

US expands illegal, unilateral sanctions against Iran

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Intensifying its aggressive “America First” global agenda, the Trump administration yesterday confirmed that it will impose new sanctions on Iran that are designed to cripple its economy, starve its people into submission and overturn its government in order to impose a subservient pro-US regime.

US President Donald Trump on Friday tweeted a photograph of himself in the style of an advertisement for the *Game of Thrones* fantasy TV series, with the tagline: “Sanctions Are Coming, November 5.” This is a reference to “Winter is Coming”—the series’ theme of violence, revenge and war. Later, he boasted to reporters: “Iran is taking a very big hit.”

The measures outlined yesterday are indeed so sweeping that they are tantamount to a declaration of war. Moreover, they are backed by threats of military action if Iran persists in defying US diktats. The sanctions violate UN resolutions endorsing the 2015 nuclear accord struck between Iran, the five permanent UN Security Council members (the US, Britain, France, Russia and China), plus Germany and the European Union.

US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo effectively confirmed that Washington, which installed and maintained the barbaric dictatorship of Shah Reza Pahlavi for more than 25 years from 1953 to 1979, is seeking once again to establish unchallenged hegemony over the oil-rich country.

“Every effort is aimed at giving the Iranian people the government that they not only want but deserve,” the former CIA director declared, employing the bullying and contemptuous language associated with US regime-change operations around the world.

To achieve its end, the Trump administration is directly punishing the Iranian people—tens of thousands of whom could die as a result of US impediments to the import of food and medicines. It is also targeting US imperialism’s European rivals, which yesterday jointly condemned the

US measures and vowed to find ways to defy them.

In line with Trump’s vow to cut off Iranian oil revenue completely, oil exporters, banks and tankers will be among 700 companies, individuals, vessels and aircraft that will be added to an existing US sanctions blacklist on Monday.

US Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin also announced that SWIFT, the Brussels-based private financial messaging service that allows banks to communicate securely, would also be subject to sanctions. “We have advised SWIFT that it must disconnect any Iranian financial institution that we designate as soon as technically feasible,” he said.

The European powers, as well as Russia and China, are threatened because the US sanctions are to be enforced through punitive secondary sanctions. Companies and countries that trade with Iran will face exclusion from the US market and massive financial and other penalties.

Pompeo said eight “jurisdictions” would be granted temporary waivers—that is US “permission” to continue importing Iranian oil or natural gas after the US sanctions come into force on Monday—but only on the understanding that they would stop or drastically reduce their imports in coming weeks. The goal, he reiterated, was to deprive Iran of all revenue from energy exports as soon as possible.

Pompeo did not name the countries to be exempted, except to say pointedly that the European Union was not among them. They are believed to include India, Japan, South Korea and possibly China, which has so far complied with the US demands by reducing its oil imports from Iran. Iran’s northern neighbour Turkey said it was one of the eight.

Six countries had agreed to “greatly reduced” levels of oil purchases, Pompeo said, and two said they would soon end their imports of Iranian oil. Money from sales to the exempted countries would be kept in accounts outside

Iran, he said, and could be spent only on humanitarian supplies or approved goods.

Far from exempting basic foods and medicines from the sanctions, the Trump administration, say European officials, has ensured that they will be subject to the US embargo in fact, if not in name.

Gerard Araud, the French ambassador to Washington, said this week: “Of course, humanitarian goods are not sanctioned. But the fact is the banks are so terrified of sanctions that they don’t want to do anything with Iran. It means that in a few months, there is a strong risk that there will be shortage of medicine in Iran if we don’t do something positive.”

The UK, French and German ambassadors to the US made joint visits to the US Treasury and State departments in September, trying to persuade the Trump administration to produce a “white list.” This would give guidelines about what channels European banks and companies could follow to conduct exempted transactions.

Under previous sanctions, foreign banks and companies avoided all transactions with Iran for fear of being penalised, leading to severe shortages of life-saving medicines and food staples in the years preceding the 2015 agreement.

“There’s no doubt that the lives of thousands of patients will be at risk,” Ahmad Ghavideh of Iran’s haemophilia society told the *Guardian* by phone from Tehran. “Any delay in supply of medicine, particularly in the sector I work in, will have catastrophic consequences,” said the NGO head.

On Friday, the State Department’s special envoy on Iran, Brian Hook, ruled out making special provisions for humanitarian goods. “The burden is not on the United States to identify the safe channels,” Hook told reporters. “Banks do not have confidence in Iran’s banking system... That’s Iran’s problem; it is not our problem.”

Ellie Geranmayeh, a senior policy fellow at the European Council on Foreign Relations, told reporters: “I have spoken to a number of European pharmaceutical companies and they say their banks have flagged they are going to struggle to deal with any payments from Iran. This is not consistent with the Trump administration’s declared policy that sanctions are not against the Iranian people.”

Pompeo said on Friday the sanctions were “aimed at depriving the regime of the revenues that it uses to spread death and destruction around the world.” In reality, it is the US, the world’s biggest nuclear power, that has a long

documented record of military aggression, coups, assassinations and support for terrorism, as well as of triggering the destruction of entire societies throughout the Middle East—from Libya to Yemen, Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan—since 2001.

Moreover, the demands issued on Iran by Washington require it to stop all uranium enrichment, that is, to permanently give up the right to develop a civilian nuclear program, including for power generation and medical use. Tehran insists it has complied fully with the 2015 nuclear accord and the International Atomic Energy Agency, the UN compliance body, has repeatedly confirmed that.

Since May, when Trump pulled out of the 2015 nuclear agreement, known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), Iran’s crude oil exports have dropped by about a third, or about a million barrels a day.

This and the existing US sanctions on 168 Iranian individuals, companies and groups have pushed the Iranian economy to the brink of collapse. Its currency has lost about 70 percent of its value this year.

The US actions are fuelling geo-strategic tensions and intensifying the risk of war. Pompeo and Mnuchin said the US would attempt to thwart any European efforts to circumvent the sanctions.

The EU foreign policy chief, Federica Mogherini, issued a joint statement with the British, French and German foreign ministers on Friday saying they would continue working on ways of keeping trade with Iran going. “Our collective resolve to complete this work is unwavering,” the statement declared.

The European statement alluded to the danger of war, defending the 2015 nuclear accord as “essential for the security of Europe, the region and the whole world.”



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