

US sends warships to Strait of Hormuz, claiming Iran threat

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The US Navy will deploy new forces to “accompany” US cargo ships passing through the Strait of Hormuz, Pentagon officials announced Thursday. The strait is one of the most important commercial waterways in the world, controlling the entrance to the Persian Gulf and handling massive flows of seaborne commercial traffic, including one third of seaborne oil.

The US Navy “accompaniments” will proceed on a near daily basis, affecting at least 25 passages by US ships per month, a spokesperson for the 5th Fleet told *Fox News*. Elements of the US Air Force, including reconnaissance and other types of war planes, will assist the mission.

The Navy began the new buildup in response to orders from US Central Command (CENTCOM). The new deployments are being made for an indefinite length of time, a US Navy spokesman implied Friday, saying that the Pentagon “does not have an end date” for the patrols.

The further escalation of US deployments to the strait is being justified by the US government as a response to the seizure of the cargo ship *Maersk Tigris* last week by Iranian naval forces. In official statements this week, the Pentagon described the seizure of the *Maersk* and alleged harassment of another cargo ship on April 25 by Iranian forces in the language of war, denouncing the moves as “provocations.” US military officials described the Iranian move as “a provocative show of force by Tehran,” in comments to the *Wall Street Journal*.

“The unpredictability of our Iranian friends,” has made it necessary to pre-position the additional naval forces at the mouth of the Persian Gulf, and American naval units are being placed on high alert in case Tehran decides to “do something stupid,” US military sources told the *Journal*.

The US is also concerned to protect the large quantities of “munitions, equipment, hardware and food for the US military” that move through the strait, officials said.

The US naval escalation underscores the marked growth of tensions around the Arabian Peninsula and Persian Gulf, and the further intensification of conditions for a region-wide war drawing in the US, Saudi Arabia, Iran and a handful of other states and non-state groups.

The naval deployments come in the context of significantly intensified tensions in the region and globally. The US military is conducting ever-growing military exercises on the doorsteps of both Russia and China, directly arming and training neo-fascist militants in Ukraine, inciting the Philippine and Vietnamese militaries against China, and backing the Saudi-led regional war coalition currently laying waste to Yemen.

Whatever the immediate impetus for the recent escalations around the Strait of Hormuz, there is no doubt that US forces deployed to the area will be utilized to ratchet up pressure against Tehran and prepare new US military interventions throughout the region.

Thus far, Iran’s leadership has denied any political motives behind the seizure of the *Maersk* cargo ship, presenting the incident as a strictly legal issue. Iranian officials claim the seizure was necessary to enforce a ruling by an Iranian court against the shipping line, stemming from the loss of some 10 containers of cargo in 2005.

The *Maersk*’s owners received notice Thursday that after an extended appeals process, an Iranian court had fined it \$3.6 million in connection with the 2005 law suit. The company claims that it still has not received a full explanation for the sudden imposition of the large

fine and takeover of its ship.

The takeover may have been initiated by elements within the Iranian military seeking to burnish Tehran's anti-imperialist facade, even as direct negotiations between the representatives of the Iranian government and the US and European powers are thoroughly discrediting the radical pretensions of Iran's clerical elite.

This line of reasoning gains credibility from the fact that the seizure of the Maersk was carried out in the immediate wake of the renewed Saudi bombardment of Yemen and fresh deployments of US aircraft carriers and other war ships to the region. Iranian officials may have green-lighted the sudden move, a somewhat reckless action which included the firing of live ammunition across the bow of the commercial vessel as it was sailing peacefully in international waters, as a political maneuver aimed to enhance Iran's position in the ongoing P5+1 negotiations.

Should this prove true, it only demonstrates that powerful objective forces are pushing the region towards larger and larger wars, the wishes of the leaders for a political settlement and a return to "stability" notwithstanding. While Iran's bourgeoisie is scrambling to secure a deal with US imperialism that could satisfy the Saudis and contain the growing chaos, a drumbeat of militarist conspiracies and provocations, arising out of the dynamics of imperialism and the nation state system, continuously reasserts the danger of a region-wide conflagration.

The seizure of the Maersk Tigris came just days after the US deployed the aircraft carrier USS Theodore Roosevelt to the same area, supposedly on a mission to intercept a convoy of Iranian vessels sailing to Yemen. The Houthi rebels, which have received political support from Iran, and Yemen's civilian population are currently facing a sustained and punishing air assault by a coalition of Arab states led by Saudi Arabia and backed by the US government.



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