy" called for by Biden in his remarks Tuesday includes achieving "a set of historic deals with Saudi Arabia," among them a "security pact," "economic assurances," and "the full normalization of relations between Saudi Arabia and Israel." The despotic Saudi regime has ruled out the latter until Israel's onslaught on Gaza ends, not out of any commitment to the rights of the Palestinians, but because it fears the political consequences among the Arab masses. Washington was bitterly hostile to a 2023 initiative by China to normalise relations between Riyadh and Tehran, fearing that it could strengthen Beijing's position in the Middle East, a central arena of focus for its Belt and Road economic strategy to build global trade and secure access to raw materials.

Biden's policy is a continuation, at a much higher level of regional and global tensions, of the Abraham Accords pursued by Donald Trump during his first presidency. US imperialism's goal then, as now, was to establish a military-strategic alliance embracing Israel, Saudi Arabia, and the remaining Gulf sheikdoms to economically, diplomatically, and militarily isolate Iran so as to bring about the downfall of its bourgeois-clerical regime, either through war or by other means. The ultimate targets are China and Russia, against which the US and NATO is carrying out a major military escalation by allowing Kiev to use long-range missiles.

Biden's blather about "peace and prosperity" in the region means nothing less than the consolidation of the energy-rich Middle East under Washington's unchallenged hegemony, with the establishment of a puppet regime in Tehran and the sidelining of its chief economic and geopolitical rivals, China and Russia. The same "democratic" rhetoric has been used by successive US presidents as they have laid waste to the entire region over the past 35 years, from the first Gulf War in 1991, to the 2001 invasion of Afghanistan, the 2003 assault on Iraq, the ongoing civil war in Syria, and the intervention into the Yemeni civil war.

This uninterrupted series of regional wars is now coalescing into a strategy for a global conflagration: a multi-front third world war for the redivision of the globe. It includes the US-NATO war in

Ukraine on Russia, which has rapidly expanding military-strategic ties with Iran and a significant military presence in Syria. It also encompasses the advanced economic, diplomatic, and military preparations for war with China in the Asia-Pacific, whether this is triggered over Taiwan, territorial disputes with India, or some other pretext. The toppling of the Iranian regime, a close Chinese ally and supplier of cheap oil for Beijing's economy, would mark a major stepping-stone in this direction.

These conflicts are rooted in the irreconcilable contradictions of global capitalism: between the nation-state system and globalised production, and between the mass, social character of the productive forces and their private control by the financial oligarchy. These contradictions both fuel the conflicts between the great and regional powers and impel the working class in every country into struggle against the ruling class, increasing the instability of all the regimes involved.

While the Lebanon ceasefire demonstrates for all to see how Israel, functioning as Washington's attack dog in the Middle East, is subservient to American imperialist interests, it is far from clear that the US-imposed ceasefire will hold.

Netanyahu had little trouble accepting the agreement, and not only because it will allow Israeli's military, as he himself boasted, to replenish its badly depleted supply of missiles and other weaponry and rest some of its overstretched forces.

According to the BBC, it includes a US side letter granting Israel the right to "take military action" if "Hezbollah looks to be preparing an attack"—effectively giving them a joint mechanism to resume the war on Hezbollah when they calculate it to be mutually beneficial.

Even more significantly, the agreement gives Israel a free hand to continue the genocide in Gaza, where dozens of Palestinians were killed in air strikes and a ground incursion into the Nuseirat refugee camp on Thursday.

The Israeli ground offensive in southern Lebanon encountered fierce resistance, with the Israel Defence Forces suffering a significant number of casualties. Under the agreement, Hezbollah is to be forced to give up many of the well-fortified positions on or near the Israeli border as its forces withdraw north of the Litani River, securing for Israel diplomatically what they failed to achieve on the battlefield.

However, some elements within Israel, particularly in the north, criticised the deal as a failure since—these significant concessions notwithstanding—Netanyahu and his government have manifestly failed to achieve their oft-repeated pledge to eliminate Hezbollah as a military force.

The war, like Israel's 2006 conflict with Hezbollah, underscored that the Zionist regime must rely on direct US intervention if it is to realize its pledge to redraw the region's map.

On a region-wide scale, military operations against Iran and its aligned forces are continuing without interruption. US and British warplanes launched at least two air strikes Thursday against targets in Yemen. In Syria, one of the largest attacks in many months by Islamist militias long patronized by the US and Israel on troops loyal to Bashar al-Assad near Aleppo resulted in the death of a senior Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps general Thursday.

The crisis-ridden regime in Tehran has no progressive response

to its systematic targeting by the imperialist powers. Torn between a faction that still believes it can cut a deal with imperialism and hardliners advocating a more strident confrontation, including by acquiring nuclear weapons, the bourgeois-clerical rulers fear above all the prospect of a mass movement of the workers in Iran and throughout the region against both imperialism and bourgeois nationalism.

Tehran applied pressure to Hezbollah to accede to the ceasefire, which was no doubt part of its efforts to curry favour with the incoming Trump administration by casting itself as a force for "order" and "stability" in the region. Another move in this direction was the meeting between Elon Musk, the world's richest man and a member of Trump's inner circle, and Iran's ambassador to the UN this week. It was Trump who provocatively targeted Iran during his first term in office, including by torpedoing the nuclear accord that gave Tehran sanctions relief in exchange for opening up its nuclear program to external inspections.

This thoroughly exposes the bankruptcy of the bourgeois-nationalist regimes throughout the region. Confronted with a sustained campaign for "regime change" in Tehran, all the Iranian leadership can offer are plaintive appeals for some sort of accommodation with the imperialists, which are dead set on removing Tehran as an obstacle to their unbridled dominance over the Middle East. This flows from the regime's organic inability, owing to its bourgeois class nature, to appeal to the workers and toilers throughout the region, let alone the working class in the imperialist centres, among whom opposition is growing to imperialist war and the domestic austerity measures that are inseparable from it.

This opposition must be developed into a conscious political struggle by the international working class to put a stop to imperialist war and genocide. Only through an industrial and political mobilisation of the working class on the basis of a socialist programme, in the imperialist centres of North America and Europe, and throughout the Middle East, can the slide of humanity towards world war and the barbarism it produces be halted. This is the programme fought for by the *World Socialist Web Site* and International Committee of the Fourth International, and we urge all of those ready to take up this struggle to join us in building an international anti-war movement led by the working class.



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