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European Languages

زبانهای اروپایی

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16.06.2019

Trump doubles down on US lies about Iran

US President Donald Trump escalated the war threats against Iran Friday, insisting that Tehran was responsible for the damage done to two oil tankers in the Gulf of Oman the previous day and vowing US retaliation for any Iranian action to shut the strategic Strait of Hormuz.

Trump based his ignorant and belligerent remarks on a grainy, black-and-white video released Thursday night by the US Central Command (CENTCOM), which directs US military interventions throughout the Middle East.

CENTCOM claimed that the video, apparently shot from a US spy plane, showed a small boat of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) approaching one of the damaged tankers, the Japanese-owned Kokuka Courageous, and removing an unexploded limpet mine attached to its hull. The video was touted as proof that Iran carried out attacks on the vessels and had sent the IRGC boat to remove any incriminating evidence.



Fire and smoke billowing from Norwegian-owned Front Altair tanker said to have been attacked in the waters of the Gulf of Oman on June 13, 2019 [Credit: ISNA]

In a Fox News television interview Friday, Trump declared, “Well, Iran did do it, and you know they did it because you saw the boat.”

He continued: “I guess one of the mines didn't explode, and it's probably got essentially Iran written all over it. And you saw the boat at night, trying to take the mine off and successfully took the mine off the boat. And that was exposed. That was their boat. That was them, and they didn't want the evidence left behind.”

He went on to denounce Iran as a “nation of terror”, adding that “they’re in deep, deep trouble.” He also told Fox News that if Iran shut down the Strait of Hormuz, “it’s not going to be closed for long.” The strait, which connects the Persian Gulf with the Gulf of Oman and the Arabian Sea, is a 21-mile-wide seaway through which 30 percent of all seaborne-traded liquid products pass, most of them petroleum-based.

The claims by Trump and the Pentagon that the CENTCOM video is some kind of smoking gun proving the culpability of the Iranian government in the apparent attack on the Kokuka Courageous and the second tanker, the Norwegian-owned Front Altair, is nothing of the kind.

Unsubstantiated is the claim that those depicted in the video were removing a limpet mine from the hull, not to mention that in supposedly doing so they were engaged in a coverup designed to conceal evidence of Iranian culpability.

The CENTCOM video recalls nothing so much as the incontrovertible “proof” presented by then Secretary of State Colin Powell to the UN Security Council in 2003 of Iraqi “weapons of mass destruction”.

The US claims ran in direct contradiction from the owners of the tanker shown in the video. Yutaka Katada, president of the Kokuka Sangyo shipping firm which owns the Kokuka Courageous tanker, told reporters Friday in Tokyo that the claim the ship had been damaged by limpet mines was “false”.

“The crew are saying it was hit with a flying object. They say something come flying toward them, then there was an explosion, then there was a hole in the vessel. Then some crew witnessed a second shot.”

Katada said. “To put a bomb on the side is not something we are thinking,” he added, noting that the damage to the ship “was above the water surface by quite a lot.”

As for Trump’s denunciation of Iran as a “terror nation”, the wholesale terror that has been inflicted upon the Middle East has the clear imprint of “Made in the USA”.

Successive US wars against Iraq, which culminated in the illegal invasion of the country and cost the deaths of well over a million people, have been followed by the wars for regime change in Libya and Syria in which Washington utilized, funded and armed Islamist militias tied to Al Qaeda for the purpose of overthrowing the government of Muammar Gaddafi and the attempt to overthrow that of Bashar al-Assad.

Now Washington is attempting to accomplish the same goal in relation to Iran a far larger and more powerful country, with four times the landmass and more than twice the population of Iraq.

It has implemented what Secretary of State Mike Pompeo Thursday boasted was a “campaign of maximum pressure” designed to starve the Iranian population into submission. Having abrogated last year the 2015 Iranian nuclear accord reached between Tehran and the five permanent member nations of the UN Security Council, plus Germany, Washington has reimposed and sharply intensified crushing economic sanctions that threaten not only Iran but any country or company doing business with it. The aim, as the US has made clear, is to reduce Iranian oil exports, which count for the overwhelming share of the country’s export earnings, to zero.

