

Growing war danger as Pentagon presents new “evidence” Iran struck tankers

Bill Van Auken
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The US Central Command, which is responsible for the Pentagon’s war operations throughout the Middle East, released what it claimed was further evidence that Iran was responsible for damage done to two oil tankers in the Gulf of Oman, near the strategic strait of Hormuz, on June 13.

This “evidence” consisted of still photos which the Pentagon claims show the crew of a boat belonging to Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) removing an unexploded limpet mine from the hull of the Japanese-owned tanker, the *Kokuka Courageous*, following suspected attacks on both that vessel and the Norwegian-owned *Front Altair*.

These photos are no more probative of US charges or convincing than the grainy video released by the Pentagon last week.

Neither the photos nor the video substantiates the claim that those depicted in them were removing a limpet mine from the hull, much less the US claim that in supposedly doing so they were engaged in a coverup designed to conceal evidence of Iranian culpability.

The US media, faithfully regurgitating Washington’s war propaganda, quoted a Navy explosives expert as saying that the alleged limpet mine supposedly depicted in the photographs and video bear “a striking resemblance” to other mines “publicly displayed in Iranian military parades.” This expert, Commander Sean Kido, offered no photographic evidence showing the alleged mine on the tanker, much less anyone parading with such a device in the streets of Tehran.

In speaking with reporters, Commander Kido stressed that the damage to the hull of the *Kokuka Courageous* was “not consistent with an external flying object hitting the ship.” This comment was directed against the account given by the ship’s crew and the company that owns it, which have insisted that the vessel was

struck by two flying objects and that the Pentagon’s account attributing the damage to limpet mines is false.

The supposed evidence linking Iran to the damaged tankers has been used to justify another escalation of US military threats in the Persian Gulf, with the Trump administration announcing at the beginning of the week the deployment of another 1,000 troops, on top of an additional 1,500 sent to the region last month and the earlier dispatch of an aircraft carrier battle group and a bomber strike force led by nuclear-capable B-52s.

Iran has vehemently denied responsibility for the damage to the tankers and has called the US charges “fabrications.”

“They know themselves that these pictures don’t prove what they are claiming,” Iran’s ambassador to the UK, Hamid Baeidinejad, told the Russian broadcaster RT Wednesday. “In fact, they are saying that we have an assessment, but the question is the assessment should be based on facts and evidence. These pictures that have been released are very distorted and you cannot get any conclusion out of it.”

On Thursday, Iran claimed it shot down an American RQ-4 reconnaissance drone, although that was denied by US Central Command.

In the midst of Washington’s latest unsubstantiated allegations, the State Department’s special representative on Iran, Brian Hook, testified before Congress Wednesday, deflecting questions from members of Congress over whether the Trump administration would invoke the Authorization for the Use of Military Force (AUMF) passed in the wake of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks as justification for a US military assault on Iran.

“We will do everything that we are required to do with respect to congressional war powers, and we will comply with the law,” Hook told the Middle East

subpanel of the House Foreign Affairs Committee.

Administration officials have attempted to portray Iran as an ally of Al Qaeda in recent congressional testimony, while US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo in a June 13 news conference included in a list of attacks allegedly “instigated” by Iran a car bomb that struck a US military convoy in Kabul, killing four Afghan civilians and wounding four US soldiers.

These claims are absurd on their face. The Taliban claimed responsibility for the car bombing. A Sunni fundamentalist movement that drew its religious-ideological inspiration from Saudi Arabia’s official Wahhabist strain of Islamism, the Taliban has brutally attacked Afghanistan’s Hazara population, which adheres to the Shi’ite form of Islam practiced in Iran.

As for Al Qaeda—a movement that got its start in the CIA-orchestrated war against the Soviet-backed government in Afghanistan in the 1980s—the US armed and funded its affiliate in Syria in a war for regime change against the government of President Bashar al-Assad, which in turn received military support from Iran.

The statements by Pompeo and other administration officials attempting to link Al Qaeda with Iran would appear to be not merely a question of ignorance, but rather a calculated effort to create a pseudo-legal justification for using the 2001 AUMF yet one more time as a legal fig leaf for another US war of aggression.

After his lying testimony to Congress, Hook, the US envoy on Iran, left Washington Wednesday for a trip to Saudi Arabia and the other Sunni oil sheikdoms that constitute, along with Israel, the anti-Iranian axis backed by US in the Middle East.

Amid the drumbeat for war in Washington, Israel on Wednesday concluded military exercises involving thousands of ground, naval and air troops simulating a war with Hezbollah, the Lebanese Shi’ite militia that is aligned with Iran. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, attending a final stage of the war games, hailed the “very great destructive power” of the Israeli military and warned Israel’s “enemies” not to “test us.”

The Israeli exercises are only one more indication that what is being prepared with the US provocations in the Persian Gulf and Washington’s relentless economic sanctions against Iran, which are tantamount to a state

of war, is a military conflict that could rapidly engulf the entire region, claiming the lives of tens of thousands in short order.

At the same time, Washington’s war aims, which are directed first and foremost at asserting unfettered US imperialist hegemony over the Middle East and its vast energy reserves, threaten to drag in all of the major powers, including nuclear-armed Russia and China, posing the immense danger of a third world war.



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