

Persian Gulf tensions rise as Trump threatens “end” of Iran

By Bill Van Auken
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A tweet by President Donald Trump threatening to put an “end” to Iran sharply escalated the war crisis in the Persian Gulf, even as US warships launched a series of provocative military exercises in close proximity to Iranian shores.

“If Iran wants to fight, that will be the official end of Iran,” Trump tweeted. “Never threaten the United States again!”

It is by no means clear what “threat” Trump had in mind. The tweet came just hours after a Katyusha rocket fell in Baghdad's Green Zone near the statue of the Unknown Soldier, approximately a third of a mile north of the US Embassy, causing no injuries.

While National Security Adviser John Bolton, who has long called for the bombing of Iran and regime change, went to the White House to brief the president on the incident, there were indications that Trump was responding not to this event but rather to commentary on Fox News, having tweeted just before in apparent response to a segment on immigration and then tweeting his threat to put an “end” to Iran following a Fox News segment on Iran.

The errant rocket fired into the Green Zone, one of the most heavily fortified enclaves on the planet, was immediately attributed by the US media to Iran or its “proxies,” even though no one has claimed responsibility for the incident and there are a multitude of factions and people in the country who have every reason to want to lob a missile at the US embassy, or for that matter, at the seat of Iraq's corrupt bourgeois government.

Earlier “threats” from Iran have emanated from the leadership of the country's Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps, which has warned Washington that it is not intimidated by the massive military deployment in the Persian Gulf, and that US warships constitute as much of a target as they do a threat.

Washington earlier this month fast-tracked the deployment of a carrier battle group, led by the USS Abraham Lincoln, to the region, and sent in a bomber task force, including nuclear-capable B-52s, to conduct over-flights off the Iranian coast. This has been followed by the dispatch to the

region of amphibious assault warships carrying US Marines, warplanes and landing craft, as well a Patriot missile battery.

The Pentagon, meanwhile, has drawn up war plans calling for the shipping of as many as 120,000 US troops to the region—a similar number to the force deployed to the region prior to the invasion of Iraq—in apparent preparation for an all-out war with Iran.

The US Navy's 5th Fleet reported on Monday that the USS Abraham Lincoln Carrier Strike Group and the USS Kearsarge Amphibious Ready Group, carrying the 22nd Marine Expeditionary Unit onboard, are conducting a series of exercises in the Arabian Sea.

The Lincoln strike group's commander, Rear Adm. John Wade, said that the maneuvers were “aimed towards increasing our lethality and agility to respond to threats, and deterring destabilizing actions in this important region.”

The real “destabilizing actions in this important region” have been carried out uninterrupted by US imperialism, which has waged war for more than a quarter-century, claiming the lives of over a million Iraqis, Libyans and Syrians and shattering entire societies. There is every indication that Washington is preparing to eclipse these massive war crimes with an even greater bloodbath in the form of a war against Iran, a country with more than twice the population and nearly four times the land mass of Iraq.

Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif denounced Trump's threat as a “genocidal tweet” and warned him that history had shown that “Iranians have stood tall for millennia while aggressors are gone. Economic terrorism and genocidal taunts won't end Iran.” He added, “Try respect—it works.”

One year ago the US unilaterally abrogated the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) reached in 2015 between Iran, the US, the European powers, Russia and China. Since then, Washington has imposed what it describes as “maximum pressure” on Tehran, including unilateral economic sanctions designed to cripple the country's economy that are tantamount to an act of war.

These have included a sweeping embargo on Iranian oil

sales, including the threat to punish third countries, including erstwhile US allies, if they continue to trade with Tehran. Earlier this month, Washington terminated waivers allowing China, South Korea, Japan, India and Turkey to continue buying Iranian oil. The country's oil exports have been cut by nearly two-thirds, from 2.8 million barrels per day (BPD) to 1 million BPD. They are expected to fall again to as low as 500,000 BPD this month. Washington has stated that its aim is to cut Iranian oil exports to zero.

Those paying the price for this state of siege against the Iranian economy are the masses of the country's working people, who are confronted with rising inflation, growing unemployment and shortages of vital goods including medicines needed to keep those who are ill alive.

The Trump administration has made it clear that it is banking on this deprivation to trigger popular upheavals that will topple Iran's bourgeois nationalist regime. It is more likely, however, to fuel nationalist hatred of US imperialism, and the prospect of a US war of aggression installing a reliable puppet regime in Tehran is even more unlikely than it was in Baghdad, Tripoli and Damascus. The more likely scenario is a war that drags in the entire Middle East and Washington's "great power" rivals, including nuclear-armed Russia and China.

In addition to the unsubstantiated claims about Iranian responsibility for the missile attack in Baghdad, the alleged sabotage of oil tankers off the coast of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and a drone attack launched by Yemen's Houthi rebels on Saudi oil facilities in retaliation for the near genocidal US-backed, Saudi-led war against Yemen, the US is wielding Iran's nuclear program as a prospective pretext for US aggression.

In response to Washington's ripping up of the nuclear accord and its escalating aggression, Tehran has suspended for 60 days its commitments to cap its production of enriched uranium and heavy water in an attempt to pressure the European powers to make good on their promises to launch an Instrument in Support of Trade Exchanges (INSTEX) to circumvent US sanctions by facilitating non-dollar trade with Iran.

The spokesman for the Atomic Energy Organization for Iran (AEOI) announced on Monday that the country is quadrupling its production rate of uranium to 3.67 percent. While Iran's action still leaves it in compliance with the JCPOA, the increased production rate would soon cause it to exceed the cap of 300 kilograms of stockpiled low-enriched uranium. Under the JCPOA, Tehran is supposed to sell off any enriched uranium above this level on the international markets, although the US sanctions regime makes this virtually impossible.

While the European powers have expressed misgivings

about Washington's increasingly bellicose threats against Iran, this is entirely bound up with their own predatory interest in exploiting Iranian oil and markets. They have taken no serious actions to counter Washington's economic siege or military threats against the country.

The British government, which last week expressed concern about "the risk of a conflict happening by accident with an escalation that is unintended on either side," on Monday issued a warning to Tehran not to defy Washington. "I would say to the Iranians: Do not underestimate the resolve on the US side," UK Foreign Minister Jeremy Hunt told reporters in Geneva on Monday. "They don't want a war with Iran. But if American interests are attacked, they will retaliate. And that is something that the Iranians need to think about very, very carefully."

Hunt's warning came amid reports that the UK had secretly sent troops to the Persian Gulf to back US aggression against Iran.

The *Sunday Express* reported that British special forces had been to sent to aid the US strike group in the Persian Gulf. The report said this included elements of the special boat service (SBS) that have been deployed to monitor military activity around the island of Qeshm, where Iran has stationed naval gunboats.

Trump's threat to put an "end" to Iran is not original. It should be recalled that in 2008, when she was a candidate for the Democratic presidential nomination, Hillary Clinton threatened Iran with "obliteration." Involved is the recklessness and criminality of not only the current occupant of the White House, but rather that of a US ruling class that is determined to reverse the erosion of its global economic hegemony by military means.

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