

US sends 3,000 more troops to defend Saudi monarchy

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12 October 2019

The Pentagon confirmed Friday that 3,000 more US troops are being deployed to Saudi Arabia to defend the blood-soaked monarchy led by Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman and prepare for war against Iran.

The deployment includes two fighter squadrons, one Air Expeditionary Wing (AEW), two more Patriot missile batteries, and one Terminal High Altitude Area Defense system (THAAD).

According to a Pentagon statement Friday, the US secretary of defense phoned Crown Prince bin Salman (who also holds the post of Saudi minister of defense) to inform him of the coming reinforcements, which he said were meant “to assure and enhance the defense of Saudi Arabia.”

The Pentagon also acknowledged that the latest escalation brings the number of additional troops sent into the Persian Gulf region since May to 14,000. They have been accompanied by an armada of US warships and a B-52-led bomber task force. The Pentagon has also announced that an aircraft carrier-led battle group will remain in the Persian Gulf.

While initiated as a supposed response to unspecified threats from Iran, the US buildup in the Persian Gulf region has constituted from its outset a military provocation and preparation for a war of aggression. This military buildup has accompanied Washington’s so-called “maximum pressure” campaign of sweeping economic sanctions that are tantamount to a state of war. The aim, as the Trump administration has stated publicly, is to drive Iranian oil exports down to zero. By depriving Iran of its principal source of export income, Washington hopes to starve the Iranian people into submission and pave the way to regime change, bringing to power a US puppet government in Tehran.

The latest military buildup was announced in the immediate aftermath of an attack on an Iranian tanker in the Red Sea, about 60 miles from the Saudi port of Jeddah. The National Iranian Tanker Co. reported that its oil tanker Sabiti was struck twice by explosives early Friday morning, leaving two holes in the vessel and causing a brief oil spill

into the Red Sea.

While Iranian state news media blamed the damage on missile attacks, a spokesman for the company told the *Wall Street Journal* that the firm was not sure of the cause.

Some security analysts have suggested that the fairly minor damage to the vessel could have been caused by limpet mines. Such mines were apparently used last June when two tankers—one Japanese and one Norwegian-owned—were hit by explosions in the Sea of Oman. At the time, Washington blamed the attacks on Iran, without providing any evidence. Tehran denied the charge, saying that it sent teams to rescue crew member of the damaged tankers.

The Iranian Students News Agency (ISNA) quoted an unnamed Iranian government official as stating that the Iranian tanker had been the victim of a “terrorist attack.”

“Examination of the details and perpetrators of this dangerous action continues and will be announced after reaching the result,” Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Abbas Mousavi said.

The National Iranian Tanker Co. issued a statement saying there was no evidence that Saudi Arabia was behind the attack.

The incident raised the specter of an escalating tanker war that could disrupt shipping through the strategic Strait of Hormuz, through which 20 percent of the world’s oil supply flows. News of the attack sent crude oil prices spiking by 2 percent.

In addition to the June attacks on the tankers in the Gulf of Oman, in July, British commandos, acting on a request from Washington, stormed an Iranian super tanker, the *Grace 1*, in waters off the British overseas territory of Gibraltar. In apparent retaliation, Iranian Revolutionary Guards seized the British-flagged *Stena Impero* for what Tehran charged were violations of international maritime regulations as it passed through the Strait of Hormuz. Both tankers were subsequently released.

Earlier this week, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo issued a statement charging that the Iranian super tanker,

renamed the Adrian Darya 1, had offloaded its oil in Syria in violation of European Union sanctions and a pledge made by Tehran to the UK at the time of the vessel's release. He demanded provocatively that "EU members should condemn this action, uphold the rule of law, and hold Iran accountable."

The Trump administration, which in May of last year unilaterally and illegally abrogated the 2015 nuclear agreement between Tehran and the major powers, has been pressuring the European signatories to the deal—Germany, France and the UK—to follow suit.

While the respective governments of the three countries have insisted that they still support the nuclear agreement, they have repeatedly bowed to Washington's war drive while failing to take any significant actions to counter the effects of the US "maximum pressure" campaign and deliver to Tehran the sanctions relief and economic normalization that it was promised in exchange for curtailing its nuclear program.

Most recently, the three European governments backed Washington in blaming Iran for a September 14 attack on Saudi oil facilities that temporarily shut down half of the kingdom's oil production and sent crude prices spiraling by 20 percent—again without providing a shred of proof.

Washington is seeking to topple the Iranian regime or bully it into accepting complete subordination to US imperialism's predatory interests in the energy-rich and geostrategically vital Middle East.

The US sanctions regime and military buildup have placed the entire region on a hair trigger for the outbreak of a catastrophic war that could engulf not only the Middle East, but the entire planet.

All of the regimes involved in the escalating conflict are gripped by crises that make the drive to war all the more explosive.

The impact of the sanctions on Iran's economy has been devastating. It is estimated that oil exports last month fell to just 400,000 barrels per day (b/d), compared to 1.95 million b/d in September 2018. Left with little means of combating spiraling inflation and growing unemployment, Iran's bourgeois-clerical regime is caught between intense pressure from imperialism on the one hand, and the growth of social opposition among Iranian workers and poor on the other.

The Saudi monarchy is confronting the debacle of its four-year-old and near-genocidal war against the people of Yemen, made possible by the weapons and logistical aid provided by Washington, even as Prince bin Salman remains a global pariah for his ordering of the grisly assassination of dissident journalist Jamal Khashoggi last year in Istanbul.

Israel's Benjamin Netanyahu, incapable of forming a new government after two elections and confronting criminal

indictments, has grown increasingly concerned over the apparent lack of appetite by the Persian Gulf Sunni monarchies for military confrontation with Iran and Washington's failure to carry out military strikes after the downing of a US drone in June and the attacks on the Saudi oil facilities last month. Clearly, Tel Aviv, which has cast Iran as its strategic enemy, would have a motive for attacking Iranian tankers in the hopes of provoking a response that could lead to US military action.

And then there is Trump. He has proclaimed his determination to halt the "endless wars" in the Middle East and provoked a political firestorm by pulling back a relative handful of US troops in Syria, allowing Turkey to launch a long-planned attack on the Pentagon's erstwhile proxy force, the Kurdish-dominated YPG militia.

Faced with an escalating political crisis and growing social tensions within the US, along with an impeachment investigation by the Democrats in Congress that is focused entirely on the national security concerns of the CIA and the Pentagon, he has ample motive for launching a new war.

While the Democrats' exclusive focus on Trump's failure to pursue a sufficiently bellicose policy against Russia and prosecute the war for regime change in Syria has allowed the US president to absurdly posture as an opponent of war, the reality is that he has overseen a staggering increase in military spending designed to prepare for "great power" confrontations, particularly with China.

Meanwhile, whatever his political pretense, Trump has done nothing to end any of the wars in the Middle East. While he has ordered US troops to pull back, allowing the Turkish invasion, none of them have been withdrawn from Syria.

With the latest buildup of US forces in Saudi Arabia, Washington is preparing, behind the backs of the working class, to launch a catastrophic military conflict with Iran. The most urgent task posed by these developments is the building of a global antiwar movement led by the working class. This movement must be armed with a socialist and internationalist program to unify working people in the United States, Europe and the Middle East in a common struggle against imperialist war and its source, the capitalist system.



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