

Washington's "Maximum Pressure" Campaign against Iran. "Unorthodox Tactics" Include Piracy, Bribery and Extortion

US Special Rep for Iran, Brian Hook makes Captain Hook look like a Good Guy

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Washington is intensifying its "maximum pressure" campaign against Iran with the addition of unorthodox tactics including piracy, bribery, and extortion

*Over the past few months, US Special Representative for Iran, **Brian Hook** the head of the Iran Action Group, has been personally writing emails and texts to over a dozen ship captains around the world, to make them an offer they can't refuse.*

According to [The Financial Times](#), a letter which included a bribe and threat was received by Indian national, **Akhilesh Kumar**, the captain of the beleaguered Iranian oil tanker Adrian Darya 1. Kumar was offered millions of dollars to sail the ship to a country which would impound the vessel on Washington's behalf. The letter warned that there would be dire consequences if he didn't accept the offer. Kumar ignored the email and just two days later they imposed sanctions on him and added him to the Treasury Departments Specially Designated Nationals list banning him from entering the US. The Adrian Darya 1 was blacklisted too.

This is just the latest attempt by the US to seize the Adrian Darya 1, an Iranian tanker which the US alleged was transporting oil to Syria breaching EU and U.S. sanctions. Previously this tanker has been sieved by British commandos off Gibraltar and was held there for a few weeks but then released after Iranians guaranteed that it wouldn't breach EU sanctions. The US has also accused the ship of money laundering and terror financing and has warned its allies that giving aid to this ship will put them at risk. To Washington's dismay, Gibraltar would not hand over the ship. Currently, it is somewhere in the eastern Mediterranean, with its signaling devices turned off.

Five months ago, the US unilaterally declared Iran's Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) a terror organization at the request of Israel, other nations however did not adopt the designation. A US State Department spokeswoman recently stated, "We have conducted extensive outreach to several ship captains as well as shipping companies warning them of the consequences of providing support to a foreign terrorist organization."

At a press conference earlier this week Hook announced, "Today, the United States government is intensifying our maximum pressure campaign against the Islamic Republic of Iran." Hook added, "We are announcing a reward of up to \$15 million for any person who helps us disrupt the financial operations of Iran's Revolutionary Guard Corps [IRGC] and Qods [Jerusalem] Force."

What Hook is referring to is the [Rewards for Justice](#) program which was established over thirty years ago to pay ordinary people large sums of cash to provide information to disrupt “terror networks”. On their website it states,

“The U.S. Department of State’s Reward for Justice Program is offering a reward of up to \$15 million for information leading to the disruption of the financial mechanisms of Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and its branches, including the IRGC-Qods Force (IRGC-QF). The IRGC has financed numerous terrorist attacks and activities globally. The IRGC-QF leads Iran’s terrorist operations outside Iran via its proxies, such as Hizballah and Hamas.”

Iranian Foreign Minister Javad Zarif tweeted “Having failed at piracy, the US resorts to outright blackmail- deliver us Iran’s oil and receive several million dollars or be sanctioned yourself. Sounds very similar to the Oval Office invitation I received a few weeks back. It is becoming a pattern”. Adding the hashtag BTeamGangsters and attaching screenshots of an article titled “US Offers Cash to tanker captains in bid to seize Iranian ships”. He also described the US Treasury as “nothing more than a jail warden” in another tweet.

In addition to the Rewards for Justice (bounty) program, Washington is issuing [sanctions](#) against an alleged “oil for terror” network, which it alleges is run by the IRGC. This latest sanction package targets sixteen companies, nine individuals, and six oil tankers which they allege are supplying Iranian oil to Syria.

“Regime change” although explicitly denied by Trump, remains the [ultimate goal](#) in Iran for the State Department and Hooks comments on Wednesday are a clear indication, “Today’s announcement is historic. It’s the first time that the United States has offered a reward for information that disrupts a government entity’s financial operations,” Hook explained. “We’ve taken this step because the IRGC operates more like a terrorist organization than it does a government.”

Washington set this downward spiral in motion when President Donald Trump unilaterally withdrew from the 2015 [JCPOA](#) nuclear deal last year. Iran was in compliance with agreement terms and obligations during that time and just recently starting scaling back on its commitments after urging EU nations for an entire year to try and save the agreement or at the bare minimum secure sanction’s relief.

On Wednesday, Iranian President Hassan Rouhani gave Europe a two-month deadline before continuing to gradually reduce commitments under the JCPOA. “Europe has another [two-month](#) deadline for negotiations, agreement, and a return to its commitments,” Rouhani stated at a cabinet meeting.

France recently suggested that it would provide Tehran with a \$15 billion credit line if the US granted sanction waivers, and in return Iran would comply with JCPOA, but clearly Washington is not interested in providing any waivers or relief.

Iran refers to the Washington’s sanctions as “[economic terrorism](#)”, illegal and unjustified under international law. Tehran has also warned European countries that if they allow this to continue it will not end with Iran, other nations will be [bullied](#) by the United States unless something is done to end this cycle of abuse.

On Friday, Javad Zarif Iran’s Foreign minister tweeted in support and solidarity with Cuba

and stated that US Economic terrorism against Cuba, China, Russia, Syria, Iran deliberately targets civilians while trying to achieve illegitimate political objectives through intimidation of innocent people. Zarif noted that the US's rouge behavior now includes piracy, bribery and blackmail.

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