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*A further step towards war with Iran*

## ***Trump deploys 1,500 troops to Middle East, sells weapons to Gulf allies***

In the latest step in US imperialism's preparations for all-out war with Iran, President Donald Trump announced Friday the deployment of an additional 1,500 troops to the Middle East. The deployment, which includes a Patriot missile battery and a squadron of fighter jets, supplements the USS Abraham Lincoln aircraft carrier strike group sent to the region earlier this month. It also includes the sending of additional reconnaissance and engineering support staff.

In a statement, Acting Defense Secretary Patrick Shanahan claimed the deployment is "a prudent defensive measure... intended to reduce the possibility of future hostilities." Meanwhile, in remarks to reporters at the White House, Trump declared the forces were intended to be "protective."

These fraudulent statements are designed to avoid triggering popular opposition to war, as US imperialism's massive war machine takes one provocative step after another to lay the groundwork for an aggressive military strike against Iran—a country of more than 80 million people. They come less than two weeks after Trump himself vowed to end Iran's existence if it recommences its uranium enrichment program to produce nuclear weapons.

Moreover, the Pentagon has already deployed nuclear capable B-52's, F-16C fighter jets and Marines to the Middle East, while drawing up plans to send a further 120,000 military personnel to the region to attack Iran.

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The US government and media claim these wars plans are necessary to counter the manufactured threat posed by the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC). Should Iran be blamed for an attack on “US interests,” which could include anything from Saudi oil platforms to CIA-backed ISIS terrorist groups in Syria, the troops being sent to the Middle East would rapidly be thrown into a war.

Underscoring that such a pretext for war could be found sooner rather than later, Rear Admiral Michael Gilday, director of the US Joint Staff, made a statement Friday blaming Iran’s Revolutionary Guards for alleged recent attacks on oil tankers in the United Arab Emirates. He cited no evidence to back this up. This provocative allegation comes hot on the heels of attempts to blame Tehran for an errant rocket fired by Iranian-backed Shia militias in Baghdad, which landed in the Green Zone near the US embassy.

The deployment also comes the same week as Washington renewed its bogus allegations of chemical weapons use against the Syrian regime of Bashar al-Assad. Assad’s forces, with Russian air support, are currently engaged in an offensive against the remnants of US-backed Islamist militias in Idlib province.

Similar allegations of chemical weapons use, which subsequently proved to be entirely concocted, were used twice before, in April 2017 and April 2018, to justify cruise missile strikes on Syria. With these strikes, together with the onslaught on Syrian cities like Raqqa spearheaded by US troops and air power, Washington demonstrated that it views the consolidation of the Iranian-aligned Assad regime’s power in Syria as a threat to its interests. It is prepared to collaborate with Al Qaeda-linked terrorists to prevent the creation of an Iranian-controlled corridor running from Tehran through Syria and Lebanon to the Mediterranean coast.

The US military already has nearly 50,000 troops spread across dozens of bases, warships and airfields encircling Iran. The US Navy’s Fifth Fleet, which patrols the Middle East and North Africa, has at least 7,000 US troops stationed at a permanent base in Bahrain. The US Army’s Central Command located in Kuwait controls approximately 13,000 troops.

In the United Arab Emirates, the Al Dhafra Air Base houses 5,000 US troops, while the massive Al Udeid Air Base in Qatar has a further 10,000 troops. At least an additional 5,200 US troops remain in Iraq.

Washington also has thousands of special forces troops operating in countries throughout the region, in conjunction with the CIA. They have conducted assassination and reconnaissance missions in Yemen, Afghanistan, Iraq and Pakistan.

In addition to preparing for a direct clash with Iran, US imperialism is also arming its regional allies for war. The same day the latest troop increase was announced, the Trump administration released a “Memorandum of Justification” detailing plans to circumvent congressional oversight in order to sell US weapons to Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Jordan. The memorandum invoked an emergency under the Arms Export Control Act, permitting the executive branch to authorize weapons transfers. The weapons to be sent to the despotic Saudi regime and Gulf allies reportedly include laser-guided bombs. In total, US firms will sell more than \$8 billion worth of arms to the three regimes.

Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, who reportedly took the lead within the administration in advocating the sending of additional US troops, said the sale of billions of dollars of US weaponry to Washington’s allies was necessary to guard against “Iranian aggression.”

The statement announcing the weapons sales also justified the illegal transfer of bombs to the despotic Saudi regime as a counter to the “fundamental threat of malign Iranian activity” across the Middle East. This threat included an unsubstantiated allegation that Iran was responsible for the deaths of “over 600” US military personnel in Iraq.

This accusation is rich coming from Washington, which bears direct responsibility for the deaths of an estimated one million Iraqi civilians since its illegal invasion of the country in 2003. The Iraq War Logs released by Wikileaks confirmed that of the over 109,000 recorded deaths logged by the US military in Iraq from 2004 through 2009, 66,081 were civilian deaths, or one hundred times the number of US military deaths, mysteriously attributed to Iran.

No less hypocritical was the response of leading Democratic Party representatives to the weapons transfers. Senator Robert Menendez, the top ranking Democrat on the Senate Foreign Affairs Committee, declared, “I’m disappointed, but not surprised, that the Trump administration has failed once again to prioritize our long-term national security interests or stand up for human rights, and instead is granting favors to authoritarian countries like Saudi Arabia.”

Who does Menendez think he is kidding? It was the Democrat Barack Obama who initiated the intimate military and intelligence collaboration with Riyadh and its Gulf allies that enabled them to launch their savage war in Yemen in 2015. Justified as a struggle to

push back Iran's malign influence in the region, the four-year-old near-genocidal conflict has laid waste to the poorest country in the Middle East.

During this time, Washington has made available cluster bombs, fighter jets, white phosphorus, acceptable targeting lists, mid-air refueling, and around-the-clock maintenance, without which the Saudis would be unable to conduct their terror bombing campaign. According to researchers from the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project, between 70,000 and 80,000 people have been killed as a direct result of the war.

The US war drive in the Middle East does not arise from the personal proclivities of Trump, his attack dog Pompeo, or his hawkish National Security Adviser John Bolton, who has been urging the US to bomb Iran for years. Rather, it is part of the US ruling elite's effort to consolidate its unchallenged domination over the energy-rich and geo-strategically critical Middle East, and push back the influence of its chief rivals, above all Russia and China.

The reality is that Washington's reckless escalation of military tensions with Iran enjoys bipartisan support. Ahead of this week's State Department threat against Syria for alleged chemical weapons use, leading Democrats in both houses of Congress signed an appeal demanding that the White House "increase pressure on Iran and Russia with respect to activities in Syria."

The danger of war with Iran, which could quickly metastasize into a third world war fought with nuclear weapons, can be averted only through the political mobilization of the working class in struggle against war and its source: the capitalist profit system. The most urgent political task is therefore the fight to build a mass anti-war movement, based on a socialist program uniting working people around the world against the war-mongers in Washington.

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