

Trump threatens new sanctions amid farcical indictment of Iran

Bill Van Auken
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US President Donald Trump threatened Wednesday to ratchet up once again the punishing US “maximum pressure” sanctions against Iran.

In an ignorant and lying tweet, the US president stated: “Iran has long been secretly ‘enriching’, in total violation of the terrible 150 Billion Dollar deal made by John Kerry and the Obama Administration ... Sanctions will soon be increased, substantially!”

There is no evidence whatsoever that Iran is “secretly enriching” uranium. The country has subjected itself to the most intrusive nuclear inspection regime of any country in history.

As for the reference to the “150 billion dollar deal,” which Trump portrays as some kind of US payout to Tehran, the figure represents previously existing Iranian overseas assets that had been frozen under UN nuclear sanctions. They were released as part of the 2015 nuclear accord, formally known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), that was reached between Tehran and six major world powers—the US, China, Russia, Britain, France and Germany.

Trump made his denunciation of the “terrible deal” on the same day that the US staged a farcical intervention before the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Board of Governors in Vienna, Austria.

Washington demanded the emergency session of the 35-nation board in order to denounce Iran for carrying out minor increases to its uranium stockpile and enrichment levels, exceeding caps set by the 2015 agreement, under conditions in which the Trump administration, in flagrant violation of international law, tore up the entire treaty over a year ago, while repeatedly denouncing it as useless.

The US performance in Vienna provided a revealing exposure of the nature of American “diplomacy,” which consists of ultimatums designed only to further the twin aims of regime change and war.

The US ambassador to the international organizations in

Vienna, Jackie Wolcott, charged Iran with “nuclear extortion” and demanded that its “misbehavior not be rewarded.” She further insisted that “There is no credible reason for Iran to expand its nuclear program.”

Everyone knows, however, that Iran agreed to contract its nuclear program in exchange for guarantees from the major powers, including Washington, that sanctions would be lifted and trade and economic ties with the country restored.

Washington not only reneged on these guarantees when it unilaterally abrogated the agreement, it instituted a sanctions regime aimed at driving Iranian oil exports down to zero and collapsing the country’s economy by targeting not only Iran, but any company or country that dares to trade with it.

Tehran has charged that, a full year after the US deserted the agreement and began its sanctions campaign, the three Western European signatories to the deal have failed to take substantive measures to counter its effects and provide the sanctions relief that had been guaranteed.

Last month Tehran announced that it had deliberately exceeded the 300 kg cap imposed by the JCPOA on its enriched uranium stockpiles, and last Sunday it announced a second deliberate breach of a limit set in the agreement, increasing its uranium enrichment level—which had been capped at 3.67 percent and has risen to 4.5 percent.

Both steps are largely symbolic, bringing Iran no significant step closer to producing weapons-grade uranium, which Tehran has repeatedly stated has never been its aim. Moreover, such stockpiles and enrichment levels in no way violate the terms of Iran’s obligations to the IAEA, which continues to inspect its nuclear facilities. Neither the IAEA, nor for that matter Washington, are parties to the JCPOA, making the agency an entirely inappropriate forum for Washington to deliver its tirade.

The Iranian government indicated that it would take

further steps within 60 days unless the European powers make good on the promise they made last year, in the wake of Washington's trashing of the agreement, to provide "practical solutions in order to maintain the normalization of trade and economic relations with Iran."

With Iran's oil exports having been slashed from 2.5 million barrels per day (bpd) in April 2018 to just 300,000 bpd today, it is self-evident that no such "normalization" has taken place. Meanwhile, the European powers' roll-out of Instex (Instrument to Support Trade Exchanges), a trade mechanism meant to evade US sanctions and bypass the dollar-based financial system, has repeatedly been postponed for what are supposedly technical reasons.

While the European bourgeoisie fears the catastrophic consequences of a US war against Iran and harbors its own ambitions to exploit the country's markets and resources, it has posed no challenge to Washington's aggression.

In advance of the IAEA board meeting, Germany, France and the UK issued a cowardly and cynical joint statement in which they made no mention of the US sabotage of the JCPOA or their own obligations under the accord, while denouncing Iran for "pursuing activities inconsistent with the JCPOA" and demanding that Tehran "immediately reverse the actions."

Under the terms of the nuclear agreement, Iran is entitled to "cease performing its commitments under the JCPOA in whole or in part" if it finds that parties to the deal are engaged in "significant non-performance" of their obligations, until the dispute is resolved.

In his own remarks at the IAEA session, Iran's chief diplomat to the Vienna-based international organizations, Kazem Gharib Abadi, described as a "sad irony" that the US had come to the IAEA to denounce Iran over a deal that Washington had repudiated. He described the US unilateral and extra-territorial sanctions as a form of "economic terrorism" that are "neither legitimate nor legal" and tantamount to "weapons of warfare."

Iran's President Hassan Rouhani was quoted as condemning the hypocrisy of the European powers in remarks to a cabinet meeting Wednesday. "On one side, Americans described the JCPOA as the worst possible deal and withdrew from it," Rouhani said. "On the other side, when Iran reduces its commitments to the deal, everyone expresses concern, while they should be concerned about the United States, which violated the entire agreement." He described Washington's convening of the meeting of the IAEA as "ridiculous."

The Iranian representative to IAEA reported after the

session that Washington had sought in vain to get other member countries to call for the meeting. He noted that the body took no decision nor issued any formal statement in response to the US intervention, underscoring its "ridiculous" character.

The US representative to the IAEA provocatively demanded that Tehran enter negotiations "without preconditions." Having thrown out the results of over a decade of negotiations, Washington is now demanding, under the pressure of sanctions aimed at starving the country's population, that Iran enter into talks aimed at turning it into a semi-colony of US imperialism.

The Pentagon also escalated its military threat against Iran Wednesday, with Marine Gen. Joseph Dunford, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, announcing that the US is forming a "coalition" to "ensure freedom of navigation both in the Straits of Hormuz and the Bab al-Mandeb," the strategic "chokepoints" that link, respectively, the Persian Gulf with the Indian Ocean and the Red Sea with the Gulf of Aden.

Dunford told reporters that the coalition would be "scalable." He continued, "So with a small number of contributors we can have a small mission and we'll expand that as the number of nations that are willing to participate identify themselves."

The remark suggested that at this point the "coalition" will consist of just the US and the Persian Gulf Sunni oil sheikdoms led by Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. Mark Esper, Trump's latest acting secretary of defense, raised the prospect of such a coalition last month with Washington's ostensible allies in NATO and was roundly rebuffed.

Whatever countries sign on to this latest escalation of US military intervention in the Persian Gulf, the increased naval operations will only escalate the threat of a military confrontation.

With Washington attempting to assert by military might its unrestricted hegemony over the Middle East and its vast energy reserves, such a clash could drag in all of the major powers, including nuclear-armed Russia and China, posing the stark danger of a third world war.



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