

Trump is planning a ground invasion of Iran

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At a Pentagon press conference on Friday morning, Secretary of War Pete Hegseth made a chilling declaration. Referring to the Strait of Hormuz—the critical waterway through which one-fifth of the world’s oil supply passes, and which Iran has effectively closed since the start of the war—Hegseth told reporters, “We have a plan for every option here. We’re working with our interagency partners. That’s not a strait we’re going to allow to remain contested or with a lack of flow of commercial goods.”

This statement, delivered with the sneering belligerence that has characterized Hegseth’s conduct throughout this criminal war, must be taken as a warning. It can mean only one thing: the Trump administration is preparing the next and most terrible stage of the escalation of the war—an invasion with US ground troops to seize control of Iranian territory along the Strait of Hormuz.

Hegseth’s statement came alongside a torrent of language that has no precedent in the public remarks of an American defense secretary. “No quarter, no mercy for our enemies,” he has declared—not once but repeatedly, as a kind of slogan for the war. He has vowed to hunt and kill the enemy “without apology, hesitation, or mercy.” He has derided “stupid rules of engagement” and sneered at Europeans for “clutching their pearls.” He has described Iran’s wounded supreme leader, appointed after the murder of his father Ayatollah Khamenei, as “cowering” underground, adding, “That’s what rats do.” He has promised “death and destruction from the sky, all day long.”

This is the language of Nazism. It is the language of a regime that glories in violence, that regards the lives of its victims as worthless, and that is preparing the population for crimes of a still greater magnitude. When the self-styled “Secretary of War” openly boasts that the war is being waged “without mercy”—a phrase that, under international humanitarian law, constitutes an incitement to war crimes—he is not merely describing what has already been done. He is signaling what is to come.

What is being prepared is a ground invasion of Iran. What is implied in Hegseth’s threats is stated explicitly in a *Wall Street Journal* editorial, published Thursday, which states 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.”

The logic of escalation

This looming crime arises directly from the catastrophic consequences of the miscalculations that accompanied the launching of this illegal war. The architects of Operation Epic Fury believed—or claimed to believe—that killing Supreme Leader Khamenei, destroying Iran’s conventional military capabilities from the air, and calling on the population to “take over” the government would produce the rapid collapse of the Islamic Republic. Regime decapitation would deliver regime change. The war would be over in weeks.

Two weeks into the war, the Iranian regime has not fallen. The IRGC

has not surrendered. Iran has struck back with missiles and drones across eight countries. The new Supreme Leader has ordered the Strait of Hormuz kept closed. The global economic crisis triggered by the closure of the strait is spiraling out of control, with oil now above \$100 per barrel and gas and food prices rising as a result of what the International Energy Agency has said is the largest supply disruption in the history of the global oil market.

Confronting this catastrophe of his own making, Trump is not retreating. He is escalating. He has demanded “unconditional surrender.” He has claimed the right to choose Iran’s next leader. And now his defense secretary is declaring that the strait “will not be allowed to remain contested”—the bureaucratic euphemism for a decision to send American soldiers to kill and die on Iranian soil.

The drive toward a ground war is being prepared through a steady stream of new deployments. The *Wall Street Journal* reported Friday that roughly 5,000 additional Marines and sailors are being sent to the Middle East, explicitly to provide “options for use” in the expanding war, according to a US official cited by the *Journal*, and to prepare the ground for additional deployments.

What this invasion would mean

Workers and young people must understand clearly what is being prepared. A ground invasion of the Iranian coastline would not be a limited or contained operation. It would be a protracted and gruesome bloodbath.

The Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI), in an assessment published on Friday, compared such an operation to the Gallipoli campaign of 1915—the catastrophic British attempt to force the Dardanelles by landing troops on Ottoman soil. At Gallipoli, the navy could not clear the strait, and the army was sent to do what the navy could not. The result was eight months of slaughter, a quarter of a million Allied casualties, and a complete withdrawal with nothing achieved. The defenders, fighting on their own ground, proved impossible to dislodge.

The institute’s assessment of an equivalent operation at Hormuz is devastating. It would be “Gallipoli times ten, with the difference that the Iranians could always pull back to interior lines of defence.” The Iranian coastline commanding the strait stretches more than 150 kilometers—three times the length of the Gallipoli peninsula—backed by mountains that offer defensive positions in depth. “There is no defensible line that US forces could ever secure,” the ASPI wrote.

Iran has spent 40 years preparing for this fight. The IRGC has fortified the coastline with anti-ship missile batteries, drone launch sites, mine-laying facilities, and positions for the hundreds of fast attack boats that form the backbone of its coastal defense. It has deployed 20,000 naval troops in the strait region, including 5,000 marines. It has conducted drills specifically rehearsing the repulsion of an amphibious landing. Bandar Abbas—the hub of Iranian naval operations, a city of half a million

people—sits directly on the strait.

