

Berlin, 20<sup>th</sup> November 2017

## **Beware of a New War in the Middle East**

Statement by 31 members of Attac Germany's Scientific Advisory Council on Trump's handling of the Iran nuclear treaty

During his electoral campaign, Donald Trump, now President of the United States of America, denounced the "Iran nuclear treaty" as "the worst treaty that the US has ever negotiated." In announcing his Iran strategy on October 13, 2017, he has now raised massive objections against it. For Iran, a decisive element of this nuclear treaty has been the suspension of economic sanctions. For the US, Congress obliged the President to confirm periodically that Iran hadn't violated the treaty. Despite the fact that the International Atomic Energy Agency hasn't determined any breach of the treaty on the part of Iran, Trump now refuses to acknowledge Iran's compliance. The US Congress must decide within 60 days whether the US will implement the same severe economic sanctions against Iran that had previously been in force. These sanctions primarily affected the general population, putting a heavy burden on everyday life. Trump's strategy is transparent: His aim is to provoke Iran to revoke the treaty. Thus a dangerous nuclear conflict – which almost led the West into a war against Iran under Bush junior's presidency back in 2006 – with Iran as the culprit, could once more appear on the world stage.

George W. Bush at that time used the Iranian nuclear program as a pretext to bring about a regime change in Iran, if need be also by force. Now Trump is using the treaty with Iran as an occasion to eliminate Iran as a regional power, if need be through a new war in the Middle East. The massive military build-up of Saudi Arabia, with arms exports amounting to 350 billion US Dollars, as well as the further trips of the Saudi king first to Moscow and then, together with US State Secretary Tillerson, to Bagdad, must be perceived by Iran as a political and military encirclement and as preliminary towards waging war. The recent accusations raised by the Saudi prince and by Lebanese President Hariri, who recently and unexpectedly resigned, that Iran and Hisbollah are destabilizing Lebanon, clearly only serve the purpose of intensifying the confrontation with Iran. They have confirmed our concerns that Saudi Arabia in particular is increasing its war preparations against Iran. We condemn in the strongest terms the new attempt by the US and its close ally Saudi Arabia to ignite a new and even larger conflagration in the Middle East, subsequent to the war disaster in Iraq.

The European Union and the German Federal Government – who together with former US President Obama had played a major role in making the Iran nuclear treaty possible – have immediately and unmistakably objected to the current US President's intention to challenge the nuclear treaty with Iran. We welcome this clear positioning by the EU and call upon it not to back down.

Nevertheless, the current position of the Federal Government and the EU cannot make us forget that in the past they actively joined and even in part reinforced the US government's strategy under George W. Bush as regards the Iran nuclear conflict, especially all of the sanction decisions initiated by the US. We also have not forgotten the intensity with which the governments of most NATO countries, as well as the EU and its mainstream media, built up enemy imagery as regards Iran and pursued a downright psychological strategy of preparedness for war. It was only when Obama halted the conflictual strategy towards Iran that the EU, too, aligned itself with Obama's policy of conflict mitigation and, along with the US government, constructively contributed to a settlement of the Iran nuclear conflict.

An important element of the US and EU sanctions regime has consisted of extraterritorial secondary sanctions. Prior to the nuclear treaty, these significantly damaged the Iranian economy and harmed the population. Sanctions of this kind were directed not only against Iran, but also against all EU companies that maintained economic relationships with Iran. The renewed sanctions against Iran, which Trump and many Republicans are consistently pursuing, represent a serious attempt to force EU financial institutions and companies to terminate their economic relationships with Iran – or else pay heavy fines – and to realign the EU to the course pursued by the US.

We remind the EU of its own Regulation 2771 (of 1996), which declares extraterritorial sanctions to be in violation of international law. This Regulation was the reaction to attempts made by the US to enforce sanctions against Cuba and Iran, which would also affect other countries (the so-called Helms Burton Act). The Foreign Trade Ordinance in Germany explicitly prohibits German companies from participating in a boycott that has not been decided upon by Germany, the EU or the UN (§ 7).

The EU should develop and resolutely enforce a policy derived from its own long-term interests and inclined towards peaceful cooperation with all countries of the Near and Middle East. The EU has an historic opportunity to put its Iran and Middle East policy onto a new track, one that is independent of the United States. Donald Trump, through his ruthless ways, has revealed what a heavy political and economic price Europe has to pay for being blindly loyal to the US. We, the undersigned of this statement, denounce the dangerous conflictual strategy pursued by the US in the Middle East and call upon the German Federal Government and the EU to dissociate themselves from it in very clear terms. In addition, we call upon the EU and the Federal Government

- to publically declare to the US, Saudi Arabia and Israel – already at this stage – that they object to a war against Iran and will not participate in it;
- to appeal to the International Court of Justice in The Hague to carry out an examination under international law of extraterritorial secondary sanctions,

- to unmistakably signal to the US government – already at this stage – that in the case of US sanctions against Iran they will use all means available to them in order to ensure trade with Iran. Foreign investments in Iran, too, are to be safeguarded by the EU in such a way as to ensure the continuation of initiated as well as future investments;
- to use the Iran nuclear treaty as an occasion to convene a conference to establish a Middle and Near East zone free of weapons of mass destruction with the intent to abolish all nuclear, chemical and bacteriological weapons. The Iranian government has already expressed its approval of such a conference.

### **Signatures:**

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