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European Languages

زبانهای اروپایی

By Bill Van Auken

21.09.2019

Trump meets with security council on Iran war plans

US President Donald Trump has convened a meeting of his National Security Council today to hear proposals from US Defense Secretary Mark Esper and chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen. Joseph Dunford for a military attack against Iran.

According to a senior administration official who spoke to the *New York Times*, the military brass is expected to recommend military strikes “at the lower end of the options.” These would include attacks on Iranian military sites believed capable of launching drones or cruise missiles as well as facilities where such weapons are stored.

At the “higher end” of potential targets would be Iranian refineries and other oil facilities as well as major bases of the country's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps.



*President Donald J. Trump, with newly named White House National Security Advisor
Robert C. O'Brien (Official White House Photo by Shealah Craighead)*

Trump initially approved such a proposal last June following Iran's shoot-down of a US spy drone over its territory. He then called the strikes off, by his own account, just 10 minutes before the bombs and missiles were set to fly. The US president claimed at the time that he had done so because the loss of Iranian life would have been disproportionate. In reality, Washington calculated that the US strikes would be answered with Iranian attacks on US ships and bases in the region that would yield mass casualties among American troops. Apparently, the White House is now prepared to accept such a price.

The pretext for the proposed acts of US imperialist aggression is the September 14 attacks on Saudi oil facilities which knocked out half the kingdom's production and sent oil prices spiraling 20 percent in trading Monday.

As yet, Washington has produced not a shred of evidence substantiating its charge that Iran was responsible for the attacks. US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo indicted Iran for the attacks within minutes of the Saudi facilities going up in flames, before anything could be known about their origin.

Employing the technique of the "big lie," US officials repeat the allegations over and over again, safe in the knowledge that they will be parroted by a corporate-controlled media that serves as an uncritical propaganda agency for imperialist war.

That the US claims are wholly unfounded has become increasingly clear as the narrative offered by top administration officials has begun to shift.

Initially, Pompeo, the leading anti-Iranian hardliner in the administration, declared Iran guilty and dismissed the claim of responsibility made by the Houthi rebels in Yemen, insisting that they lacked the technical ability to carry out such attacks.

Speaking on Wednesday in Saudi Arabia, however, Pompeo brushed aside questions relating to a United Nations report establishing that the Houthis did possess drones capable of striking targets throughout Saudi Arabia. "It doesn't matter," he 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."

This line was echoed Thursday by Vice President Mike Pence, who told an interviewer that "whether it was their surrogates in Yemen who fired these missiles and drones or

whether they fired them themselves, we're imposing punishing new sanctions on Iran to hold them accountable.”

This is hardly a matter of indifference. The Houthis are no “surrogates” of Iran. They carried out their rebellion against the Saudi-backed regime in Yemen for their own reasons and without backing from Tehran. They have defended their strikes on Saudi Arabia, which have included other previous targets, as acts of self-defense against a Saudi monarchical regime that has waged a near-genocidal war against the Yemeni people for the last four and a half years, claiming the lives of nearly 100,000 Yemenis and pushing another 8 million to the brink of starvation.

Iranian Foreign Minister Javad Zarif has warned that any US or Saudi attack on Iran would lead to “all-out war.”

“I am making a very serious statement that we don't want to engage in a military confrontation,” Zarif said in an interview with CNN. “But we won't blink to defend our territory.”

Pompeo seized upon the statement, proclaiming at the end of his talks with Saudi Arabia's blood-soaked de facto ruler Crown Prince Mohamed bin Salman, “While the foreign minister of Iran is threatening an all-out war and to fight to the last American, we are here to build out a coalition aimed at achieving peace and peaceful resolution.”

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What nonsense! Washington is wholly responsible for the present threat of a catastrophic war in the Persian Gulf. It was the Trump administration that last year unilaterally and illegally tore up the 2015 nuclear agreement between Tehran and the five permanent member nations of the UN Security Council plus Germany. It reimposed and escalated draconian sanctions that US officials have described as a “maximum pressure” campaign designed to reduce Iranian oil exports to zero and starve the Iranian people into submission. These sanctions, targeting not only Iran but any country and any company doing business with Iran, are tantamount to an economic blockade, an act of war.

It is also Washington that has provided indispensable military support that has allowed Saudi Arabia to carry out the bloodbath in Yemen. Without the warplanes, bombs and ammunition, logistical aid and the backing of the US Navy for a blockade of Yemen's coast, the Saudi regime would never have been able to carry out its criminal war.

Behind all of the lies of Trump, Pompeo and Pence about Iran's alleged crimes, they are pursuing a policy of US imperialist aggression and regime change that has been developed over the course of decades.

Washington has never accepted the 1979 overthrow the bloodthirsty dictatorship of the Shah of Iran, brought to power in a CIA-organized coup against the bourgeois nationalist Prime Minister Mohammad Mosaddegh in 1953. While ruthlessly repressing the Iranian masses, the Shah served as US imperialism's principal gendarme throughout the region.

Ever since the revolution that toppled the Shah, Iran has been cast as part of a "axis of evil," a uniquely hostile and supposedly irrational enemy of the United States. Sanctions against Iran date back to the Carter administration, when billions of dollars in Iranian assets were seized by the US government. In 1984, new sanctions barring weapons sales and US aid were imposed as Washington swung behind Iraq in the Iran-Iraq war. And in 1996, the Clinton administration imposed sanctions targeting both US and foreign companies investing in Iran's oil sector. Plans for US military aggression were developed under both Democratic and Republican administration alike.

Iran's geostrategic importance has made it a focal point of US imperialist intrigue from the Second World War onward. Aside from possessing the world's fourth-largest oil reserves and second-largest gas reserves, it occupies all of the eastern coast of the Persian Gulf and has land borders with Pakistan, Afghanistan, Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan, Armenia, Turkey and Iraq. And it shares the coast of the Caspian Sea with Kazakhstan and Russia. With a population of 83 million and one of the most developed economies in the region, it also constitutes a lucrative market.

Over the past 18 years, US imperialism has fought two wars in Afghanistan—to Iran's east—and Iraq—to Iran's west—under the pretenses of a "war on terror" and "weapons of mass destruction." Both were aimed at asserting unfettered domination over strategic energy reserves in the Caspian Basin and the Persian Gulf, thereby placing US imperialism in a position to ration oil and gas required by its principal rivals, in particular China. This strategic aim cannot be realized without another war against Iran.

The US corporate media has speculated that Trump does not want a war or that any military action will be postponed until after the United Nations General Assembly debate next week. Such predictions are worthless.

Washington is unlikely to garner any significant support at the UN. Its erstwhile allies in Western Europe and Asia are reluctant to be dragged into a war for US interests that

threatens world catastrophic consequences. Another Colin Powell-style presentation of “evidence” of Iranian culpability is hardly likely to sway the positions of many governments.

As for Trump, his daily fluctuations between threatening Iran with the “ultimate option” and claiming that he wants to avoid a war reflect the pressures that he is under from conflicting layers within the US ruling establishment and the military and intelligence apparatus.

The march to war, however, is objective, rooted in the insoluble contradictions of the capitalist system and the growing social tensions and class struggle within the US itself, which the American ruling class is driven to divert outward in an eruption of military violence.

20 September 2019