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Analysis: There Is Little Hope that Europe Will Stand in the Way of a US War with Iran

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In-depth Report: IRAN: THE NEXT WAR?

The United States will go to war with Iran if nothing is done to prevent it. This is the assumption that the world's geopolitical actors have worked off for the better part of two decades, and there has been precious little evidence to the contrary.

In the early 2000s, once it became clear that the War on Terror was, for all intents and purposes, a war without end, Iran loomed in the background of the nightmares that engulfed Afghanistan and Iraq and persist to this day. The fact that this original member of the 'Axis of Evil' escaped the heyday of post-9/11 imperial adventurism has stuck in the craw of the United States' sulking, unrepentant neoconservatives ever since.

The near-incalculable consequences of a potential American military intervention against this defiant, well-resourced, well-defended nation did not bother the late John McCain – a serial loser of both wars and elections – who pulled off the difficult trick of warmongering and insulting the Beach Boys simultaneously in a 2008 call for action. Once again, the monstrous dream was deferred, but would not be denied.

The possibility has endured for so long that complacent observers could almost be forgiven for failing to treat recent developments with sufficient seriousness. That Donald Trump's national security advisor John Bolton seeks a war of regime change with Iran is not revelatory; it can be filed alongside breaking news concerning the colour of the sky and the wetness of water. Yet the past two weeks give every indication of being the culmination of a bloodthirsty project many years in the making.

As of yesterday [May 15], the US state department ordered the departure of all "non-emergency employees" from Iraq, while Germany and the Netherlands suspended their assistance programs to the Iraq military. The previous day, the US military announced that the threat level for the Middle East had been raised, in response to usefully non-specific 'intelligence' concerns over Iran. US air and naval forces – including warships and bombers – have been dispatched to the region, following as-yet-unsubstantiated allegations of sabotage against oil tankers off the coast of the United Arab Emirates and a drone attack by Yemen's Iranian-allied Houthi rebels.

If the escalation appears rapid – not to mention finely orchestrated – that is because the groundwork has been laid for some time, and particularly since Bolton – a moustache with a maniac hanging off it – became Trump's point man on foreign policy in April 2018. Within a month of taking up his new appointment, Bolton easily guided Trump into withdrawing from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), the Iran nuclear deal which had by most

accounts successfully stalled any ambitions had towards an independent nuclear program. Irritatingly for Bolton and all others who once dreamed of a New American Century, the absence of even the possibility of Iranian weapons of mass destruction removed the pretext for military intervention that had been so handy in the case of Iraq.

Since Trump – always happy to abandon legacies of the Obama administration without examining the fine print – ended the Iran deal over the objections of almost the entire world barring Israel, the US has pursued a campaign of sanctions – a cheap and brutally efficient means of warfare – combined with increasingly provocative military manoeuvres.

Speaking to CommonSpace, foreign policy writer Robert Somynne commented: "The recent escalation can be seen as a battle within the White House administration between different national security interests. The push from outside forces such as Saudi Arabia and Israel has led to the emboldening of John Bolton and his cadre. Trump and his defence team would rather send a signal of support to regional Sunni allies by strangling Iran's population and economy. His instincts are still more anti-intervention than the mainstream American hawk; the question is whether Iranians who have been facing sanctions and war-like conditions feel as if they have nothing to lose. In the backdrop of the fight is the talk of a small summer war between Hezbollah and Israel in Lebanon."

The nature and intent of the escalation became soberingly clear with Bolton's statement last week, which – in addition to reiterating the United States' standing policy that it will respond to any alleged attack by Iranian forces, or indeed anyone else who can halfway-convincingly be portrayed as Iran's proxies – added that it would send "a clear and unmistakable message to the Iranian regime than any attack on United States interests or on those of our allies will be met with unrelenting force."

In other words, should a skirmish occur with the Israeli military or – just a thought –a couple of Saudi oil tankers are trifled with, then Freedonia's going to war.

Amidst all this, a superficial point of distinction between the present crisis and the drums of war beaten in the early 2000s is a lack of Western consensus. Europe was virtually united in its support for the Iran nuclear deal, and has little appetite for military involvement in further Middle East conflict.

Meanwhile, the UK Government – regardless of the ever-farcical 'special relationship' – is still bruised and wary after the failure of its attempts to sell the necessity of intervention in Syria to both parliament and the British public. Though there is no limit to her capacity for self-sabotage, Theresa May likely has little inclination to back a far grander and bloodier endeavour in Iran, particularly when a British general has just announced that – contrary to always trustworthy US intelligence sources – there is no "increased threat" in the region.

Nevertheless, an expectation that Europe or the UK will throw up serious roadblocks to the dark designs of Bolton and the other would-be architects of Iranian regime change has little basis in reality. While war with Iraq was once the defining crisis of the age, turning even the likes of Jacques Chirac into opponents of US intervention, Angela Merkel is today more concerned with building a Western consensus in opposition to Chinese and Russian aspirations, and the EU as a whole has done little to effectively frustrate – or even rhetorically oppose – the US drive to war with Iran.

"The UK and EU have failed categorically to put pressure or stop the US from violating the

interests of the international agreement, the JCPOA," says Somynne. "We have disinisragenuous actors like France and the UK who claim a united Europe position but are in security deals with the UAE, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. European policy is adrift like flotsam."

Amidst all this, dissent does exist within the American body politic. Opposition to any war with Iran has already been voiced by the Democratic congresswoman and presidential candidate Tulsi Gabbard and her fellow 2020 contender Sen Bernie Sanders, who has warned that conflict with Iran would commit the US to a war "for decade after decade, which will cost us thousands of lives for our troops, as well as God knows what happens in terms of how many people die in the region."

Sanders has said that he is "working hard" to remind Trump that it is the US Congress, not the president, who decides whether or not to go to war. Bolton – perhaps based on prior experience with Congress – does not appear particularly worried.

The United States will go to war with Iran if nothing is done to prevent it. The question is: what can be done?

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