

Washington steps up threats over Iran missile tests

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Washington has stepped up threats of new sanctions and retaliation against Iran after its Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps carried out a second day of missile tests Wednesday.

The Obama administration has indicated that it will raise the missile tests before the United Nations Security Council, while Vice President Joe Biden, on a state visit to Israel, declared that Washington and Tel Aviv were “united in the belief that a nuclear-armed Iran is an absolutely unacceptable threat to Israel,” adding that the US would “act,” not only if Iran broke the nuclear deal, but in response to “their conventional activity outside of the deal ... wherever we can find it.”

Leading the denunciations, and demonstrating once again her determination to run to the right of the Obama administration, particularly on foreign policy, Democratic presidential front-runner and former secretary of state Hillary Clinton issued an immediate call for the imposition of new sanctions against Iran.

Describing herself as “deeply concerned” by the tests, Clinton declared: “Iran should face sanctions for these activities and the international community must demonstrate that Iran's threats toward Israel will not be tolerated.”

Clinton has long taken a hard-line and militarist position in relation to Iran. During her unsuccessful run for the Democratic presidential nomination in 2008, she threatened that as president she would “totally obliterate” Iran, a country of over 77 million people, if it attacked Israel.

Last year, speaking before the Brookings Institution, a Washington think tank with close ties to the Democratic Party, Clinton vowed that as president she would “not hesitate to take military action if Iran attempts to obtain a nuclear weapon” and laid out a detailed strategy for confronting Iran across the Middle

East.

In her statement Wednesday, Clinton added, “As president, I will continue to stand with Israel against such threats.” Her campaign has been the first to accept an invitation to address the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), the right-wing Zionist lobby, later this month.

Clinton’s statement placed her in alliance with Congressional Republicans who opposed the nuclear agreement and are now furiously demanding new sanctions over the missile tests.

The reality is that the Iranian missile tests in no way violate the UN Security Council resolution that was the basis for the nuclear deal reached between the P5+1 (the five permanent members of the council: the US, Russia, China, Britain and France; plus Germany) and Iran last July.

The agreement involves a curtailment of Iran’s nuclear program—which the Iranian government has always insisted was intended for peaceful purposes—and an intrusive inspections regime in return for the lifting of international sanctions.

UN Security Council Resolution 2231, which codifies the deal, states that Iran “is called upon not to undertake any activity related to ballistic missiles designed to be capable of delivering nuclear weapons, including launches using such ballistic missile technology.”

Iran’s position is that it is not now, nor was it ever, developing nuclear weapons, and therefore has never designed ballistic missiles to deliver such weapons.

State Department spokesman John Kirby on Tuesday acknowledged that the missile tests are not a “violation of the Iran deal itself,” but added that Washington would not “turn a blind eye” to them and would employ both “unilateral and multilateral tools” to

address them.

Last January, just one day after the nuclear deal went into effect, the US Treasury Department imposed a new set of unilateral US sanctions against Iran over a test launch of a ballistic missile carried out on October 11.

Iranian officials have defended the ballistic missile tests as a defensive measure aimed at deterring aggression by the US and its allies, principally nuclear-armed Israel, together with Saudi Arabia and the other despotic Persian Gulf oil sheikdoms.

The US military has effectively encircled Iran, with large deployments of troops in Afghanistan, on its eastern border, in Iraq on its western border and to the south in Qatar and Bahrain. Meanwhile, the US Navy's Fifth Fleet has been deployed within sight of Iran's coastline in the Persian Gulf.

"We are always ready to defend the country against any aggressor. Iran will not turn into Yemen, Iraq or Syria," said Brigadier General Amirali Hajizadeh, the head of the Aerospace Division of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) in response to the Western denunciations of the missile tests.

Hajizadeh warned that the missile program was the target of "infiltration and sabotage," just as the nuclear program—hit with the assassination of Iranian scientists and the Stuxnet cyber attack—before it. He added, that another danger was that "the enemy might influence political officials through ballyhoo."

The missile tests have underscored divisions within Iran's bourgeois-clerical state between so-called "hardliners," who opposed the nuclear deal and are hostile to the drive to open up Iran's economy to Western capital, and forces around Iran's current President Hassan Rouhani, who are eager to cement commercial deals with Europe and the transnational corporations, while seeking to reach a closer alignment with Washington.

While the US ruling establishment sees the deal as means of deepening these divisions, weakening the Iranian state and ultimately bringing about some form of regime change, it continues to pursue more direct methods, with continuing US military threats, the ongoing intervention in Iraq and Syria and the massive arming of Israel and Saudi Arabia.

In the midst of the missile controversy, President Barack Obama signed an executive order renewing for another year the state of "National Emergency" in

relation to Iran.

"Despite the historic deal to ensure the exclusively peaceful nature of Iran's nuclear program, certain actions and policies of the Government of Iran continue to pose an unusual and extraordinary threat to the national security, foreign policy, and economy of the United States," Obama wrote in a statement announcing the extension.

Meanwhile, citing unnamed US officials, CNN reported Thursday that the Obama administration is preparing to publicly indict Iran for an alleged cyber attack against a dam in New York in 2013. An indictment being prepared by the Justice Department reportedly claims that Iranian hackers were responsible for the incident, which in no way interfered with the dam's operations, and that they worked for the Iranian government.

The US government itself was directly responsible for far more serious cyber attacks carried out in league with Israel. In 2009 and 2010, US and Israeli agents used a malicious computer bug called Stuxnet to attack the Iranian nuclear facility at Natanz, causing high-speed centrifuges to spin out of control and self-destruct. According to a 2012 report in the *New York Times*, Obama personally authorized and oversaw these attacks, meeting with the US intelligence officials who organized them in the White House situation room.



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