

Washington's rush to indict Iran over Saudi attacks

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Casting itself once again as the world's judge, jury and executioner, US imperialism is recklessly hurtling toward yet another war in the Middle East, with catastrophic implications. This time, Washington has seized upon Saturday's attacks on Saudi installations as its pretext for war against Iran.

The reaction of US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo to these attacks, which have cut the kingdom's oil production by almost half and slashed global daily output by 6 percent, was as noteworthy for its haste as for its peculiar wording.

"Iran has now launched an unprecedented attack on the world's energy supply," Pompeo tweeted late Saturday, adding, "There is no evidence the attacks came from Yemen."

The indictment of Iran for attacks that set off a series of fires which devastated two oil facilities in eastern Saudi Arabia came without a shred of supporting evidence, outside of the bald assertion that there was "no evidence" that they were launched from Yemen.

Yemen had to be discounted, according to the secretary of state's predatory logic, because the Houthi rebels, who control most of the country, had claimed responsibility for the attacks and had a clear motive—given the kingdom's near-genocidal war against Yemen's civilian population—for carrying them out. The US mass media has by and large echoed Pompeo's allegations as absolute truth. On Monday night, television news broadcasts quoted unnamed intelligence sources, citing unspecified evidence, claiming Iranian responsibility for the attacks. No doubt this "evidence" will prove just as compelling as that of the Gulf of Tonkin in Vietnam and "weapons of mass destruction" in Iraq. These same media outlets have made virtually no mention of Saudi crimes in Yemen.

For the last four and a half years, Saudi Arabia has waged a near-genocidal war against Yemen, the Middle East's poorest country. The violence has claimed the lives of nearly 100,000 Yemenis outright—the greatest share through a relentless bombing campaign against civilian targets—while pushing some 8 million more to the brink of starvation.

Washington is a direct accomplice in this bloodbath, providing the warplanes, bombs and missiles used to carry it out, along with logistical support and, until the end of last year, mid-air refueling that allowed Saudi bombers to carry out uninterrupted carnage. Meanwhile, the US Navy has helped enforce a blockade that has starved Yemen of food and medicine.

If what the Yemeni Houthis say is true, that they sent a swarm of 10 weaponized drones to attack the Saudi facilities, then the action was clearly an act of self-defense, far less than proportionate to the slaughter inflicted by the Saudi regime against Yemen.

Meanwhile, Washington's new ambassador to the United Nations, Kelly Craft, repeated the charges against Iran on Monday before a United Nations Security Council meeting on Yemen. Providing no more proof than Pompeo did two days earlier, merely repeating the formulation that "there is no evidence that the attacks came from Yemen," she described the damage to the Saudi oil installations as "deeply troubling."

Like the government she represents, the UN ambassador—the wife of billionaire Kentucky coal baron Joe Craft and a top Republican donor—clearly finds the spilt oil of the Saudi monarchy far more upsetting than the spilt blood of tens of thousands of Yemeni men, women and children.

On Saturday night, President Donald Trump made a call to Crown Prince Mohamed bin Salman, the kingdom's de facto ruler, offering his condolences and unqualified support to a man exposed as a cold-blooded murderer. Bin Salman is responsible not only for the grisly assassination and dismemberment of the Washington-based journalist Jamal Khashoggi at the Saudi consulate in Istanbul nearly a year ago, but also the beheadings of at least 134 people in just the first half of this year, 34 of them political activists slaughtered en masse on April 23.

Trump subsequently announced that the US was "locked and loaded" to avenge Saudi oil with military force. (This was a variation on his assertion in June that the Pentagon

had been “cocked and loaded” when he came, by his own account, within 10 minutes of launching devastating attacks on Iran after it shot down an unmanned US spy drone over its territory.)

If there is, as Washington claims, “no evidence” that the attacks were launched from Yemen, one could, with equal if not greater justification, observe that there is likewise “no evidence” that they were not launched by the US itself, or by its principal regional ally, Israel.

If one proceeds from the age-old detective maxim of *Cui bono?* or “Who benefits?”, Tehran is the least likely suspect. There is clearly more to Washington’s rush to judgment than meets the eye.

The attack on the Saudi oil facilities provides a *casus belli* desired by a major section of the US ruling oligarchy and its military and intelligence apparatus, which is determined to prosecute a war for regime change in Iran. Such a war would be the latest installment in Washington’s protracted drive to reverse by military means the decline of US imperialism’s global hegemony, in particular by claiming unfettered US control over the world’s energy reserves and the power to deny them to its rivals.

The thinking within these layers was expressed in an editorial published Monday by the *Wall Street Journal*, the mouthpiece of US finance capital. The *Journal* warned that Iran was “probing Mr. Trump as much as the Saudis.” It continued, “They are testing his resolve to carry out his ‘maximum pressure’ campaign, and they sense weakness.” It pointed disapprovingly to Trump’s failure to launch airstrikes in June following the downing of the US drone.

The *Journal* approvingly cited calls by Republican Senator Lindsey Graham for bombing Iranian oil refineries in order to “break the regime’s back” and suggested that Trump “apologize to John Bolton, who warned repeatedly that Iran would take advantage of perceived weakness in the White House.” Bolton, a long-time advocate of bombing Iran, resigned as Trump’s national security adviser last week, reportedly over differences on policy toward Tehran.

The attack on the Saudi oil facilities also provides leverage for Washington in corralling the Western European powers—the UK, France and Germany—behind US war aims. Signatories to the Iranian nuclear accord that the Trump administration renounced, they have made feeble gestures toward countering Washington’s “maximum pressure” sanctions regime in an attempt to salvage their own imperialist interests. While thus far failing to endorse US charges of Iranian responsibility, they could, by means of the attack on Saudi Arabia, be swung behind the US drive to war.

Israel and its beleaguered Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu also have ample motive to stage a military action

aimed at provoking war with Iran. On the eve of Tuesday’s Israeli election, the threat of a major war with Iran serves the political interests of Netanyahu, whose political fortunes are inextricably tied to the escalation of military conflict in the Middle East. The Israeli state, moreover, had become increasingly concerned over an apparent cooling of the appetite of the ruling monarchies in both Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates for a confrontation with Iran.

Recent drone strikes against Shia militias in Iraq that had allegedly received Iranian weapons were, according to a report by the web site Middle East Eye, staged by Israeli drones operating out of bases controlled by the so-called Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), the main US proxy force in Syria. A similar covert US-Israeli collaboration could easily have produced the attacks on the Saudi oil installations.

Whatever the exact circumstances of the attacks on the Saudi oil facilities, they are being exploited for the purpose of dragging the American people and all of humanity into a war that can rapidly escalate into a regionwide and even global conflagration.

US strikes against Iran carried out under the pretext of retaliation for the attacks on Saudi Arabia can trigger Iranian counterstrikes, sending US warships to the bottom of the Persian Gulf and wreaking havoc on American military bases throughout the region.

The prospect of thousands of US soldiers and sailors dying as a result of Washington’s conspiracies and aggression carries with it the threat of the US government assuming emergency powers and implementing police-state measures in the US itself in the name of “national security.”

This would, by no means, be an unintended consequence. The buildup to war is driven in large measure by the escalation of social tensions and class struggle within the United States itself, which has found fresh expression in the strike by 46,000 autoworkers against General Motors. There is a powerful incentive for the US ruling class to direct these tensions outward in the eruption of military conflict, while creating the pretext for mass repression.

The threat of a US assault on Iran paving the way to a third world war must be answered through a politically conscious and independent intervention of the working class to put an end to imperialism and reorganize society on socialist foundations.



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