As ground troops arrive in the Middle East, Trump threatens “obliteration” of Iran’s infrastructure

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On Monday, the 30th day of the US-Israeli war against Iran, US President Donald Trump threatened to destroy all of Iran’s energy generation and water desalination plants unless it surrendered to his demands. “If for any reason a deal is not shortly reached,” Trump posted on his Truth Social platform, “we will conclude our lovely ‘stay’ in Iran by blowing up and completely obliterating all of their Electric Generating Plants, Oil Wells and Kharg Island (and possibly all desalinization plants!).”

Destroying all of Iran’s power plants would uproot the basis of civilized life in the country: cutting off water treatment, hospitals and food refrigeration. And the destruction of its water desalination plants would deepen the already catastrophic water crisis in Iran, which is facing the worst drought in its modern history.

What Trump is threatening is a war crime: the latest in a war full of them. Article 54 of the 1977 Additional Protocol I to the Geneva Conventions states: “It is prohibited to attack, destroy, remove or render useless objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian population, such as foodstuffs, agricultural areas for the production of foodstuffs, crops, livestock, drinking water installations...”

Trump’s threats constitute collective punishment—one of the oldest prohibitions in the laws of war. It is the Gaza model applied to a country of 90 million: the systematic destruction of the infrastructure necessary to sustain human life.

The criminality of the Trump regime is so naked that even the media has been compelled to take note. When NBC’s Garrett Haake asked White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt why the president was “threatening what would amount to potentially a war crime,” she did not deny it. She replied that the US Armed Forces “has capabilities beyond their wildest imagination. And the president is not afraid to use them.”

The *New York Times* published an opinion piece Monday headlined “Is Trump Threatening to Commit a War Crime?” It admitted that Trump’s threat “would almost certainly amount to a war crime. One of the central tenets of the laws that govern modern conflict is that the targeting of civilians is off limits in military campaigns.”

This is true. But the entire war is criminal and illegal. The Nuremberg Tribunal defined the initiation of a war of aggression as “the supreme international crime, differing only from other war crimes in that it contains within itself the accumulated evil of the whole.” This is precisely what the US-Israeli war on Iran is.

The systematic assassination of Iran’s political and military leadership—from Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei to dozens of senior officials—violates the prohibition on assassination under Executive Order 12333 and the laws of armed conflict prohibiting perfidy and treacherous killing. The bombing of a girls’ school in Minab that killed more than 170 people, most of them children; the destruction of 61,000 homes and 500 schools; the killing of more than 6,500 people—every act flows from the original crime of launching this war.

There is a logic to the increasingly genocidal rhetoric coming out of the White House. The Trump administration, having hoped to overthrow the Iranian government by assassinating its leaders, has failed to achieve its objectives and must either escalate US involvement in the war or face a catastrophic defeat. Trump called it an “excursion” and said it would be over in days. A month later, thousands are dead, but Iran’s government remains intact, the Strait of Hormuz remains closed and oil prices have surged 59 percent.

The administration is turning to the Gaza model: the total destruction of a society as a method of war. In Gaza, Israel has killed more than 72,000 people, displaced the entire population of 2.3 million, destroyed every hospital and university and reduced the territory to rubble. Trump is threatening similar methods to a country 40 times the size of Gaza.

US troops are flooding into the Middle East. Thousands of

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paratroopers from the 82nd Airborne Division have arrived in the region. Two Marine Expeditionary Units have been dispatched to the Persian Gulf. The *Washington Post* reported the Pentagon is preparing for "weeks" of ground operations and drawing up plans for 10,000 additional troops. The *Wall Street Journal* reported that Trump is planning a military operation to seize nearly 1,000 pounds of enriched uranium from underground facilities deep inside Iranian territory.

The Trump administration operates outside of all legal and constitutional restraint. It is the criminal underworld in power, speaking the language of gangsterism on a global scale. Trump told the *Financial Times* on Sunday that his "preference" is to "take the oil in Iran," resurrecting the colonial premise that a great power can invade, destroy, and then claim ownership over a nation's resources.

A ground invasion of Iran—a country of 90 million with a large military, rugged terrain and the capacity to inflict serious casualties—will not produce a swift victory. When the invasion bogs down, when casualties mount, when the political crisis deepens, what will be Trump's next move?

As White House officials are so fond of saying, "Nothing is off the table." Mohamad Safa, who served 12 years as the permanent representative of the Patriotic Vision Association to the United Nations, resigned this week, warning that the US is "preparing for possible nuclear weapon use in Iran."

The administration has staked the credibility of American imperialism on this war. A defeat would call into question the capacity of the United States to project power against Russia and China, the central strategic preoccupation of both parties. Trump's threat to unleash "fire and fury" on Iran should, in fact, be taken as a threat to use nuclear weapons.

Trump's threat came the same weekend an estimated 8 million people marched in the largest single-day protest in American history. Sixty-two percent of Americans "strongly oppose" sending ground troops to Iran. No war in American history has been so unpopular at its outset.

The Democratic Party, which, before Trump's election, had been waging war in the Middle East for over a year, is seeking to divert and neuter this mass popular opposition to the war.

At the "No Kings" rallies, Democratic politicians either ignored the war or reduced it to a passing phrase. In Boston, Senator Elizabeth Warren did not mention Iran at all. "No kings today and we vote in November," as AFT President Randi Weingarten put it. Minnesota Attorney General Keith Ellison told the crowd to "vote for people who don't start wars."

Ellison was telling attendees to vote for the Democrats. But the experience of the Biden administration, together with every other Democratic presidency before it, shows that this is a completely bankrupt perspective. Biden provoked the Russian invasion of Ukraine and then massively escalated the war. He armed Israel's genocide in Gaza, which was intended from the beginning as a prelude to war against Iran.

The claim that the crisis will be resolved by electing Democrats in November is a fraud. And what will happen between now and then? The real significance of this focus is to buy time: to give Trump the months he needs to prosecute the war that the Democrats support in its fundamentals.

Trump does not speak and act simply as an individual madman. He is the political personification of a capitalist oligarchy: an American ruling class that has broken with democratic restraints and turns to war abroad and repression at home to defend its wealth and global interests.

The war will not be ended through a vote for the warmongering Democratic Party, but through the independent mobilization of the working class. Already, the war has been a disaster for working people, who are confronted with a massive surge in the cost of living. As the war drags on, the costs will only intensify, together with demands to slash social programs to pay for war. Trump has called for a $1.5 trillion defense budget. Where will this money come from? Medicare, Medicaid and Social Security are already under assault. The social programs built over the past century will be gutted to feed the war machine.

The working class is the only social force capable of stopping this war. Eight million people took to the streets, but that opposition will be strangled if it remains under the control of the Democratic Party. The fight against war requires an independent movement of the working class, organized in rank-and-file committees in every workplace and linked across industries and borders, armed with a socialist program against the capitalist system that produces war, dictatorship and social inequality.

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