

# White House threatens “lethal force” against Iran

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Nine days after launching an assault on Venezuela, which killed 100 people, to kidnap President Nicolás Maduro, the Trump administration is openly threatening strikes against Iran, using as a pretext mass protests that have erupted across the country.

White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt told reporters Monday that Trump is “unafraid to use the lethal force and might of the United States military if and when he deems that necessary. And nobody knows that better than Iran.”

Leavitt declared that “airstrikes would be one of the many, many options that are on the table for the commander-in-chief.”

Trump is set to receive a military briefing on Iran on Tuesday. The Pentagon is presenting a wide range of strike options to Trump. The *New York Times* reported Monday, “Possible targets include Iran’s nuclear program, going beyond the US airstrikes that battered it in June, and ballistic missile sites.”

In June 2025, seven US B-2 stealth bombers dropped 14 Massive Ordnance Penetrator bunker-buster bombs on Fordow, Natanz and Isfahan nuclear facilities, destroying much of Iran’s nuclear infrastructure, following a 12-day Israeli assault on Iran that killed over 400 people.

Monday evening, Trump announced on Truth Social a 25 percent tariff, “effective immediately,” on any country that does business with Iran.

Trump’s latest threats echo those he made after his meeting with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu at Mar-a-Lago in late December. The *Washington Post* reported that strikes against Iran were a major topic of discussion at the meeting. “If Iran is trying to build up again,” Trump said at the meeting, “we’ll knock the hell out of them.”

Leavitt added on Monday: “The truth is, with respect

to Iran, nobody knows what President Trump is going to do except for President Trump.”

These statements follow Trump’s assertion of unlimited presidential powers to wage war all over the world in an interview with the *New York Times* published last week, in which he declared, “I don’t need international law.” Asked what limits exist on his power as commander-in-chief, Trump replied: “Yeah, there is one thing. My own morality. My own mind. It’s the only thing that can stop me.”

Investigative journalist Seymour Hersh, writing on his Substack, noted the relationship between the Venezuela operation and the threats against Iran. “The objective of the Venezuela operation is to cut off China, America’s economic rival, from its ongoing purchases of Venezuela’s cheap heavy crude oil,” Hersh wrote. China is the largest importer of Venezuelan oil.

“The next target, I have been told, will be Iran, another purveyor to China whose crude oil reserves are the world’s fourth largest,” Hersh continued. He characterized the operations as “the opening shot in a US energy war on China.”

The Iranian government has responded to Trump’s threats with pleas for negotiations. Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi declared Monday: “We are not looking for war, but we are prepared for war—even more prepared than the previous war. We are also ready for negotiations.”

Iranian state media broadcast images Monday of pro-government rallies in several cities, along with funeral processions for security personnel killed in the unrest. The *Guardian* reported that tens of thousands gathered in Tehran’s Enqelab Square for a rally organized under the banner “Iranian uprising against American-Zionist terrorism.” State television, which had initially aired heavily censored coverage of the protests, switched to

broadcasting the pro-regime demonstrations, saying they had been organized to promote “national unity.”

The Democratic Party has offered no serious opposition to Trump’s global military escalation. In an interview with Fox, Senator Mark Warner declared, “The Iranian regime is awful, and I stand with the Iranian people.”

In December, 115 House Democrats—including Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries, Minority Whip Katherine Clark, and Democratic Caucus Chair Pete Aguilar—voted for a \$901 billion defense authorization bill, authorizing the largest annual military spending in US history.

The threats from Trump come amid protests across Iran triggered by the collapse of the rial and soaring inflation. According to the *Financial Times*, annual inflation hit 42 percent in December, while food inflation soared to 72 percent, with the price of bread rising 113 percent. The rial has lost 45 percent of its value against the dollar in 2025 alone.

The economic crisis is the direct product of decades of US sanctions. Between 2000 and 2012, the Iranian economy grew an average of 4.4 percent annually. Since the reimposition of sanctions, growth has slowed to just 1.9 percent. Oil exports, the mainstay of the Iranian economy, dropped from 2.8 million barrels per day in May 2018 to as low as 300,000 barrels per day after Trump withdrew from the nuclear deal in his first term.

As the WSWS wrote in a statement Sunday night, “Because of the Islamic Republic’s repression—itsself an indication of the regime’s ever narrowing social base—and the relentless hostility of the Western corporate media to an Iran not directly subservient to imperialism, it is difficult to get a precise picture of the protests in Iran.”

“But any progressive tendency in Iran would have to immediately repudiate Trump’s ‘support,’ denounce the threat of imminent US military action and call for the immediate lifting of the punitive sanctions that are strangling Iran’s economy.”



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