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Trump menaces the world over Iran sanctions

As US sanctions on Iran “snapped back” into force, US President Donald Trump yesterday issued a blunt warning to countries and corporations around the world: “Anyone doing business with Iran will NOT be doing business with the United States.”

The punitive measures follow the Trump administration’s decision in May to abrogate the 2015 nuclear deal with Iran, known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, or JCPOA. The unilateral US sanctions will ban trade with Iran of commercial aircraft, cars, precious metals, coal, aluminium and steel, as well as Iranian exports of carpets and pistachios.

Washington is threatening to sanction any corporation internationally breaching the bans by blocking it from the US financial system. A second round of US sanctions is due to come into effect in November that will hit all foreign transactions of Iran’s central bank and its oil exports, which comprise the bulk of the country’s export earnings and underpin government finances.

In his tweet yesterday, Trump declared, “these are the most biting sanctions ever imposed,” justifying his stance by absurdly declaring, “I am asking for WORLD PEACE, nothing less!” Under the banner of “peace,” the Trump administration is preparing for trade war and war—not only against Iran, but against all potential rivals to the US, including its European and Asian allies.

Yesterday, the European Union’s (EU) “blocking statute” also came into effect, under which European companies have been instructed not to comply with US demands to cease

business with Iran. Those that decide to pull out because of US sanctions will require EU authorization, and without it could face legal action from member states.

Britain's Foreign Office Minister Alistair Burt told the BBC that the "Americans have really not got this right." While it was up to companies to decide whether to remain in Iran, he said Britain believed that the 2015 nuclear deal was important "not only to the region's security but the world's security."

Nathalie Tocci, an aide to the EU foreign policy chief Federica Mogherini, warned on BBC radio on Monday night: "If EU companies abide by U.S. secondary sanctions they will, in turn, be sanctioned by the EU." She said that the measures were "necessary in order to signal, diplomatically, to the Iranians that Europeans are serious" about trying to maintain the Iran nuclear deal.

European companies have already voted with their feet, however. The German auto company Daimler, the maker of Mercedes-Benz cars, confirmed on Tuesday that it had suspended its activities in Iran. Other corporations including Boeing, Airbus, Total and Siemens have already signalled their intention to do the same.

By tearing up the 2015 nuclear deal, the US is also dealing a blow against its European rivals, particularly Germany. German firms, which have close ties with Iran, moved quickly to take advantage of investment opportunities. Last year German exports to Iran increased by 16 percent to nearly €3 billion, but have slumped by 4 percent in the first five months of 2018 as Trump moved to reimpose sanctions.

An unnamed US official declared on Monday that the EU blocking statute was "not something that we're particularly concerned by." Another official claimed that "nearly 100 international firms have announced their intent to leave the Iranian market." It remains to be seen whether the EU and its member states will attempt to enforce the statute by legal action against European companies.

While US sanctions on Iranian oil do not come into force until November, China has already rejected US calls for an end to its oil imports from Iran. US officials visiting Beijing last week told the media that China had only agreed not to increase its purchases. China is the number one buyer of Iranian crude oil.

The Russian foreign ministry yesterday issued a statement branding the sanctions as "a glaring example" of Washington's violation of UN resolutions and "its trampling on international law." It urged other countries not to allow the Iran deal to be "sacrificed to American attempts to settle scores with Iran on issues unrelated to the JCPOA."

The Trump administration abrogated the 2015 agreement despite the fact that the International Atomic Energy Agency repeatedly verified Iran's compliance with its terms. Under the deal, Iran agreed to severely limit its nuclear programs in return for a step-by-step ending of international sanctions.

The Trump administration, however, has repeatedly denounced the agreement, insisting that Iran completely shut its nuclear and missile programs, submit to ever more intrusive inspections and end its so-called "support for terrorism." The last demand signifies Iran's complete subservience to US domination in the Middle East, including the removal of Iranian forces from Syria and the ending of support to groups such as Hezbollah in Lebanon and Houthi forces in Yemen.

US national security adviser John Bolton claimed on Monday that Washington's policy was not regime-change in Tehran but "to put unprecedented pressure on the government of Iran to change its behaviour." Such statements are simply not credible. Bolton, himself, is notorious for militarist statements that underscore the decades-long US ambition to install a pliable regime in Tehran.

The Trump administration's sanctions are clearly aimed at provoking a severe economic and social crisis in Iran. The US decision in May to withdraw from the nuclear accord has already impacted heavily on the Iranian economy. Its currency has halved in value against the US dollar this year on the unofficial market, forcing up the price of food and other basic goods.

The Trump administration is clearly hoping to exploit anti-government protests that have erupted over recent months. The demonstrations, however, have included widely disparate layers, including unemployed workers, teachers calling for better pay, as well as well-off layers angered by the government's currency controls.

Amid growing strikes and unrest by the working class internationally, the potential exists for a movement not only directed against the repressive Iranian regime, but also against the predatory actions of US imperialism.