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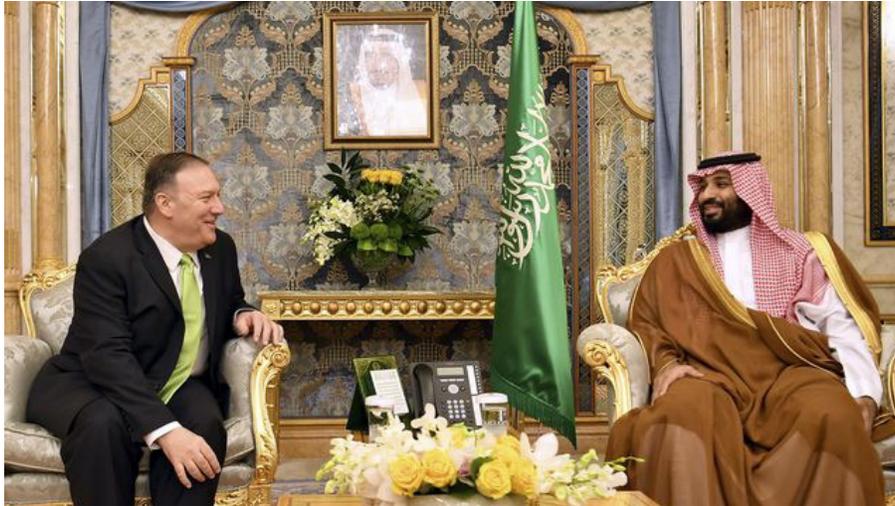
By Bill Van Auken
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Trump reviewing target lists as Iran war threat mounts

US President Donald Trump has been presented with list of targets for US military strikes against Iran as US imperialism draws ever closer to initiating an armed conflict that could prove the antechamber to a third world war.

According to a report by the *New York Times* late Wednesday, military planners at the Pentagon and the US Central Command (CENTCOM) have provided the White House with options for strikes against Iran's massive Abadan oil refinery on Kharg Island, Iranian missile launch sites, military bases and assets associated with Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps.

"Any strikes against Iran would almost certainly be carried out by volleys of cruise missiles from Navy vessels," according to the *Times* report. "Strike aircraft would be aloft to carry out attacks if Iran retaliated against the first wave...."



U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, left, meets with Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, on Wednesday, Sept 18, 2019.

(Mandel Ngan/Pool Photo via AP)

As the threat of a major war with Iran becomes ever more imminent, the corporate media, with the *Times* in the lead, becomes all the more slavish in its parroting of the US charges of Iranian responsibility for Saturday's attacks on Saudi oil installations. There is no serious attempt to critically probe these claims, much less to place them in the context of the proven record of deliberate lies and false pretenses used to justify US military aggression, from the Gulf of Tonkin in Vietnam to "weapons of mass destruction" in Iraq.

On Wednesday, Trump said that he would announce a new round of economic sanctions against Iran within the next 48 hours, while again raising the threat of military action, in relation to the attacks on Saudi Arabia's oil installations, for which Tehran has repeatedly denied responsibility.

While deflecting reporters' questions over whether the White House is preparing military strikes, Trump, who was in California on a campaign fund-raising tour, said that "there's plenty of time to do some dastardly things. It's very easy to start. And we'll see what happens."

"There are many options," Trump told the media. "And there's the ultimate option, and there are options that are a lot less than that."

Asked by a reporter whether by "ultimate option" he was referring to dropping a nuclear bomb on Iran, Trump said no, adding, "I'm saying 'the ultimate option,' meaning go in—war."

The fact that such questions are being raised and such answers are being given is a manifestation of the acute and rising danger of a catastrophic new war in the Middle East that can trigger a global nuclear conflagration.

Given Trump's repeated statements about how he could end the war in Afghanistan overnight if he "wanted to kill 10 million people," the question about the "nuclear option" was hardly far-fetched. As for his answer, to "go in" to Iran by means of war would far eclipse the disastrous US wars waged in Iraq and Afghanistan in terms of casualties and destruction, while requiring hundreds of thousands of troops and, inevitably, the reimposition of the military draft in the United States.

US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, the most prominent hardliner in relation to Iran within the administration after the recent resignation of John Bolton as national security adviser, declared in the western Saudi city of Jeddah Wednesday that the attacks on the oil facilities were "an act of war," while insisting, without providing any substantiating evidence, that "this was an Iranian attack."

Pompeo was in Saudi Arabia for consultations with the kingdom's de facto leader, the blood-soaked Crown Prince Mohamed bin Salman, who organized the hideous murder and dismemberment of US-based journalist Jamal Khashoggi at the Saudi consulate in Istanbul nearly a year ago and who has overseen the beheadings of at least 134 people, including dozens of political dissidents, in just the first half of this year.

