THE BUILD-UP OF WAR WITH IRAN

An explainer

Background

The 2003 US-led illegal invasion of Iraq unleashed chaos, death and destruction in the country and sowed instability in the region at large, the effects of which are still being felt today.

The power vacuum created with the collapse of Iraq's state institutions opened the way for sectarian and regional power plays.

President George W. Bush and UK Prime Minister Tony Blair expected to be welcomed as liberators. Instead, they unleashed a protracted conflict.

Half a million Iraqis suffered violent death because of the invasion. Standards of living have dropped. Democracy is still fragile. The world is a more dangerous place.

EU member states are deeply involved in Middle East conflicts, either through direct intervention or support for despotic regimes like Saudi Arabia.

Security has been the main justification for the West to meddle in the Middle East but the past two decades have shown how interventionism has the opposite effect, helping breed international terrorism and facilitating the emergence of even more extreme groups, like ISIS.

Violence begets violence.
NO TO WAR!

What our MEPs say

Cornelia Ernst
(Die Linke, Germany)

"What had taken 15 years of hard work have been destroyed by Donald Trump in just a matter of moments. There will now be more insecurity arising from nuclear threats, and hardline conservative forces are once again on the rise in Iran. We therefore demand an end to America's policy of escalation and call on EU governments to continue engagement and dialogue."

Encircling Iran

The US has a formidable military presence across the Middle East, 80 000 military personnel operating from 35 military bases with unmatched airpower and naval force.

Iran is keenly aware that it is surrounded, having sought to build competing alliances in surrounding countries to resist the encroachment.

The US and Iran support opposing warring sides throughout the region. In Yemen, the US and EU member states are arming and training the Saudi-led coalition, leading an offensive in the country, while Iran supports Houthi rebels.

In Syria, Iran supports the government of Bashar al-Assad, whereas the US and EU countries have armed and trained rebels, including groups linked to al-Qaeda.

Upon taking office, President Trump ripped up the Iran nuclear deal, which established strict controls over Iran's ability to develop nuclear capabilities in exchange for sanctions relief.

Far from weakening Iran's government, US sanctions affected ordinary people most, limiting access to life-saving medicines for example.

The killing of General Suleimani, Iran's top military general, in January 2020 marked a turning point and an escalation in the conflict between the US and Iran, raising fears of a full-blown war.

EU not a bystander

A war with Iran would have catastrophic effects for Iranians, the region and the world at large. Those effects would certainly be felt in Europe.

The European Union has been a partner in US wars in the Middle East, including the so-called War on Terror, mostly through the NATO alliance.

The EU has financed and armed wars, volunteered troops and propped up dictators.

The largest proportion of EU member states' arms exports goes to the Middle East, running into billions of euros annually. EU member states currently have boots on the ground in Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria.

In order to stem refugees from seeking protection in Europe - many from conflicts the EU has helped fuel - the EU has armed and trained border forces of countries notable for human rights abuses such as in Libya.

The view of the Left

The Left stands for non-intervention, following the lessons from history: War begets war, violence begets violence.

The US-European interventions in the Middle East have undermined the role of the UN, weakened international law, and threatened global security.

Despite Trump's withdrawal from the Iran nuclear deal, the EU has kept the deal alive, developing an alternative mechanism to allow trade with Iran. We welcome this development, but it is by no means enough.

We call for an immediate de-escalation of tensions with Iran, for dialogue and negotiations to ease tensions across the region and to charter a way forward.

We demand the EU stop the US from using European bases in its war efforts and ultimately, to disband NATO as an obsolete war alliance.