

Treasury Secretary Bessent says US will escort ships through Strait of Hormuz as Iran war spirals

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US Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent said on Thursday that the US Navy will begin escorting commercial vessels through the Strait of Hormuz—a major escalation that would place US warships directly in the line of Iranian fire with a high likelihood of casualties.

“As soon as it is militarily possible, the US Navy, perhaps with an international coalition, will be escorting vessels through,” Bessent told Sky News.

The US-Israeli war on Iran, now in its thirteenth day, has triggered a cascading regional crisis centered on the Strait of Hormuz—the waterway through which 20 percent of the world’s oil passes. Iran effectively closed the strait within days of the war’s outbreak on February 28, ordering over 150 tankers to anchor and declaring that “not one litre of oil” would pass. Tanker traffic has dropped 70 percent. On Wednesday, Iran’s newly appointed Supreme Leader Mojtaba Khamenei issued his first public statement, vowing to keep the strait closed and open new fronts. Iranian drone boats and missiles have struck multiple commercial vessels—six on Wednesday alone—and CNN reported on March 10 that Iran has begun laying mines in the waterway.

Brent crude has surged from \$70 to over \$100, briefly touching \$119, despite the IEA authorizing a record release of 400 million barrels from strategic reserves—what the agency called “the largest supply disruption in the history of the global oil market.” Analysts predict it could rise to as much as \$200 a barrel. US gasoline prices have risen 20 percent in two weeks, European gas prices are up 58 percent, and fertilizer prices have surged, as roughly 30 percent of the world’s fertilizer exports transit the strait.

The Hill reported on Thursday that naval experts warn the escort mission would be extraordinarily dangerous. Bryan Clark, an expert in naval operations with the Hudson Institute, explained the core problem: “The challenge is going to be dealing with the proximity of the drone launchers and the missile launchers that are going to be along the Iranian coast.” He added: “The issue is that you only have a couple of minutes once the launcher comes out before the missiles are going to get on top of you, because you’re only talking about 3 or 4 miles from the shoreline to the transit lane.”

The strait is just 21 miles wide at its narrowest point. Senator Chris Murphy responded to the escort proposal bluntly: “they had NO PLAN.” Energy Secretary Chris Wright acknowledged on CNBC the same day that the Navy is “simply not ready” and that escort operations could begin only “by the end of this month.”

Also on Thursday, a US KC-135 Stratotanker went down in western Iraq with six crew members aboard. CENTCOM called it an “apparent accident” during a refueling operation. The IRGC said it was shot down by Iranian air defenses and that all six crew were killed.

The IRGC claimed on Wednesday that it had targeted the USS Abraham Lincoln aircraft carrier and that the ship is “withdrawing toward the US.” US officials denied the carrier came under attack and released photographs showing the Lincoln operating normally in the Gulf of Oman, where it has remained throughout the war without entering the Persian Gulf. However, the Pentagon acknowledged that Iranian vessels approached the carrier and were fired on, and that a fire broke out aboard the ship. Separately, the USS Gerald R. Ford also suffered a fire this week—the carrier has

been at sea for over eight months, well past its scheduled maintenance period.

As the war grinds on with no clear end in sight, sections of the ruling class are now openly agitating for the deployment of US ground troops. The *Wall Street Journal* warned on Thursday that ending the war prematurely would be a strategic disaster. “This is the danger Mr. Trump faces as he contemplates when to end the war,” the *Journal* wrote. “Iran has threatened Gulf oil production for decades, and that potential threat has built a risk premium into the oil price. But if the war ends with that threat having been proven in practice, with the U.S. unable to do anything about it, the U.S. will be the strategic loser.”

The *Journal* argued that the war’s original aims—eliminating Iran’s missile threat, its nuclear program, and its navy—are no longer sufficient. “Iran’s counterpunch means that reopening the Strait and reducing Iran’s veto power over its traffic will now have to be a goal. As a conflict evolves, war aims have to change as well.” This, the *Journal* continued, “may mean a longer campaign than Mr. Trump initially anticipated as the U.S. and Israel secure the area of the Strait and increase the target list to include more of Iran’s drone units and individual IRGC and basij units.”

The editorial went further, calling for the seizure of Kharg Island, Iran’s main oil export terminal: “It may also require taking control of Iran’s main oil export terminal at Kharg island...Iran’s oil sales to China continue to sustain the regime.” Trump, the *Journal* noted, “has been careful not to rule out deploying special forces for discrete and vital missions, and perhaps he has had Kharg in mind.” Its conclusion: “Winning now includes reopening the Strait of Hormuz.”

In other words, the most influential mouthpiece of American finance capital is demanding an expansion of the war—ground troops, the seizure of sovereign territory, and an open-ended military occupation of the world’s most critical energy chokepoint. The administration has not ruled out conscription. Asked about a military draft on Fox News on March 8, White House Press Secretary Karoline Leavitt said it is “not part of the current plan right now, but the president, again, wisely keeps his options on the table.”

Meanwhile, the bombing of Iran continues to

intensify. Bessent announced on Fox Business last week that the US would carry out “our biggest bombing campaign” yet. The US has struck over 5,000 targets since February 28. Over 1,348 Iranian civilians have been killed, including hundreds of children. At least 12,000 have been wounded. The UNHCR reports 3.2 million Iranians have been internally displaced. Israeli officials privately assess the regime is unlikely to fall soon, with Netanyahu conceding uncertainty on regime change.

The war has simultaneously expanded into Lebanon, where Israel launched an intensive bombing campaign and ground incursion after Hezbollah resumed fire on March 2.

Israeli forces have pushed into southern Lebanon along several fronts, establishing at least 18 military positions inside Lebanese territory—the first ground operations since the November 2024 ceasefire. Israeli strikes hit central Beirut on Wednesday, one kilometer from the government headquarters. Over 680 people have been killed in Lebanon, including 98 children, and more than 800,000 displaced. Israel’s military chief said the campaign “will not be short.” Defense Minister Katz ordered preparations to expand the ground offensive on Wednesday.



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