

The underlying geostrategic reasons behind the US-Israeli war against Iran

Gabriel Black
26 June 2025

On June 21 the United States bombed three nuclear sites in Iran—dramatically escalating the illegal war that began on June 12, when Israeli warplanes launched a broad assault on the country.

The total killed from the US-Israeli war against Iran now stands at 610 people, including 13 children, the vast majority of them civilians.

For now, the bombing of Iran has stopped. A fragile ceasefire remains in effect. But as Lt. Gen. Eyal Zamir, chief of staff of the Israeli military, threatened Tuesday, “We have concluded a significant chapter, but the campaign against Iran is not over.”

Zamir’s remarks reflect the fact that whatever the outcome of this specific “chapter,” the United States and Israel remain committed to achieving their long-standing strategic aim in the region: to cripple the Iranian regime and reassert control over the Gulf’s vast oil and gas reserves.

In October 2024, Israel launched what was, at the time, the largest single strike ever conducted against Iranian territory. Yet a broader war was postponed until after the US presidential election. That same month, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu made his intentions clear: “When Iran is finally free—and that moment will come a lot sooner than people think—everything will be different.”

Now, after almost two years of an escalating genocide against the Palestinian people, Israel found its moment to attack. The war against Iran marks the culmination of a years-long buildup—a shared desire, by both the Israeli and American establishments, to assault their most enduring adversary in the region. It also serves as a distraction from mounting internal crises and contradictions in both societies.

China, Iran’s largest trade partner, is the ultimate target behind this war. The Trump administration, focused on preparing for war against China, sees the kowtowing or removal of the Iranian regime as a critical strategic step towards war with China. It clears the path to reclaim vast energy reserves and to reassert US dominance over two of the world’s most critical geopolitical chokepoints: the Persian Gulf and the Caspian Sea.

US and British imperialism in Iran

Iran, home to over 90 million people, is the second-most populous country in the Middle East. It is also twice the size of Iraq, which the United States invaded and devastated in 2003.

For over a century, Iran’s oil wealth has placed it squarely in the crosshairs of US and British imperialism.

In 1908, British geologists discovered massive oil deposits in Iran—among the largest in the world. The British state quickly moved to establish the Anglo-Persian Oil Company (APOC), the forerunner of today’s BP. Iran’s oil delivered enormous profits to Britain, while the Iranian people received virtually none.

By the late 1940s, a powerful popular movement emerged, seeking to reclaim this wealth. Led by Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadegh and the National Front, the movement pushed to nationalize the oil industry, redistribute land and limit the monarchy’s power. Mossadegh, a moderate bourgeois nationalist, tried to strike a balance—reaching out to the US and deploying the army against parts of the mass movement—but even his half-measures were considered too much for Britain and the United States.

In 1953, the CIA and British intelligence staged “Operation Ajax,” a coup that overthrew Mossadegh and reinstalled the Shah. Money was flown into Iran to buy off generals and mobilize violent mobs. Tanks rolled into Tehran. What followed was two decades of dictatorship under Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, enforced through brutal repression. Tens of thousands of workers and socialists were imprisoned, tortured or killed. Iran’s oil once again flowed to Western corporations, with BP at the center.

Under the Shah, Iran was not only a key oil producer but also a forward operating base for US power projection across the broader Eurasian rim. Following the 1953 coup, the US helped modernize Iran’s military and intelligence services and gained access to a network of surveillance facilities—including a critical signals intelligence station near the Soviet border, used to monitor missile tests and military communications. These outposts allowed the United States to peer deep into Soviet territory and helped position Iran as a bulwark against communist influence across the Middle East, the Caucasus and Central Asia.

Following the 1979 Islamic Revolution, which deposed the Shah and brought the Ayatollahs to power, Iraq invaded Iran with tacit US approval. From 1982 onward, the Reagan administration provided Saddam Hussein with weapons, intelligence and political support during the brutal eight-year war.

