

US secretary of state declares “military response” to Iran “being considered”

Peter Symonds
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US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo yesterday continued the Trump administration’s belligerent threats against Iran, declaring in an interview on CBS “Face the Nation” that the US was “considering a full range of options.” Asked if that included “a military response,” he declared “of course.”

Pompeo blustered his way through the interview, dismissing any suggestion that the US had no evidence to prove that Iran had attacked two oil tankers in the Gulf of Oman last Thursday. He insisted that a grainy video released by the US Central Command showed a small boat of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corp (IRGC) approached and removed an unexploded limpet mine from the Japanese-owned Kokuka Courageous.

Last Friday, Yukata Katada, the president of the Kokuka Sangyo shipping company that owns the Kokuka Courageous tanker, rejected the claim that the ship had been damaged by limpet mines. “The crew are saying it was hit with a flying object. They saw something flying toward them, then there was an explosion, then there was a hole in the vessel. Then some crew witnessed a second shot.”

Confronted with these remarks yesterday on Fox News Sunday, Pompeo simply dodged the question, declaring that “the intelligence community has lots of data, lots of evidence” and “the American people should rest assured we have high confidence with respect to who conducted the attacks.” He provided no evidence or data, however.

The Secretary of State gave a similar response when asked on CBS about comments by German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas that the video was “not enough.” Pompeo baldly declared that Maas had seen “a great deal more than just the video” but did not elaborate. In a not-so-subtle swipe at Germany, he added that “there are countries that just wish this should go away and

they want to act in a way that is counterfactual.”

Germany is not the only country to question the lack of evidence. *Japan Today* reported yesterday that the Japanese government had also requested further proof. “The US explanation had not helped us to go beyond speculation,” a senior government official said.

Another source close to Prime Minister Shinzo Abe told the website: “These are not definitive proof that it’s Iran. Even if it’s the United States that makes the assertion, we cannot simply say we believe it.”

The source also noted that the attacks on the tankers took place as Abe was meeting with Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei during his trip to Iran to try to mediate between Tehran and Washington. He said the attacks had “severely affected the prime minister’s reputation” and “making mistakes when determining facts is impermissible.”

Clearly Japan and Germany simply do not believe the US allegations and suspect that the incident could well be a provocation organized by the US or an ally to provide the justification for war against Iran. Commenting on US claims that the sophistication of the attacks “proved” it was Iran, a Japanese foreign ministry official told JapanToday: “That [argument] would apply to the United States and Israel as well.”

Iran has emphatically denied any involvement in the incident. In rejecting the allegations, Iranian President Hassan Rouhani branded the US as “a serious threat to the stability of the region.”

The Trump administration deliberately ratcheted up tensions with Tehran when, in breach of UN resolutions, it abrogated the 2015 Iranian nuclear deal with the five permanent members of the UN Security Council plus Germany. The US has re-imposed and intensified crippling economic sanctions on Iran with the express aim of reducing its energy exports to zero.

The US decision to confront Iran is not just aimed at Iran but at allies such as Germany and Japan, as well as open rivals such as China and Russia. In the wake of the 2015 agreement and the partial lifting of sanctions, these and other countries have been developing economic and political relations with Tehran. Largely excluded, Washington is exploiting sanctions and the threat of brute military force to sabotage these ties.

In what amounted to a blunt threat, Pompeo implied that the threat of war would force other countries to line up with the US. On Fox News Sunday, he noted that “very little of our crude oil comes through the Gulf,” then added that other countries—China, Japan, South Korea, Indonesia—were highly dependent. “I am confident that when they see the risk, the risk to their own economies and their own people... they will join us,” Pompeo boasted.

At this stage only Britain and several Gulf States have backed the US claims. Crown Prince Mahammed bin Salman, who is implicated in the murder of journalist Jamal Khashoggi last October, declared over the weekend that Saudi Arabia “will not hesitate to deal with any threat to our people, sovereignty and vital interests.” Yesterday, US F-15 fighter jets flew in formation with Saudi warplanes in the Gulf region.

Last month, the Trump administration ordered the USS Lincoln’s carrier battle group, a bomber strike force led by nuclear-capable B-52s, along with 900 additional ground troops and a Patriot missile battery into the region. Leaked plans also revealed that up to 120,000 troops could be deployed to the region.

On Friday, according to the *New York Times*, Trump’s National Security Adviser John Bolton, a notorious warmonger, met for three hours with acting Defence Secretary Patrick Shanahan and Joint Chiefs of Staff chairman, General Joseph Dunford, to discuss the tanker attacks.

The Pentagon is reportedly weighing sending as many as 6,000 additional troops to the Gulf region, along with warships and fighter jets. Washington is also trying to assemble an international coalition to provide warships to escort tankers through the Gulf. Asked about these plans yesterday, Pompeo refused to comment.

When pressed on CBS as to whether Trump had the legal authority to attack Iran, Pompeo dismissed the suggestion that the US Congress would have to approve

such action. He declared that “the American people should be very confident... [that] we will always do the hard task it takes to protect American interests, wherever they are.”

The Trump administration is engaged in a reckless drive to war against Iran on the basis of lies. The US military build-up in the Gulf region, including the prospect of military manoeuvres in the narrow Strait of Hormuz, sets the stage for provocations that provide the trigger for a catastrophic conflict that would draw in other powers.



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