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US preparing for regime change and war against Iran

Just days after President Donald Trump publicly threatened Iran with “consequences the likes of which few throughout history have ever suffered,” his National Security Adviser John Bolton held a top-level meeting to discuss US plans to confront Iran.

Notorious for his own belligerent threats against Iran, Bolton chairs the Principals Committee on national security matters, whose members include Defence Secretary Jim Mattis and Secretary of State Mike Pompeo. Officials told the *Wall Street Journal* it was only the third such meeting Bolton had convened since his installation as national security adviser in April.

In May, the Trump administration effectively sabotaged the 2015 deal with Iran, under which Tehran severely restricted its nuclear programs and placed its nuclear facilities under intense international scrutiny in exchange for the winding back of crippling economic sanctions.

US sanctions will be re-imposed next month on Iran’s auto industry, as well as trade in gold and other metals. In November, bans will come into force on Iran’s energy sector—the mainstay of its exports and government finances—along with shipping and insurance and central bank transactions. Washington has vowed to reduce Iranian oil exports to near zero.

The Trump administration’s decisions have provocatively ramped up a dangerous confrontation with Iran. They also have worsened relations with US allies in Europe, which have developed economic links with Tehran since 2015. Washington has refused to

exempt European companies from the sanctions, thus threatening to exclude them from the US financial system if they continue to do business with Iran.

No official statement was made following the Principals Committee meeting, but its purpose was clearly to plan how to ramp up the pressure on Iran. Officials told the *Wall Street Journal* the meeting discussed a “holistic” strategy to undermine Iranian influence throughout the Middle East. While it was unclear what military options were discussed, the article noted that the Defence Department had in the past “worked on limited military options.”

An Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) article last Friday provided further evidence that the Trump administration is preparing to attack Iran. “Senior figures in the Turnbull [Australian] Government have told the ABC they believe the United States is prepared to bomb Iran’s nuclear facilities, perhaps as early as next month, and that Australia is poised to help identify possible targets,” it stated.

Citing senior government sources, the ABC reported that Australian facilities would likely play a role in providing the US military with intelligence to wage war against Iran. While the sources denied that Australia would be involved in “active targeting,” the joint US-Australian spy base at Pine Gap in central Australia provides intelligence for a broad sweep of territory from the Middle East to East Asia, and also has provided targeting information for US drone assassinations.

The ABC suggested that “analysts from the little-known spy agency Australian Geospatial-Intelligence Organisation (AGO) would also be expected to play a part.” The AGO uses satellite and aircraft imagery to provide geographical intelligence (GEOINT) that could be used for targeting in various military operations.

US Defence Secretary Mattis and Australian Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull tried to dismiss the ABC report. Mattis declared it was “fiction,” adding: “I’m confident that it’s not something that’s being considered right now.” Turnbull, however, stopped short of a complete denial, saying only that the ABC story “has not benefited from any consultation with me, the foreign minister, the defence minister or the Chief of the Defence Force.”

Mattis insisted the Trump administration had no plans for regime change in Iran. “There’s none that’s been instituted,” he claimed, but declared that “we need them to change their behaviour on a number of threats that they can pose with their military, with their secret services, with their surrogates and with their proxies.”

In reality, far from Iran posing a threat to the US, successive American administrations have menaced Iran with the full force of the US military, and sought to destabilise the

regime in Tehran. Having torn up the 2015 agreement, the US is undoubtedly considering all its options, including military ones, in order to end what it regards as a significant obstacle to its domination in the Middle East.

The Israeli-based *Haaretz* newspaper reported late last month on tactical differences within the Trump administration over Iran, with Bolton pressing to exploit social unrest to engineer regime change. “One person who recently spoke with senior White House officials on the subject summarised Bolton’s view in the words: ‘One little kick and they’re done’,” it stated. Mattis, on the other hand, reportedly warned that such efforts could lead to full-scale war.

In early July, *Axios* reported that Israel and the US had “formed a joint working group a few months ago that is focused on internal efforts to encourage protests within Iran and pressure the country’s government.”

Ahead of next month’s sanctions, on the weekend the Iranian rial plunged in value to 111,500 against one US dollar on the unofficial market, from about 97,500 rials, according to a foreign exchange website. The currency has lost half of its value since April amid fears about the sanctions’ impact on the economy.

Deliberately exacerbating social tensions inside Iran, however, could fuel an explosive movement of working people against the Islamic regime in Tehran that would not be to Washington’s liking. In late 2017 and early 2018, mass protests of workers erupted over worsening social conditions and widening social inequality. These demonstrations had a completely different class character to the so-called Green Movement of the upper-middle classes of Tehran that sought to overturn the 2009 presidential election.

A mass movement of the Iranian working class would reverberate throughout the region, where workers in every country face a deepening social crisis.