

Iran conflict intensifies transatlantic tensions

Peter Schwarz
11 May 2019

The intensification of sanctions against Iran by the United States has produced sharp transatlantic tensions. In a joint statement, the European Union's foreign policy representative and the foreign ministers of Germany, France, and Britain condemned the expansion of the sanctions.

“We take note with regret and concern of the decision by the United States not to extend waivers with regards to trade in oil with Iran,” the declaration states. The signatories noted their determination “to enable the continuation of legitimate trade with Iran,” and explicitly appealed to Russia and China “to make their best efforts to pursue the legitimate trade that the agreement allows for, through concrete steps.”

But unlike in 2003, when representatives of the German and French governments publicly declared their opposition to the war in Iraq, and millions of people took to the streets on both sides of the Atlantic to oppose it, the European governments are today doing all in their power to avoid a broader mobilisation against the war danger.

Instead, they are demanding even louder than before that European military rearmament be speeded up. In the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, Stefan Kornelius demanded a “European muscle-building programme” to defend Europe against the arbitrariness of the two actors, the US and Iran. “What is thus far lacking is a credible strategy for deterrence or even for a counter-strike, in the finance sector, with the help of trade sanctions, but ultimately also militarily.”

“Deterrence” and a military counter-strike: this is the undisguised language of militarism. Comments like these underscore that the only difference between the Trump administration and the European governments is that the latter are lagging behind in the rearmament race.

Last year, Germany, France and Britain opposed the US when it unilaterally cancelled the nuclear accord

with Iran. They agreed with Iran to continue respecting the accord and to develop financial and trading mechanisms to circumvent the sanctions imposed by the US.

Above all, they were motivated by their own economic interests in a country with large oil and gas reserves and a population of around 80 million well-educated people. They view Trump's threats of war against Iran as an attack on their imperialist interests in the region.

However, the attempt to circumvent the US sanctions came to nothing. Faced with the ultimatum of losing access to the US market if they continued to do business with Iran, almost all major European corporations and banks withdrew from Iran.

Washington's latest decision, withdrawing the exemptions for China, South Korea, Japan, India and Turkey, who had been permitted to continue purchasing oil from Iran, only accelerated this trend. The European press commentaries are dominated by anger towards Trump and Europe's lack of power, combined with pledges to rearm and establish Europe as a world power.

Britain's *Financial Times* complained that the European governments “have few options: however much they are urged by officials, banks and companies cannot operate outside of Washington's robust sanctions regime. They will not choose Iran over the US... Mr Trump never gave the accord a chance, even as he has enthusiastically sought a similar deal with North Korea.”

Klaus-Dieter Frankenberger sighed in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, “It's painful to acknowledge one's own impotence... The road to world power is still a long one.”

Daniel Brössler remarked in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* that the German-American friendship has been “shattered.” “In many cases, the US is no longer an

ally, but an opponent, against whom alliances must be plotted,” he continued. There remain “many common interests, in Ukraine, for example, in Venezuela and Syria.” But even after Trump, the US will never “return to being the protective power that Germany relied on for so long.” Brössler concluded with the call for Germany to increase its military spending.

Former Foreign Minister Sigmar Gabriel (Social Democratic Party--SPD) spoke along similar lines in an interview with *Deutschlandfunk*. He described it as a problem that the “European Union, ever since it was founded, was never meant to be a world power. Instead we were always supposed to keep out. And we made ourselves comfortable and thought that was good.” Gabriel concluded, “We have to learn to play a role in the world.”

The European opposition to American sanctions and threats of war against Iran is not motivated by any concern over defending Iran against unfair treatment or blackmail, or to prevent a war. This was made clear after Tehran responded to Trump's threats by announcing it would leave the nuclear deal unless the remaining parties to the accord, Germany, France, Britain, Russia, and China, implemented the nuclear accord within 60 days by lifting sanctions on oil and the banking sector.

The foreign ministers of Germany, France, Britain, and the European Union responded by issuing a statement in which they denounced Iran. “We urgently call upon Iran to comply fully with its obligations under the JCPoA as it has done to date, and refrain from any escalatory steps,” the statement read. It also noted that Iran's compliance with its obligations would be reviewed.

German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas (SPD) stated that Germany wants to prevent Iran from gaining possession of a nuclear weapon. “We therefore expect Iran to fully implement the accord, without any deviations.” French Defence Minister Florence Parly announced new sanctions against Iran to be implemented if Tehran violates the accord's provisions. British Foreign Minister Jeremy Hunt warned of “consequences” if Iran stopped fulfilling its obligations.

Mounting tensions between the major powers, threats and blackmail in foreign policy, and an escalating arms race--all of this recalls the conditions prior to the two

world wars of the last century. As was the case then, the threat of war does not arise from the characteristics of one or another political leader, but the irreconcilable contradictions of capitalist society. The struggle for hegemony in the global economy and the attempt to turn mounting social tensions outwards is driving the capitalist states unavoidably towards war.

The danger of a third, nuclear world war can be stopped only by an independent international movement of the working class fighting to overthrow capitalism and for the building of a socialist society.



To contact the WSWs and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

[wsws.org/contact](https://www.wsws.org/contact)