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European powers condemn Trump's cancellation of Iran nuclear treaty

The Trump administration's withdrawal from the 2015 Iranian nuclear treaty has revealed deep and explosive divisions between Washington and its imperialist allies in Europe. Governments and major media outlets across Europe were virtually unanimous in condemning Trump's action, calling for the treaty to be preserved, and vowing to defend their business interests against Trump's threats to impose the "highest level of economic sanctions against Iran."

German Chancellor Angela Merkel, British Prime Minister Theresa May and French President Emmanuel Macron issued a joint statement defending the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), the Iranian treaty's official name, against Trump. In the statement, the three leaders note "with regret and concern" the US withdrawal from the deal and "emphasise our continuing commitment to the JCPOA." So long as Iran continues to abide by the restrictions on its nuclear program posed by the JCPOA, they add, "we, the E3, will remain parties to the JCPOA."

While demanding that Iran continue to submit to International Atomic Energy Agency monitoring of its nuclear program, Berlin, London and Paris called on Washington not to impose new sanctions: "Iran should continue to receive the sanctions relief it is entitled to whilst it remains in compliance with the terms of the deal."

They also pledged to address "major areas of concern" raised by Washington, primarily focused on demanding that the Iranian regime slavishly comply with US and EU foreign

policy in the Middle East. These concerns include “shared concerns about Iran’s ballistic missile program and its destabilising regional activities, especially in Syria, Iraq, and Yemen.”

European Union (EU) foreign policy chief Federica Mogherini echoed these positions, hailing the United States as “our closest partner and friend” but indicating the EU, which is a signatory to the treaty, would continue to support it as long as Iran stayed in compliance with it. She declared, “As we have always said, the nuclear deal is not a bilateral agreement and it is not in the hands of any single country to terminate it unilaterally.”

Mogherini focused on the threat that US sanctions could cut across European business interests in Iran: “The lifting of nuclear-related sanctions is an essential part of the agreement. ... I am particularly worried by the announcement of new sanctions. I will consult with all our partners in the coming hours and days to assess their implications. The European Union is determined to act in accordance with its security interests and to protect its economic investments.”

It is ever clearer, however, that the EU’s promotion of its business interests in Iran and the broader Middle East is setting it on a collision course with its supposed ally in Washington. And this is taking place as Trump’s withdrawal from the Iranian treaty, and his tacit backing for Israeli strikes on Iranian forces in Syria—who are backing President Bashar al-Assad’s regime against the NATO powers—has placed the entire Middle East on the verge of all-out war. Such a war could also rapidly involve troops posted in the region by Russia, a nuclear-armed power.

European bourgeois politicians are widely discussing the danger of a devastating regional war. Three years after French President François Hollande said NATO was on the verge of “total war” with Russia in Ukraine, before jetting off to negotiate the Minsk peace deal, his successor Emmanuel Macron spoke to *Der Spiegel* this weekend to again warn of large-scale conflict. “We are opening up a Pandora’s box. There could be war,” he said.

Nonetheless, while admitting that their policies threaten to unleash a catastrophe, the European powers and Washington are continuing to clash ever more violently over the conflicting interests of their corporations in the oil-rich Middle East.

The same day that Trump announced his withdrawal from the nuclear treaty, US officials issued a series of demands that the EU cut off its trade relations with Iran. National Security Advisor John Bolton said, “No new contracts are permitted,” and gave European

businesses 90 to 180 days to wind down operations in targeted sectors such as oil, energy, auto and shipping.

Hours after taking up his position as US ambassador to Germany, Richard Grenell went on Twitter to demand that Berlin cut off German economic ties to Iran. He wrote, “As Donald Trump said, US sanctions will target critical sectors of Iran’s economy. German companies doing business in Iran should wind down operations immediately.”

These statements drew angry retorts from top European officials. French Economy Minister Bruno Le Maire said it was “unacceptable” for Washington to act as “the world’s economic policeman.”

Former German ambassador to the United States Wolfgang Ischinger publicly attacked Grenell: “Ric: my advice, after a long ambassadorial career, explain your own country’s policies and lobby the host country—but never tell the host country what to do, if you want to stay out of trouble. Germans are eager to listen, but they will resent instructions.”

On Twitter, Ischinger bluntly asked whether Grenell’s remarks were a sign that the alliance between the United States and the European powers had collapsed: “Is the transatlantic alliance dead? If one side refuses to even consider arguments presented by the other side, are we still together, as we try to manage challenges to our shared security interests? Or are we drifting apart for good? Sad questions.”

Grenell shot back a comment reiterating that his threats are US policy, noting that his tweet was “the exact language sent out from the White House talking points and fact sheet.”

In this conflict, the European imperialist powers are seeking to promote and defend their imperialist interests, which are no less reactionary than those advanced by Trump. They defend these interests via unpopular and illegal interventions in the Middle East—like last month’s bombing of Syria by Washington, London and Paris. And as they try to pursue an independent commercial and military policy from Washington, they will ramp up attacks on the working class to obtain the hundreds of billions of euros needed to build up their militaries into a credible rival to the Pentagon.

In an article titled “Contracts worth billions up in smoke with US sanctions against Iran,” *Le Monde* drew up a list of the contracts major EU corporations stand to lose in Iran. These include a €10 billion contract for Airbus for passenger jets to Iran; French oil major Total’s €5 billion contract to exploit the South Pars gas field; Volkswagen’s plans to begin selling cars in Iran, as well as operations of automakers PSA Peugeot-Citroën, which

holds 30 percent of the Iranian car market and Renault-Nissan, which now sells 170,000 cars a year in Iran.

In Germany, where trade with Iran increased by 42 percent since 2015 to 3.4 billion euros a year, Dieter Kempf, president of the Federation of German Industries (BDI), said Berlin was not prepared to abandon Iran as a market. “Our firms have invested a lot of hope in the market openings that resulted from the lifting of the economic sanctions,” he said.

Speaking to German radio broadcaster Deutschlandfunk. The former head of the European parliament’s commission on foreign affairs, Elmar Brok, denounced the US policy. Asked if “Trump’s words have to be understood as a clear threat against Europe”, Brok replied: “Yes! I mean, we have often heard of America, for example in the Cuba issue, and so on, that companies that do not follow American policy will be punished for it. This is an extraterritorial claim of legislation that is simply no longer acceptable.”

The media are raising the possibility of a collapse of the trans-Atlantic alliance and the emergence of open conflict between the NATO imperialist powers. “Donald Trump acts as an arsonist, governments in Berlin, Paris and London are forced to look for new allies in Moscow, Beijing and Tehran,” declared Klaus Remme, the chief commentator on foreign and security policy at Deutschlandfunk. “It is no longer just about how the Chancellor said in 2017, given the differences with Washington, (that Europe should) take fate in their own hands. The Europeans should now not only demonstrate independence. They would have to organize resistance against Donald Trump.”