The Houthi rebels who control the bulk of Yemen claimed responsibility for attacking the Saudi oil facilities, which they said was an act of retribution for the near-genocidal war led by the Saudis and backed by the US which has killed nearly 100,000 Yemenis and driven roughly 8 million more to the brink of starvation.

For his part, Pompeo insisted that the attacks had to have been launched by Iran because the Houthis did not have the technical capacity to organize such an action. He claimed that US intelligence had "high confidence" that the weapons used could not have come from Yemen. Confronted with a UN report issued last January establishing that the Houthis did indeed possess drones capable of carrying out such strikes, the US Secretary of State was unfazed.

"It doesn't matter," Pompeo said. "This was an Iranian attack. It's not the case that you can subcontract out the devastation of five percent of the world's global energy supply and think that you can absolve yourself of responsibilities."

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Even if the Houthis did launch the attacks, he added, “it doesn't change the fingerprints of the Ayatollah as having put at risk the global energy supply.”

In other words, Washington has no evidence that Iran launched the attack. If the Houthis, who have every reason to claim the attack as an act of self-defense, did so, they will simply be dismissed as Iranian “proxies” in order to justify the US build-up to war against Iran.

Such assertions are believed by no one, including Washington's erstwhile allies. Japanese Defense Minister Taro Kono told reporters Wednesday that his government is “not aware of any information that points to Iran” in relation to the Saudi attacks. He added, “We believe the Houthis carried out the attack based on the statement claiming responsibility.”

It is widely recognized that Washington has deliberately provoked the confrontation with Iran, having last year unilaterally and illegally abrogated the 2015 nuclear accord between Iran and the five permanent members of the UN Security Council plus Germany, followed by the imposition of a draconian regime of economic sanctions tantamount to a state of war.

For its part, Tehran delivered an official diplomatic note to the United States through the Swiss embassy Wednesday, denying that it was responsible for the strikes on the Saudi oil facilities and warning that “if any actions are taken against Iran, that action will face an immediate response from Iran and its scope will not be limited to just a threat.” Iranian officials have previously warned that US bases throughout the region, and the roughly 70,000 US troops deployed there, are in range of Iran's ballistic missiles.

In a further exacerbation of tensions, the Trump administration has failed to issue visas for an Iranian delegation, including President Hassan Rouhani and Foreign Minister Javad Zarif, to travel to New York City for the opening of the United Nations General Assembly. An advance party was already supposed to be in New York, while Zarif was to arrive there on Friday, and Rouhani on Monday.

Trump made the idiotic statement Wednesday that “if it was up to me I'd let them come,” when it is entirely up to the US president to admit or exclude the Iranians. For his part, Pompeo justified barring the Iranian officials from the United Nations on the grounds that they are guilty of “terrorism.”

It had earlier been suggested that Trump and Rouhani could hold a meeting on the sidelines of the General Assembly meeting. Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali

Khamenei, however, ruled out talks with American officials “at any level.” In a speech Tuesday, he described US suggestions of a negotiated settlement as a “ploy” designed to prove that Washington’s campaign of “maximum pressure,” designed to starve the Iranian people into submission, had succeeded.

Other Iranian officials have insisted that any resumption of negotiations be preceded by Washington resuming its adherence to the nuclear accord negotiated between Tehran and the world’s major powers in 2015 and the lifting of US sanctions.

The response of Trump’s ostensible political opposition, the Democratic Party, to the rising war threat has been mild at best. Leading congressional Democrats have largely restricted themselves to calling for any proposal for military action to be submitted to Congress, where it in all likelihood would be approved with substantial bipartisan support.

Meanwhile, Michael Morell, who was appointed acting director of the CIA under Obama and endorsed Democratic presidential candidate Hillary Clinton in the 2016 election, echoed the calls for a military assault on Iran. In a speech delivered in northern Virginia Monday night, he insisted that Washington needed to respond to an “act of war,” suggesting strikes on Iranian military installations “to deter Iran.”

A war for regime change in Iran and the securing of a US stranglehold over the massive energy reserves of the Middle East has been a strategic objective of major sections of the US ruling establishment and its military and intelligence apparatus for some 40 years, under both Democratic and Republican administration.

The deepening crisis of American capitalism, and above all the growth of social inequality and class struggle within the US itself, powerfully expressed in the autoworkers strike at General Motors, is providing an impetus for escalating the confrontation with Iran and provoking another war for the purpose of directing social tensions outward in an explosion of military violence.

Such a war would pose the immediate threat of drawing in all of the major world powers, including nuclear-armed Russia and China, which have major strategic interests in Iran. A war on Iran and the threat of a new world war, posing the end of human civilization, can be prevented only by means of the independent mobilization of the international working class in a struggle to put an end to capitalism

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