Since the 1990s, the US has spent billions to fund exiled monarchists and opposition groups, while imposing crippling sanctions that have devastated Iran’s economy and caused mass immiseration. These policies have failed to bring down the regime—but they have succeeded in generating enormous suffering.

Major protests broke out in 2017, spreading to 85 cities. These demonstrations were not controlled by the US but reflected widespread hatred of both the bourgeois nationalist Islamic Republic and the imperialist chokehold placed on the country.

Iran’s oil and its role in China’s development

Iran holds more than 150 billion barrels of proven oil reserves—making it the fourth-largest reserve holder globally. It also possesses the second-largest natural gas reserves after Russia. Yet its oil production—around 3

million barrels per day about 3 percent of the world's production—is well below potential. Sanctions have deprived Iran of capital, technical expertise and foreign partnerships that could lead to a significant increase in its oil production.

Despite sanctions and other obstacles, Iran's oil exports have found a critical buyer: China.

Today, China purchases as much as 90 percent of Iran's oil, largely through informal or semi-clandestine channels, often at a discount. These flows bypass Western oversight and sanctions, fueling both nations' strategic partnership and hampering US efforts to strangle Iran's economy.

For China, this relationship is vital. It imports over 11 million barrels of oil per day, more than any country in the world. While Beijing is rapidly expanding renewables, its industrial base and petrochemical sector still depend heavily on crude. Iran now accounts for roughly 15 percent of China's oil imports.

But Iran's importance goes beyond the sheer production of oil. Iran has virtual control over the Strait of Hormuz, the world's most critical oil chokepoint. More than 20 percent of all seaborne oil passes through this narrow passage. While Iran has threatened to close the strait in retaliation for the US attacks, at the time of writing, oil markets are down by several percentage points as traders bet that Iran will not shut down the strait.

Part of the reason Iran has been reluctant to use the so-called "oil weapon" is that the majority of oil flowing out of the Strait of Hormuz now heads east—to China. Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Kuwait and the UAE are all major suppliers to China. If Iran were to close the Strait, it would strain its relations with these Gulf states and, more critically, harm China—its largest trading partner.

US strategic planners understand this dynamic well. The rise of American hydraulic fracturing—the largest oil boom in history—has temporarily granted the United States breathing room to shatter the Middle East with relatively fewer consequences at home. While oil markets remain global and a price spike would still affect the US, it is China that would be most directly and immediately impacted by any disruption to traffic through the Strait.

While China dominates the global refining of critical minerals, the United States and its allies still exert far greater control over global oil and gas flows. In any future confrontation with China, access to oil and gas will serve as a critical pressure point. Every day, one out of every nine barrels of oil produced worldwide is shipped to China. If that flow were cut off, the impact on China's economy would be immediate and potentially devastating.

It is for this reason that the Trump administration, in particular, appears to relish the prospect of removing Iran from the equation—cutting off one of China's key suppliers and tightening US imperialism's grip over the global energy system.

While oil is central to understanding Iran's importance, it has broader strategic value. Iran sits at the nexus of multiple geopolitical fault lines—bridging the Middle East, the Caucasus, Central Asia and the Indian Ocean. Its territory offers not only access to the Persian Gulf but also proximity to the Caspian Sea and Russia's southern flank.

For over a century, imperial powers have viewed control over Iran as key to securing influence across the Eurasian landmass. Today, US planners see Iran not only as a critical node in China's energy security but as a potential lever to disrupt regional integration between China, Russia and their neighbors. From the US perspective, crippling Iran weakens an entire axis of connectivity that threatens to undercut American dominance across both East and West Asia.

Iran's regional alliances further reinforce its strategic weight. Through Hezbollah in Lebanon and the Houthi movement in Yemen, Iran has demonstrated its capacity to disrupt global oil flows. In September 2019, for example, Houthi drones struck Saudi Arabia's Abqaiq and Khurais

facilities, temporarily knocking out 5 percent of the world's oil supply and sending prices surging 20 percent overnight.