These measures, carried out unilaterally and in direct violation of UN resolutions, are the equivalent of a full-scale economic blockade, an act of war.

Iran responded to the latest threats from Trump and the Pentagon calling them “alarming and worrisome.”

Just before Trump gave his interview to Fox, Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif denounced Washington for having “immediately jumped to make allegations against Iran [without] a shred of factual or circumstantial evidence.”

On Thursday, Zarif called attention to the fact that the two tankers, one owned by a Japanese firm and the other carrying a Japanese-related cargo, had been struck precisely at the moment that Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe was meeting with Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei. “Suspicious doesn't begin to describe what likely transpired,” he said.

Pompeo, in his bullying speech at the State Department Thursday afternoon, declared insultingly that Zarif was trying to be “funny”. On the contrary, the Iranian foreign minister was merely hinting at the conclusion drawn by many around the world that Tehran would hardly be motivated to strike the tankers just as Abe was in Tehran crediting the Iranian government with abiding by the nuclear accord and forswearing the development of nuclear weapons. While there, he declared that “major progress has been made toward securing peace and stability in this region.” Japan had been one of the major purchasers of Iranian oil before last month when the Trump administration abrogated waivers that had been granted to several importing countries.

In examining the crime from the standpoint of the age-old detective maxim of *Cui bono?*, or Who benefits?, the answer is obvious: those who want to prevent Iran from reaching accommodations allowing it to loosen the economic noose tied around its neck by US imperialism. This includes both Washington itself, as well as its principal regional allies, including Israel, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, all of which are entirely capable of carrying out strikes on tankers in order to blame them on Tehran and set the stage for a catastrophic war.

The apparent attacks on the two tankers came just days after German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas traveled to Tehran with the aim of salvaging the nuclear accord repudiated by Washington and forestalling a region-wide war.

Maas promised Iran that Germany, the UK and France would soon put into operation a payment channel to sidestep US sanctions known as INSTEX, while warning that the European powers could not do “miracles” in the face of punishing US sanctions feared by companies who previously did business in Iran.

Germany and the other European powers—with the exception of London, which, as in the run-up to the 2003 Iraq invasion, is marching in lockstep with Washington—have voiced skepticism about the US charges of proof of Iran’s guilt in relation to the tankers and have called for de-escalation by both sides.

China, meanwhile, has rejected the US charges. Meeting on the sidelines of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization summit in Kyrgyzstan, with his Iranian counterpart Hassan Rouhani, Chinese President Xi Jinping vowed that Beijing would deepen its ties with Tehran no matter what the situation in the region. He and Rouhani both placed central responsibility for the tensions on Washington’s unilateral abrogation of the nuclear treaty.

Washington is determined to blow up any attempts to circumvent its sanctions regime and clear the way for direct military intervention in Iran. This is the most likely motive for the tanker attacks.

This conclusion is borne out by an editorial published in the *Wall Street Journal* Thursday which stated: “Lately, some have doubted the importance of the U.S. role in the region. Two oil tankers in flames from torpedo attacks in the Gulf of Oman refute that view. The unavoidable fact is that Iran remains the primary threat to stability in the Middle East. The U.S. is right to be there, in force and prepared to defend the interests of itself and its allies.”

The *Journal* added that it was “all the more important that the West unite in opposition to Iran’s aggression, It would send the worst possible signal if in the aftermath of these attacks the Europeans buckled to Iran’s military pressure.”

Similarly, the *Washington Post*’s David Ignatius, a columnist with close ties to the US military and intelligence apparatus, wrote in a piece published Thursday titled “Is the Iran-U.S. tinderbox about to ignite?”: “Trump has a new opportunity to broaden international support for his Iran policy, after isolating the United States last year by abandoning the Iran nuclear agreement.”

What is being prepared with the provocations in and around the Persian Gulf is a war that could quickly claim the lives of tens of thousands. An outright US invasion of Iran would require the mobilization of hundreds of thousands of US troops, forcing the re-introduction of the draft and creating revolutionary conditions in the US itself.

At the same time, as the tensions with Europe and China signal, such a bloody conflict would pose the direct threat of triggering a third world war. **15 June 2019**