

White House issues war threat against Iran

Peter Symonds
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In an extraordinarily bellicose statement Wednesday, US National Security Adviser Michael Flynn accused Iran of “destabilising behaviour across the Middle East” and warned, “As of today we are officially putting Iran on notice.”

He denounced Tehran for carrying out a ballistic missile test on Sunday and accused the Iranian regime, without any substantiation, of responsibility for an attack on a Saudi Arabian warship by Houthi rebels in Yemen on Monday.

Flynn appeared at the daily briefing for the White House press corps, which had no advance notice that he would make a statement. He was called to the podium by White House Press Secretary Sean Spicer to deliver a blistering tirade not only against Iran, but also against the Obama administration, after which he walked out without taking any questions.

Flynn gave no indication of the US actions being prepared against Iran. Hours later, in a closed-door briefing to the media, senior administration officials declared that the US intended to take “appropriate action” against Iran over its missile test. “We are considering a whole range of options,” one official said, refusing to rule out military action against Iran.

Flynn condemned Sunday’s “provocative ballistic missile launch,” claiming it was “in defiance of UN Security Council Resolution 2231, which calls upon Iran ‘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 has repeatedly denied that its ballistic missiles can carry nuclear weapons. The International Atomic Energy Agency—the organisation responsible for monitoring Resolution 2231—has confirmed this. An Iranian foreign ministry statement declared that missile tests “are an integral component” of Iran’s self-defence” and rejected “politically motivated comments

regarding Iran’s missile program.”

Flynn provided no evidence to back up his claims, either on the missile test or the alleged attack on the Saudi warship.

The national security adviser declared that Monday’s attack on the Saudi naval vessel was one of “a series of incidents in the past six months in which Houthi forces that Iran has trained and armed have struck Emirati and Saudi vessels, and threatened US and allied vessels transiting the Red Sea. In these and similar activities, Iran continues to threaten US friends and allies in the region.”

Neither Flynn nor anyone else in the Trump administration has demonstrated that Iran is training and arming the Houthi rebels. What is clear, however, is that Saudi Arabia, in league with the US and various Gulf States, is waging a bloody war, in which more than 10,000 people have been killed, to oust the Houthi-led government in Yemen. Saudi warplanes, supported by the US armed forces, have killed civilians in attacks on hospitals and other non-military facilities.

Flynn’s remarks follow the bellicose comments of the US ambassador to the UN, Nikki Haley, after an emergency session of the UN Security Council on Tuesday, convened at Washington’s request over Iran’s missile test. Haley branded the missile launch as “absolutely unacceptable” and declared: “We’re going to act. We’re going to be strong. We’re going to be loud and we’re going to do whatever it takes to protect the American people and the people across the world.”

Tehran is already at loggerheads with Washington over the Trump administration’s visa ban on seven predominantly Muslim countries, including Iran. Tehran retaliated on Tuesday, imposing a ban on American citizens traveling to Iran.

The Trump administration’s immediate target is the nuclear agreement reached with Iran in 2015 by the Obama administration, along with Britain, Germany,

France, China and Russia. The deal, formalised in UN resolution 2231, ended the crippling economic sanctions on Iran in return for the shut-down of Iran's nuclear programs and intrusive inspections.

Flynn condemned the Obama administration for failing "to respond adequately to Tehran's malign actions." He continued: "President Trump has severely criticised the various agreements reached between Iran and the Obama administration, as well as the UN, as being weak and ineffective."

Speaking last March to the Zionist lobby group, the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, Trump declared: "My No.1 priority is to dismantle the disastrous deal with Iran... This deal is catastrophic—for America, for Israel, and for the whole Middle East." He vowed to halt Iran's missile program, claiming it threatened Israel, Europe and the United States. "We are not going to let that happen," Trump stated.

Israel, Washington's closest ally in the Middle East, is armed to the teeth with the aid and assistance of the United States, and has built its own substantial nuclear arsenal. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who bitterly opposed the 2015 nuclear agreement, immediately condemned the Iranian missile test on Monday. He said he would press the Trump administration to renew economic sanctions on Tehran when he visits Washington this month.

The Trump administration includes pro-Zionist figures, such as his son-in-law and senior adviser Jared Kushner, as well as politicians and generals who are deeply hostile to Iran. Newly-installed CIA chief Mike Pompeo led the campaign in Congress in 2015 to block the nuclear agreement with Iran.

Flynn is notorious for his anti-Muslim xenophobia and outlandish views, which contributed to his removal as Defence Intelligence Agency (DIA) director. The *New York Times* reported one case involving the attack on the US diplomatic compound in Benghazi, Libya in 2012. Flynn blamed Iran and insisted that his DIA subordinates find evidence to prove he was right. None existed.

Flynn told the House Foreign Affairs Committee in 2015 that "regime-change in Iran" was the best means to stop Iran's nuclear programs. In a book entitled *The Field of Fight: How We can Win the Global War Against Radical Islam and Its Allies*, he and anti-Iran hawk Michael Ledeen laid out a blueprint for war

against Iran. They denounced Iran as "the lynchpin" of a coalition of nation states and terrorist groups focused on attacking the US.

At the same time, divisions exist within the Trump administration over tearing up the 2015 nuclear deal. That would create a major rift with key European allies and undermine commercial opportunities, including for American corporations, which have an eye on the Iranian market and large reserves of oil and gas.

At his confirmation hearing last month, Defence Secretary James Mattis declared that the nuclear pact was "an imperfect arms control agreement" but the US was obliged to continue to abide by it. For Mattis, the issue is a tactical one—a clash with Iran might not be the top priority as Trump prepares to confront China. On his first overseas trip, Mattis is en route to East Asia to visit two American allies, South Korea and Japan.

That said, Mattis is not opposed in principle to a war against Iran. During his time as head of the US Central Command, he was preoccupied with the alleged threat posed by the Iranian regime. He reportedly advised the Obama administration in 2011 to take military action inside Iran in retaliation for alleged attacks on US forces in Iraq by Iranian-backed militia. He was removed from his post after urging the deployment of a third aircraft carrier battle group to the Persian Gulf in preparation for war with Iran.

The escalating war of words with Iran has its own logic. It could lead to clashes and conflict that would rapidly draw in other countries in the Middle East and internationally. The fact that the threat against Iran has emanated from Trump's National Security Council, a cabal of ex-generals and extreme right-wing figures, including the fascistic Stephen Bannon, Trump's chief strategist, is the sharpest of warnings.

Less than two weeks in office, the Trump administration is rapidly emerging as a regime of militarism and war directed at any obstacle to the interests of the super-rich oligarchy it represents.



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