

Trump Favors Military Escalation: Washington's War Threat Against Iran

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It is just two weeks since President Donald Trump was sworn into office after delivering an inaugural address proclaiming his policy of "America First" and vowing to defend the United States against "the ravages of other countries."

Any illusions that this policy spelled a turn away from the unending wars waged by the US over the past quarter of a century in favor of isolationism have been rapidly dispelled. Trump and his advisors have staged one bellicose provocation after another in a sharp escalation of the longstanding militarist policy of American imperialism.

This has taken its starkest form in the ultimatum delivered Wednesday by Trump's national security advisor, Gen. Michael Flynn. The former chief of military intelligence marched unannounced into a White House press briefing to declare that "... we are officially putting Iran on notice" over its ballistic missile test last Saturday and an unsubstantiated charge that it was somehow responsible for an attack on a Saudi Arabian warship by Houthi rebels in Yemen three days later.

Both, Flynn declared, were examples of "Iran's destabilizing behavior across the entire Middle East," as well as the failure of the Obama administration "to respond adequately to Tehran's malign actions."

After delivering his ultimatum, Flynn turned on his heels and left the briefing without taking a single question.

At Thursday's White House press briefing, only one reporter asked whether placing Iran "on notice" included the threat of military action. White House spokesman Sean Spicer responded by falsely charging that Iran's missile test violated a UN resolution and citing "Iran's additional hostile actions that it took against our Navy vessel," apparently referring to the Houthi attack on a Saudi ship. These were actions, he said, that Washington would not "sit by and take," and they would not be "going un-responded to."

While the corporate media has criticized Trump on other issues, its response to the war threat against Iran is notably subdued. This is no accident. While it takes a more extreme form under Trump, the threat of war against Iran is hardly an innovation by the new president. Such threats date back to the 1979 overthrow of the Shah's US-backed dictatorship, through to George W. Bush's "Axis of Evil" and repeated US-Israeli threats of air strikes under Obama. Planning for such a war of aggression has a long bipartisan pedigree.

What is Iran to make of these latest extraordinary statements? Given Trump's repeated statements that there should be no talk about military action before it is initiated, Iran has every reason to believe that Tomahawk cruise missiles could be flying toward Tehran within days. Or that the Trump administration is attempting by means of provocation to tear up the nuclear treaty, goading Tehran into resuming its nuclear program and preparing the way for a US-Israeli attack.

The motives for such a war are clear, and they have nothing to do with ballistic missile tests or attacks on Saudi warships. Nearly a decade and a half after US imperialism launched its war of imperialist aggression against Iraq, followed by subsequent wars for regime-change initiated by the Obama administration in Libya and Syria, US policy throughout the region lies in shambles. In both Iraq and Syria, where Washington sought to bring to power a puppet regime in preparation for war against Iran, Tehran has substantially increased its influence and status as a regional power, posing an obstacle to the US drive for hegemony over the oil-rich region.

In one of his crude tweets Wednesday, Trump gave expression to the exasperation of the US ruling establishment over this course of events: "Iran is rapidly taking over more and more of Iraq even after the US has squandered three trillion dollars there. Obvious long ago!"

Last week, Trump spoke at CIA headquarters, repeating his thuggish assertion that the US should have "taken Iraq's oil" after the 2003 invasion, while casually adding, "maybe you'll have another chance." These remarks appear more and more to represent a direct threat of a far wider and bloodier war that could engulf the entire Middle East and beyond. The consequences of a war with Iran would be catastrophic not only in the region, but internationally and in the US itself.

In a worried article titled "A new era in foreign policy," the *Washington Post* commented Thursday that "President Trump is advancing a combative and iconoclastic foreign policy that appears to sideline traditional diplomacy and concentrate decision-making among a small group of aides who are quickly projecting their new 'America First' approach to the world."

It would be a dangerous mistake, however, to believe that the actions of the Trump White House are the result of mere improvisation or impulse. Rather, they are part of a definite plan.

According to the *Wall Street Journal*, Trump's aides refer to their policy as one of "shock and awe," directed this time around not at smashing and subjugating just Iraq, but rather the entire planet, including the working class within the United States itself.

The shape of the foreign policy agenda being pursued by the Trump White House becomes clearer every day. It is focusing today on Iran while pursuing an increasingly confrontational policy toward China. Stephen Bannon, Trump's fascist chief strategist, predicted in a radio broadcast in the run-up to the 2016 election that the US will be "going to war in the South China Sea in five to 10 years."

To the extent that the Trump administration has adopted a conciliatory attitude toward Russia—the focus of bitter disputes within the ruling establishment that played out in the election—it is only a temporary and tactical postponement, meant to facilitate war elsewhere. Should Moscow fail to comply with US interests, its turn will come sooner rather

than later.

The way the Trump White House conducts foreign policy, its threats and insults to nominal allies and adversaries alike, does not have a real precedent in the history of American governments. Rather, his treatment of foreign governments and heads of state recalls the thuggish bluster and intimidation of an Adolf Hitler or Benito Mussolini.

But Trump, like them, did not fall from the sky or rise out of hell. He is the personification of the criminality of the financial oligarchy that rules America. The policies he is pursuing may be unprecedented, but they have been prepared over decades.

Particularly since the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, the US capitalist class, acting through both Democratic and Republican administrations, has sought, for the most part unsuccessfully, to offset its crises and the erosion of its domination of world markets through the threat and use of military force.

With the advent of the Trump presidency, and in the aftermath of a series of disasters resulting from this protracted policy of global militarism, the policy has taken a more extreme and reckless form in the headlong rush toward world war.

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