This is the geostrategic backdrop to today's war: a plan to not only control Iran's oil but to lock down the Gulf as a whole, in preparation, ultimately, for conflict with China.

Iran, a stepping stone towards war against China

Early last week, Donald Trump threatened to assassinate Iran's Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Khamenei. "We know exactly where the so-called Supreme Leader is hiding," he said, adding that he was an "easy target."

Trump, posturing as restrained, clarified: "We are not going to take him out—at least not for now," but warned, "Our patience is wearing thin."

Israeli Defense Minister Israel Katz stated last Friday that the war's aim was to "destabilize the regime" by attacking "the foundations of its powers."

While Iran has retaliated, firing several rockets at US bases on Monday, these strikes seem largely symbolic and perfunctory. They suggest Iran is choosing to avoid a genuine retaliation that could lead to full-blown war.

Since at least 2015, the *World Socialist Web Site* has warned that the United States is preparing for a major confrontation with China—a strategic move to offset its long-term economic decline and to prevent the emergence of a rival power capable of challenging US global dominance.

In 2023, one of the country's top generals predicted that the United States would be at war with China by 2025.

Earlier this month, US Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth traveled to Asia to meet with Washington's key Pacific allies—Australia, Japan, South Korea and the Philippines—urging them to prepare for "imminent" conflict. Each of these four countries has ramped up military spending to historic levels. In Australia, Chief of Defense Admiral David Johnston explicitly called on the nation to prepare for war.

It is essential to place the war against Iran in this larger context. For the Trump administration, Iran is a key geostrategic steppingstone—part of a broader plan to weaken China's position in the Middle East and offset declining US hegemony. Even if the war, for now, stops short of regime change, its aim is to significantly maim Iran's ability to function as an independent power—and by extension, to undercut China's energy security and regional influence.

As Wen-Ti Sung, a nonresident fellow at the Atlantic Council's Global China Hub, explained to the German news agency *DW*, "With a weakened Iran, one that's perhaps militarily bordering on either full-on conventional war or civil war as a result of US military intervention, it's going to make Iran a lot less effective partner for China's outreach in the Middle East." This, ultimately, is the goal of US imperialism in this war.

In his 2025 May Day address, Socialism Against Fascism and War, World Socialist Web Site International Editorial Board Chairman David North stated:

The struggle for dominance and even survival leads inevitably to bitter struggles over access to critical resources, including labor and world markets... The United States is the chief protagonist in this world struggle. What imparts to its actions an especially ruthless and violent character is the fact that the American ruling class's struggle for global hegemony is taking place within the context of the protracted decline of its real economic power.

Confronted with mounting and seemingly unsolvable crises—soaring debt, structural inequality, political decay—the American ruling class is resorting to violence on a global scale to preserve its slipping grip on the world order.

But this imperial aggression will not go unopposed. Resistance is growing—not only in the Middle East, but also within the cockpit of world imperialism itself: the United States.

As the *World Socialist Web Site* Editorial Board wrote on Saturday:

US imperialism is going to war not just against the 90 million people of Iran but against the entire world. On Friday, millions took to the streets of Iran and other countries in the Middle East to voice their opposition to the illegal US-Israeli assault...

Trump is waging war on two fronts: abroad against Iran, and at home against democratic rights and the working class. These are two sides of the same process. A war with Iran will inevitably be accompanied by an escalation of political repression and social austerity. With the war budget already over \$1 trillion, the working class will be forced to foot the bill.

Wars typically produce unseen and far-reaching consequences. While the Trump administration will no doubt try to spin its actions as proof of his unparalleled “genius” and “dealmaking,” this would-be Hitler has only accelerated a global process of radicalization. As the crisis of the capitalist system deepens, billions are beginning to see more clearly the scale of violence and horror it is unleashing.



To contact the WSWWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

[wsws.org/contact](https://www.wsws.org/contact)