An American amphibious assault on this coastline would face a combination of mines beneath, boat attacks from the water, and anti-ship missiles and drones from the shore. The soldiers who survived the landing would then face an indefinite ground war—IEDs, guerrilla raids, drone strikes, artillery from positions deeper inland—against forces that know every ridge, every road and every tunnel, and that can be reinforced from a nation of 90 million people.

To hold this coastline would require tens, or potentially hundreds of thousands of troops. The casualties—in the initial assault, the ongoing occupation, and the inevitable expansion of the operation as each “limited” objective proves insufficient—would be devastating. They would be measured not in the dozens that have been killed so far, but in the hundreds, the thousands—on a scale that the American population has not witnessed since Vietnam.

And these would be only the American casualties. The Iranian death toll, which is already in the thousands from the air campaign, including at least 175 children incinerated in a single strike on an elementary school in Minab, would multiply enormously. Hegseth has told us what to expect. “No mercy” and “no quarter.” “Death and destruction from the sky, all day long.”

The wider catastrophe

A ground invasion would set the entire Middle East ablaze and develop into a global conflict. Israel is already extending the genocide in Gaza into a bombardment of Lebanon, with hundreds killed and hundreds of thousands driven from their homes. The European imperialist powers have sent warships to patrol the Strait of Hormuz.

Iran has struck US bases and allied infrastructure across eight countries. A landing on Iranian soil would trigger intensified ballistic missile attacks on US bases, expanded Hezbollah strikes on Israel, Houthi attacks on Red Sea shipping, and direct strikes on Gulf Arab oil infrastructure that could drive oil prices to \$150 or \$200 per barrel and plunge the world into recession.

And behind all of this lurks the most terrifying danger of all. The Trump administration has refused to rule out the use of nuclear weapons against Iran. So-called “tactical” nuclear weapons—or earth-penetrating bombs like the B61-11, designed for hardened underground targets like Iran’s buried nuclear facilities—carry yields of tens or hundreds of kilotons, many times the bomb that destroyed Hiroshima.

A president who wages war “without mercy,” whose war secretary boasts of granting “maximum authorities” to kill, who has shattered every norm of international law and democratic governance—this president cannot be presumed to respect the nuclear taboo that has held since 1945.

The use of nuclear weapons, once unthinkable, has become a real possibility in the hands of an administration that treats the lives of Iranians and workers everywhere as worthless and the constraints of law as contemptible.

Stop the war—build the movement of the working class

The Democratic Party will not stop this crime. It has funded the war.

In February, 21 House Democrats provided the decisive margin to pass a \$1.2 trillion government spending bill—which funded the military through September 2026—by a vote of 217 to 214, as Trump was surging military

assets to the Middle East. The party’s leaders have confined their objections to questions of process and protocol—the polite procedural complaints of politicians who share the war’s strategic objectives and fear only the political consequences of being associated with its failures. As Drop Site News reported, a substantial number of Senate Democrats believed Iran “ultimately needed to be dealt with militarily”—“That’s precisely why they wanted Trump to be the one to do it.”

The war will not be stopped by the institutions of bourgeois politics, which are complicit in it. It will be stopped by the organized resistance of the working class.

The *World Socialist Web Site* and the International Committee of the Fourth International issue this warning and this call: a terrible crime is being prepared. The invasion of Iran will produce carnage on a scale not seen in a generation. It must be stopped.

The war’s economic consequences—soaring gas prices, rising food costs, the diversion of a billion dollars a day from social needs to the military machine—fall directly on the backs of working people. The soldiers who will be sent to die on Iranian beaches are the sons and daughters of the working class.

The connection between the criminal war abroad and the social crisis at home is not abstract. In the months and weeks that preceded the attack on Iran, the Trump administration had flooded cities with ICE agents and murdered American citizens.

The escalation of the war against Iran will require an intensification of attacks on democratic rights in the United States itself. All of American society will be subordinated to the demands of war. This will mean a massive assault on social programs and the criminalization of political dissent.

There is deep-rooted popular opposition to the war against Iran. This opposition must be organized and politically directed.

The WSWS calls on workers to mobilize against the war in your workplaces, your schools, your communities. Form rank-and-file committees independent of the trade union bureaucracy, which has maintained a shameful silence. Link the struggle against war to the fight for decent wages, healthcare, housing and education—the social rights that are being sacrificed on the altar of imperialist war. Reject both parties of American capitalism, which have demonstrated once again that they serve the interests of the ruling class, not the people.

The fight against war is the fight against the capitalist system that produces it. Socialism is not a utopian ideal. It is an existential necessity.



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