

International Court of Justice strikes down US sanctions against Iran

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Rebuking US moves to scrap the 2015 Iranian nuclear accord, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in The Hague unanimously ruled yesterday that Washington must let Iran use international financial payments systems to buy humanitarian supplies.

When the Obama administration imposed sanctions on Iran in 2012-2015, it tried to strangle Iran's economy by freezing it out of all financial transactions denominated in US dollars. At its request, the Brussels-based Society for Worldwide Inter-bank Financial Telecommunication (SWIFT) network expelled Iranian banks, ending Iran's ability to use US dollars for international purchases. Since unilaterally repudiating the 2015 accord this May, the Trump administration has made clear it plans to re-impose sanctions as part of its preparations for war with Iran.

The ICJ ruling demands that Washington not block trade in critical goods, and makes clear that the US war drive against Iran—including calls by US officials such as White House national security adviser John Bolton to re-impose SWIFT sanctions on Iran—violates international law.

Pending final adjudication of US claims against Iran, the ICJ has ordered Washington to “remove, by means of its choosing, any impediments ... to the free exportation to the territory of Iran of goods required for humanitarian needs, such as (i) medicines and medical devices; and (ii) foodstuffs and agricultural commodities; as well as goods and services required for the safety of civil aviation, such as (iii) spare parts, equipment and associated services ... necessary for civil aircraft.”

The ICJ adds: “To this end, the United States must ensure that licences and necessary authorizations are granted, and that payments and other transfers of funds are not subject to any restriction insofar as they relate to the goods and services referred to above.”

The Iranian foreign ministry applauded the ICJ decision, stating that it “vindicates the Islamic Republic of Iran and confirms the illegitimacy and oppressiveness” of US sanctions.

The ICJ has no mechanism or power to enforce its decision, however, and US officials immediately made clear they will defy the ICJ ruling. Calling Iranian requests “baseless,” US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo announced the termination of

the 1955 Treaty of Amity between the United States and Iran, on which the ICJ ruling relied. “That is a decision that is, frankly, 39 years overdue,” Pompeo said, referring to the 39 years since the 1979 Revolution toppled the bloodstained CIA-backed regime of the Shah of Iran.

Pompeo then cynically tried to imply that the ICJ ruling is irrelevant, as Washington already makes exceptions for humanitarian goods in its sanctions. He said, “With regard to the aspects of the court's order focusing on potential humanitarian issues, we have been clear. ... Existing exceptions, authorisations and licensing policies for humanitarian-related transactions and safety of flight will remain in effect. The United States has been actively engaged on these issues without regard to any proceeding before the ICJ.”

US sanctions on Iran have had devastating humanitarian consequences, and Pompeo's argument is a repugnant political lie. Over a span of decades, economic sanctions have been a key foreign policy tool allowing US imperialism to inflict untold suffering on innocent people in an attempt to bully and bludgeon various countries it targeted for regime change into line.

US officials have applauded sanctions against Iraq, Cuba and the former Yugoslavia even as they caused horrific losses. The UN embargo Washington imposed on Iraq after the 1991 Gulf War cut off Iraq's access to health supplies, leading to an estimated 500,000 deaths of Iraqi children. Asked about this number on television in 1996, then-US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright infamously defended the sanctions: “A hard choice, but the price, we think the price is worth it.”

The relentless campaign by Washington to isolate Iran since the 1979 Revolution, and in particular the 2012-2015 sanctions, have taken a terrible toll.

Between 2012 and 2016, Iran's critical oil and gas exports fell from over \$9 billion to under \$3 billion, shattering its economy and its access to critical food, pharmaceutical and industrial supplies.

A 2014 article on the US National Institutes of Health's (NIH) National Center for Biotechnology Information website, titled “Sanctions against Iran: The Impact on Health Services,” explains: “Although medicine is not included in the list of the sanctions, the difficulties in holding license for export of

medicine, financial transaction, and shipment as well as fear of possible US sanction by pharmaceutical companies and international banks, led to the shortage of specific drugs and medical facilities in last months. A sudden fifty percent rise in the price of drugs is another contributing factor ... The impact is being felt by more than six million patients suffering from complex diseases such as hemophilia, multiple sclerosis, thalassemia, epilepsy, and various immunological disorders, as well as transplant and kidney dialysis patients and those being treated for cancer.”

