

US secretary of state issues war threat against Iran

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US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson issued a threat of military confrontation with Iran Wednesday at a hastily called news conference in which he drew a direct parallel to Washington's reckless and increasingly dangerous confrontation with North Korea.

Referring to the nuclear agreement negotiated between Iran and the major world powers, Tillerson said: "This deal represents the same failed approach of the past that brought us to the current imminent threat that we face from North Korea. The Trump administration has no intention of passing the buck to a future administration on Iran. The evidence is clear: Iran's provocative actions threaten the United States, the region and the world."

The Trump administration had acknowledged on Tuesday that Iran has fully complied with the terms of the nuclear agreement that it negotiated in July 2015 with the so-called P5+1—China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom and the United States plus Germany. In the same breath, however, it signaled that it is preparing measures designed to blow the agreement up.

In a formal notification required every 90 days to the US Congress—the first delivered since Trump's inauguration—Secretary of State Tillerson certified that, as of April 18, Iran was meeting its terms of the deal, which required it to cap its uranium enrichment, reduce its number of centrifuges by two-thirds and submit to international inspections to ensure compliance. These terms were supposed to preclude Iran's ability to develop a nuclear weapon, something which Tehran insisted it had never sought.

The rest of Tillerson's statement, however, revealed that the Trump administration is conducting a systematic review of all of the economic and financial sanctions that were waived in return for Iran's reining in of its nuclear program.

Iran, the secretary of state alleged, "remains a leading sponsor of terror through many platforms and methods," and therefore Trump "has directed a National Security Council-led interagency review of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action that will evaluate whether suspension of sanctions related to Iran pursuant to the JCPOA (Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, the formal name of the Iran nuclear deal) is vital to the national security interests of the United States."

On Wednesday, White House spokesman Sean Spicer deflected a direct question as to whether the administration was seeking to abrogate the nuclear agreement, saying that the "inter-agency review" would be concluded in 90 days and would serve as the basis for policy recommendations.

"We're well aware of any potential negative impacts that an action could have," he added, in relation to the re-imposition of suspended sanctions.

Indeed such "negative impacts" are precisely the purpose of taking this action, which would be designed to provoke Iran into repudiating its own obligations under the nuclear agreement and thereby creating the pretext for US military aggression.

Thus, even as Washington is pushing the world to the brink of a potential nuclear confrontation on the Korean peninsula, it is laying the foundations for another catastrophic war in the Middle East.

During his 2016 presidential campaign, Donald Trump repeatedly denounced the Iran nuclear agreement as "the worst deal ever negotiated" and vowed to "rip it up" once elected.

In February, his since ousted national security advisor Gen. Michael Flynn marched into a White House briefing to ominously announce that he was putting "Iran on notice," implying possible US military

retaliation for the Iranian military's testing of non-nuclear missiles, which is not barred by the nuclear agreement.

And last month, Gen. Joseph Votel, the chief of US Central Command, which oversees the American wars and interventions in the Middle East and Central Asia, denounced Iran as the "greatest long-term threat to stability" in the Middle East and advocated a campaign to "disrupt [Iran] through military means or other means."

The latest escalation of these threats came as Trump's defense secretary, Gen. James "Mad Dog" Mattis, is conducting a tour of the Middle East, with meetings scheduled with Iran's principal regional enemies, including the Saudi and Qatari monarchies and Israel.

Mattis has reportedly advocated a policy of increasing the already massive US military aid and arms sales to the Saudi royal dictatorship and providing more direct US collaboration in its more than two-year-old war against the impoverished population of Yemen, which has killed some 12,000 people, the majority of them civilians, turned 3 million into refugees and left large portions of the population on the brink of starvation.

Speaking to reporters in Riyadh after meeting with Saudi King Salman and Deputy Crown Prince and minister of defense Mohammed bin Salman, Mattis declared, "Everywhere you look if there is trouble in the region, you find Iran." He added, "We will have to overcome Iran's efforts to destabilize yet another country and create another militia in their image of Lebanese Hezbollah but the bottom line is we are on the right path for it."

The charges of Iranian "destabilization" stem from Iran's objective position as Washington's rival for regional hegemony in the Middle East and its participation, alongside Russia, in defending the government of Syria against the US-orchestrated war for regime change.

The hypocrisy of Washington's labeling Iran as a sponsor of terrorism and the source of all "trouble in the region" is shameless. US imperialism has carried out a series of wars that have killed millions, toppled governments and devastated entire societies. The CIA has armed and funded terrorist Islamist groups in Libya, Iraq and Syria, including those directly tied to Al Qaeda.

In Yemen, the Pentagon has supplied the warplanes, bombs and missiles that have slaughtered men, women and children, while offering intelligence assistance as well as mid-air refueling to enable round-the-clock bombing aimed at crushing the Yemeni population's resistance and compelling them to accept the reimposition of the puppet regime of ousted President Abd-Rabbu Mansour Hadi.

Now, the Pentagon is reportedly preparing to directly assist a Saudi-UAE offensive to conquer the Yemeni port of Hodeida, the last link between the country's starving population and the outside world. Aid agencies have warned that such an attack may well tip the country into a full-blown famine.

Speaking alongside the Saudi deputy crown prince on Wednesday, Mattis offered an obsequious tribute to the 31-year-old "royal highness" while vowing to "reinforce Saudi Arabia's resistance to Iran's mischief and make you more effective with your military as we work together as partners."

Mattis went on to declare that it was in the US "interest to see a strong Saudi Arabia military security service and secret services," this in a country where the "secret services" ruthlessly repress any manifestation of dissent and where criticism of the ruling royal family is grounds for beheading.

As with the attack on Syria, the ratcheting up of tensions with Russia and the ongoing nuclear brinkmanship with North Korea, the Trump administration has enjoyed crucial support from the Democrats for the buildup toward war with Iran. Key Democratic members of the House and Senate have joined with Republicans in supporting the imposition of new sanctions. From the 2016 presidential campaign onward, the Democrats' criticisms of Trump have been focused centrally on foreign policy and have come from the right, particularly over concern that the Trump administration would prove "too soft" on Russia, and, by extension, Iran, which has allied itself with Russia in Syria.



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