

Washington delivers new ultimatum on Iran

By Bill Van Auken
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The US State Department has issued a fresh ultimatum on the Iran nuclear deal to Washington's ostensible major allies in Europe, demanding that Germany, Britain and France commit themselves to altering the agreement along the lines demanded by President Donald Trump or face its unilateral abrogation by the US.

A secret State Department cable obtained by Reuters presents what are essentially the same demands made by Trump last January. At that time, he announced that he was prepared to relaunch all-out US economic warfare against Iran unless the European powers joined Washington in imposing a rewritten nuclear accord on Tehran, including provisions that the Iranian government cannot and will not accept.

The occasion for Trump's threat was his reluctant announcement on January 12 that he had decided to waive the reimposition of US sanctions that were lifted as part of the nuclear agreement, formally known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). He vowed that this would be the last time he issued such a waiver, unless his conditions were met. The next deadline for waiving the sanctions is May 12.

The message from the State Department to the European powers asks for their "commitment that we should work together to seek a supplemental or follow-on agreement that addresses Iran's development or testing long-range missiles, ensures strong IAEA inspections, and fixes the flaws of the 'sunset clause.'"

Washington has demanded that Iran grant International Atomic Energy Agency inspectors immediate and unlimited access to any site in the country, including military bases; the elimination of "sunset clauses" in the JCPOA, making time-limited restrictions on aspects of Iran's civil nuclear program permanent; and drastically limiting, if not outlawing, Iran's ballistic missile program.

While presented by Reuters and other media as a softening of the position outlined by Trump in January, the cable makes it clear that the US is continuing to present its nominal allies in Europe with an ultimatum.

"In the absence of a clear commitment from your side to address these issues, the United States will not again waive sanctions in order to stay in the Iran nuclear deal. If at any time the President judges that such commitment is not within reach, the President indicated he would end US participation in the deal."

The cable's "talking points" for US diplomats to advance Washington's agenda in Europe stress "the Trump administration's strategy to counter the Iranian regime's reckless aggression," which "addresses the full range of Iranian threats, of which Iran's nuclear program is only one element."

The clear implication is that Washington is embarked on a trajectory of war with Iran, either with or without the collaboration of its NATO allies in Berlin, London and Paris. Should they join with the US in ripping up the nuclear accord, it will set them on a collision course not only with Iran, but also with Russia and China, the two other signatories to the JCPOA.

The US has spelled out its own intentions in the Trump administration's recent National Security Strategy, lumping Iran together with North Korea under the category of "rogue states" that represent a threat to US "national interests" and are to be confronted and defeated.

None of the European powers responded directly to the US cable, which the State Department itself refused to discuss. Asked about the US demands in an online media briefing, the French Foreign Ministry declared: "The French position on the Iran nuclear deal is known. As the President of the Republic [Emmanuel Macron] has said, we reaffirm our full attachment to the global action plan and its strict implementation." It added that Paris would "continue to talk about the Iran nuclear program with our European and American partners."

The European powers are pursuing their own imperialist interests in the Middle East and are increasingly at odds with US interests and strategies. The lifting of sanctions against Iran was greeted by European corporations as an opportunity to generate a fresh stream of profits through

billions of dollars in new investments and trade deals. Many of these plans remain unfulfilled because of concerns that the US will target companies with unilateral sanctions, and that their investments could go up in smoke in the event of a new and catastrophic US war in the Middle East.

While hostile to Iran's growing influence in the region, the European powers are increasingly alarmed at the prospect that Washington's strategy of forging a regional anti-Iranian alliance with Israel and Saudi Arabia, together with the other Sunni Gulf oil sheikdoms, will produce a military confrontation that could cut off oil supplies upon which Europe depends and unleash a political and refugee crisis that will spill onto the continent.

Washington has issued its latest ultimatum in the midst of an explosive escalation of regional tensions, driven in the main by US and Israeli aggression. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu spelled out Tel Aviv's aggressive stance against Iran in a bellicose speech to the Munich Security Conference on Sunday. Holding up what he claimed was a piece of an Iranian drone shot down over Israeli-occupied Syrian territory in the Golan Heights, he denounced Iran as "the greatest threat to the world," equating it with Nazi Germany.

"We will act without hesitation to defend ourselves, and we will act if necessary not just against Iran's proxies that are attacking us, but against Iran itself," said Netanyahu, in a clear threat to attack Iran, an action that his government would undertake only with US backing.

Israel responded to the alleged overflight of the drone, which Tehran insists was launched by independent Syrian militia elements in Syria, by targeting Iranian personnel in Syria with air strikes. Syrian air defense units succeeded in shooting down an Israeli F-16 fighter jet, the first such loss for the Israeli Air Force since the early 1980s.

Speaking in response to Netanyahu at the Munich conference, Mohammad Javad Zarif, the Iranian foreign minister, attributed the frenzied tone of Netanyahu's speech to the downing of the warplane. "The so-called invincibility of [Israel] has crumbled," he said.

The US military and intelligence apparatus and its loyal stenographers in the US corporate media are churning out continuous war propaganda against Iran.

Speaking at the Munich Security Conference on Saturday, US national security advisor Gen. H.R. McMaster declared it was necessary to "act against Iran," which he accused of arming a "network of proxies" that

is "becoming more and more capable as Iran seeds more and more...destructive weapons into these networks."

The *New York Times* published a lengthy piece Monday based on interviews with Israeli military officers and government officials along with representatives of US, Israeli and Saudi-funded think tanks alleging that Iran is "creating an infrastructure [in Syria] to threaten Israel." Needless to say, the article made no mention of Israel's own funding and aid for Sunni Islamist militias attacking the Syrian government of President Bashar al-Assad.

The same issue of the *Times* carried an opinion piece by US ambassador to the United Nations Nikki Haley claiming, falsely, that a report issued by the United Nations proved that Iran has shipped missiles to the Houthi rebels in Yemen to fire at Saudi Arabia. The actual report found that "remnants" of the missiles were of Iranian origin, while providing no evidence as to how they got there.

Haley insists that the world must "act before a missile hits a school or a hospital and leads to a dangerous military escalation that provokes a Saudi military response."

The column echoes the "big lie" methods pioneered by Nazi Minister of Propaganda Joseph Goebbels. That Saudi Arabia has been bombing Yemeni schools, hospitals, neighborhoods and infrastructure for nearly three years, killing some 13,000 Yemeni civilians and plunging the country's population into the worst humanitarian crisis on the planet, goes unmentioned.

Haley is also silent on the fact that the US has provided the vast majority of the bombs and missiles dropped on the Yemeni people, while mounting logistical and refueling operations that make the mass slaughter possible.

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