And after Aseman flight 3705 crashed in Iran in February, killing all 65 aboard, the *Guardian* noted that at least 1,985 people have died in Iranian plane crashes since 1979: “There have been scores of plane crashes in Iran since the 1979 Islamic Revolution, mainly because western sanctions for decades limited its ability to purchase spare parts or buy new planes.”

Washington’s new sanctions have already resulted in a cut-off of vital medicines to Iran. According to Mohammad-Naeem Aminifard, a member of the Iranian parliament’s health commission, 80 important drugs are no longer available under the Iranian state’s drug insurance scheme.

An Iranian doctor working with low-income Iranians recently told the British-based *Guardian*, “It’s no more only about shortages in drugs for cancer or special diseases such as haemophilia or thalassemia. [N]ormal drugs ... like Warfarin, which stops blood clotting, (are) becoming difficult to find, which means patients’ lives are at risk.”

The ICJ ruling undoubtedly reflects growing opposition in ruling circles internationally to US policy—including its war drive against Iran, and threats of trade war and military attack against nuclear-armed Russia and China. It came a day after US ambassador to NATO Kay Bailey Hutchison issued an unprecedented threat to bomb Russia in order to destroy cruise missiles Washington says violate the 1987 Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty. Such an attack would set the stage for global nuclear war that could annihilate humanity.

Significantly, opposition to US policy increasingly comes from America’s imperialist “allies” in Europe and Asia. Germany, Britain and France have consistently defended the 2015 Iranian accord and, last month, signed an agreement with China, Russia and Iran to set up a so-called Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV) funding scheme, to circumvent the use of the US dollar in the Iranian oil trade. Pompeo condemned the SPV scheme, saying he was “disturbed” and “deeply disappointed” by the “counterproductive” measure.

On Tuesday, moreover, reports emerged of high-level talks on Iran between Japan’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) and US State Department officials in Tokyo. The MOFA stated that “both sides actively discussed the US re-imposition of sanctions against Iran,” and that it had reiterated its “basic principle” that Japanese corporations should not be affected by the US sanctions.

Nonetheless, the only progressive opposition to the US-led

war drive comes from the millions of working people around the globe who are opposed to war, not Washington’s imperialist rivals. After a quarter century of spreading imperialist war from Iraq to Afghanistan, Libya and Syria, there can be no doubt that this growing inter-imperialist rivalry for access to oil and strategic advantage will only accelerate the drive toward all-out war across the Middle East.

Even those imperialist governments critical of US sanctions are, for their own reasons, stoking a confrontation with Iran. As France participates in the US-led proxy war for regime change in its former colony, Syria, it has already targeted Iran, a key military backer of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad. Paris has postponed sending a new ambassador to Tehran and has advised its diplomats to postpone visits to Iran.

Yesterday, the French government charged Iran’s ministry of intelligence for preparing a foiled bombing plot against a June meeting between the exiled Iranian Mujahedin-e-Khalq (MEK) and top US officials including Donald Trump’s attorney, Rudy Giuliani, in Villepinte, near Paris. In a joint statement, the French interior, economic and foreign affairs ministries said: “A planned bomb attack was foiled at Villepinte on June 30. This extremely serious attack that was to take place on our territory cannot go without a response.”

It remains unclear what evidence Paris has connecting Iranian intelligence to those it is charging: Iranian diplomat Assadollah Assadi, who was arrested in July in Germany on terror charges, a Belgian couple of Iranian origin, and three others.

It came after French police launched a major “antiterrorist operation” to shut down the Shiite Islamic Zahra-France association, which works near the Grande Synthe refugee camp. Media reported that Paris wanted to “send a message” to Iran with the crackdown.

Tehran rejected accusations they were planning a terror bombing in Villepinte and demanded the Iranian diplomat’s release. An Iranian government spokesman warned of “the evil hands of ill-wishers who seek to ruin deep-rooted ties between Iran and France as well as other influential European countries.”



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