

US draws up plans for “leadership change” and “targeting individuals” in Iran strike

Andre Damon
20 February 2026

The aircraft carrier USS Gerald R. Ford, the largest warship ever built, transited the Strait of Gibraltar on Friday and entered the Mediterranean, placing the United States within days of having the military force in position for a massive illegal assault on Iran.

Two US officials told Reuters on Friday that military planning had reached “an advanced stage,” with options including “targeting individuals” and “pursuing leadership change in Tehran.” Asked whether he was considering a limited strike, US President Donald Trump told reporters: “I guess I can say I am considering that.”

The *New York Times* reported Tuesday that the buildup had “progressed to the point” that Trump could take military action “as soon as this weekend.” More than 50 fighter jets, two carrier strike groups and dozens of refueling tankers have been deployed. B-2 bombers have been placed on higher alert.

The *Wall Street Journal* detailed the hardware pouring into the region: F-35 and F-22 stealth fighters, F-15Es, F-16s, EA-18G electronic warfare jets, nine destroyers armed with Tomahawk cruise missiles, and the submarine USS Georgia. The Associated Press called it “the largest force of American warships and aircraft to the Middle East in decades.”

An attack on Iran would constitute a war of aggression—the “supreme international crime”—as defined at the Nuremberg trials. Iran has not attacked the United States. There is no UN Security Council authorization. There is no congressional authorization. Trump has made clear he regards none of this as a constraint. “I don’t need international law,” he told the *New York Times* in January.

The threat of attack comes as Iran’s government has been desperately appealing to the Trump administration to negotiate. Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi

said Friday that a draft counterproposal would be ready “in the next two, three days” following indirect talks in Geneva this week and that a deal could be achieved “in a very short period of time.”

Iran’s diplomatic efforts will count for nothing, because for the Trump administration “diplomacy” is merely a pretext and cover for murder and extortion. Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro sought to negotiate with the Trump administration in the months before the January raid that seized him and his wife, offering as late as the day before to discuss a deal.

The same fraud was carried out against Iran last year. The White House gave Iran a 60-day ultimatum. Five rounds of talks were held. On June 8, Special Envoy Steve Witkoff sat in a war-planning session at Camp David alongside the CIA director and defense secretary. Five days later, Israel launched Operation Rising Lion, bombing more than 100 targets and assassinating senior commanders and nuclear scientists. On June 22, seven B-2 bombers launched Operation Midnight Hammer, striking Iran’s nuclear facilities at Fordow, Natanz and Isfahan. Iran’s foreign minister told the UN: “We were attacked in the midst of an ongoing diplomatic process.”

The White House demands total capitulation—no uranium enrichment on Iranian soil, dismantling of the ballistic missile program and abandonment of regional allies. US officials say privately they see no prospect of Iran meeting these terms. The *Wall Street Journal* reported Friday that if Iran refuses to comply after an “initial limited military strike,” “the US would respond with a broad campaign against regime facilities—potentially aimed at toppling the Tehran regime.”

The war against Iran is a component of the eruption of American militarism all over the world. The carrier

now entering the Mediterranean to attack Iran was redeployed from the Caribbean, where it took part in the seizure of Venezuelan President Maduro. The attack on Venezuela, the threatened seizure of Greenland and the Panama Canal, and the war against Iran are components of a single strategy: the use of military power to control the world's critical resources and chokepoints in preparation for conflict with Russia and China.

There is overwhelming opposition to war with Iran. A Quinnipiac poll in January found 70 percent of voters oppose military action. A Reuters/Ipsos poll found 69 percent say the US should not get involved in Middle East military action unless directly threatened.

Despite this public opposition, the Democratic Party has systematically enabled Trump's war preparations, because it speaks for the same constituency in the capitalist ruling class, which sees the colonial subjugation of the whole world as a means to prop up US global hegemony.

Democratic Senator Mark Warner of Virginia told MS NOW on February 14: "I think it's appropriate the president has all the options on the table."

On Friday, Democratic Representative Josh Gottheimer of New Jersey issued a bipartisan statement with Republican Representative Mike Lawler of New York explicitly opposing a resolution by Representatives Thomas Massie and Ro Khanna that would prohibit the use of military force against Iran without congressional authorization. "This resolution would restrict the flexibility needed to respond to real and evolving threats and risks signaling weakness at a dangerous moment," they wrote. "Congress must not limit our ability to protect Americans and our allies."

Democratic Senator John Fetterman of Pennsylvania declared on Newsmax on February 11 his support for bombing Iran, pledging to vote against any war powers resolution. "I absolutely was fully supportive and was cheering for that Midnight Hammer," he said. "And, now, if that's required for a second round, I'll be the one Democrat to absolutely say that's entirely appropriate."

On Friday, as the Ford entered the Mediterranean and the administration announced plans for "leadership change" and "targeting individuals," neither House Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries, nor Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer, nor the leaders of the

"progressive" wing of the Democratic Party—Senator Bernie Sanders and Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, who last weekend at the Munich Security Conference repeated the administration's regime change talking points about Iran—issued any statement.

The Democrats have voted to fund every weapon now being assembled for this attack. The \$901 billion National Defense Authorization Act passed the House 312-112 in December, with 115 Democrats voting yes. In the Senate, it passed 77-20 with the vast majority of Democrats in favor. In January, 149 House Democrats voted for \$839 billion in defense appropriations.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact