

US blockade of Strait of Hormuz deepens conflicts between major powers

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Washington's blockade of the Strait of Hormuz has been in force since Monday in what marks a major escalation of the war against Iran. The attempt by US forces to halt all tanker traffic to and from Iranian ports aims to compel Tehran to accept sweeping concessions to American imperialism, while also cutting across the interests of China, which relies on cheap oil from Iran and the broader Gulf region for much of its energy imports.

US Vice President JD Vance made clear Tuesday that the US war of aggression is aimed at restructuring the Middle East. He declared at an event that President Donald Trump was not interested in "small deals" but was seeking a "grand bargain" with Iran, which would see the US treat Iran "economically like a normal country." Trump and Vance want to roll back the clock to before 1979, when the Iranian Revolution ended US imperialism's financial and military dominance over the country of 93 million people.

Trump's statements since the beginning of the war demonstrate that American imperialism will resort to the most ruthless barbarism in order to secure its preeminence over the world's most important energy-exporting region. He vowed to bomb Iran "back to the stone ages" and made the genocidal threat on 7 April that an "entire civilisation" could be wiped out. The US/Israeli bombardment of Iran was conducted with indiscriminate bloody-mindedness, as shown by the destruction of a girls' school on the first day of the war, killing over 160 children. Independent investigations and on-the-ground reports following last week's ceasefire revealed that even when the US claimed to be hitting military targets, the collateral damage to surrounding civilian infrastructure and residential buildings was extensive.

In an interview this week with Fox Business, the war criminal Trump menaced Iran with further war crimes if it refuses to bow to American imperialist dictates. Speaking like a mafia don, Trump said, "If I pulled up stakes right now, it would take them 20 years to rebuild that country. And we're not finished...We could take out every one of their bridges in one hour...every one of their power plants."

Trump speaks for American imperialism, which has never forgiven the Iranian people for the 1979 revolution that toppled the US-funded Shah's repressive dictatorship. His concern is not with Iranian "terrorism," let alone the democratic rights of the Iranian people. Rather, as David North put it when summing up the historical relationship between US imperialism and Iran in a recent lecture given at Berlin's Humboldt University, it all boils down to "oil, geopolitical influence, and the class interests of American capitalism."

At a briefing on the war Thursday, fascist Secretary of War Pete Hegseth warned that the US military is "reloading," and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Dan Caine declared that the military could resume combat "at literally a moment's notice." Caine added that 13 ships have turned around since the blockade of Iranian ports began. Later in the day, this figure was increased to 14.

Home to the world's fourth-largest oil reserves and second-largest natural gas reserves, Iran exported between 80 and 90 percent of its oil to China. Beijing has benefited from cut-price Iranian oil over recent years due to the brutal sanctions imposed on the country by Trump during his first term in office, when he unilaterally abrogated the UN-backed nuclear accord with Tehran in 2018. In 2021, China signed a 25-year strategic partnership with Iran that included major investments in Iranian infrastructure in exchange for \$400 billion worth of oil for the Chinese economy. Washington now hopes that what its sanctions could not accomplish can be achieved through brute military force, but the first six weeks of this war have demonstrated that even the world's most powerful military cannot overcome the impact of American imperialism's protracted decay.

Prior to the war, China was receiving some 1.4 million barrels of oil per day from Iran and over 5 million barrels per day from the Gulf region as a whole. Although the US blockade does not directly hinder exports from other Gulf states to China, the region's output has been hit sharply by the war, threatening global economic disruption. China reportedly has oil reserves able to cover 5 months of

demand, but long-term reductions in supply could seriously weaken its already fragile economy. Moreover, the prospect of a global economic recession, raised this week in a report by the IMF, would mean a decreasing market for Chinese exports, which the Stalinist regime in Beijing relies upon to maintain economic growth.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov stated during a visit to Beijing Wednesday that Moscow could offset any oil shortfalls for China resulting from the war in the Middle East. However, this assertion is more than dubious. Pipelines between Russia and China are reportedly already operating at full capacity, and Russia lacks the tankers needed to substantially increase its approximately 2 million barrels of oil per day reaching China. Russia would have to more than double its present exports to China to offset entirely Iranian oil exports and partially cover the decline from other Gulf nations.

Faced with the aggressiveness and criminality of American imperialism unparalleled since the Nazi regime during World War II, Beijing has responded to the US blockade by holding out the prospect of a stable “multi-polar world” in which the interests of all states are respected. According to a Xinhua report, Xi told Lavrov that Beijing and Moscow should “strengthen multilateral cooperation, firmly uphold and practice multilateralism, join hands to revive the authority and vitality of the UN, engage in closer coordination and cooperation within the frameworks of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and BRICS countries, and promote the development of the international order in a more just and reasonable direction.”

This modern-day version of the Soviet Stalinist bureaucracy’s policy of “peaceful coexistence” has even less of a basis in the realities of world capitalism today than it did during the 20th century, when it led to the Stalinists’ liquidation of the Soviet Union in a failed bid to integrate Russian capitalism into the imperialist world order. Under the would-be dictator Trump, American imperialism is fully committed to waging a third world war to defend its global hegemonic position amid its accelerating economic decline. Trump’s blood-curdling threats to wipe out Iranian civilisation testify that American imperialism is not simply going to peacefully accept an expansion of Chinese and Russian influence under the banner of “multilateralism” at its expense.

Trump’s actions since the beginning of the year have made unmistakably clear that his ultimate goal is blocking China’s rise. He launched a military raid on Venezuela, a major supplier of oil to China, in order to capture its President and install a US puppet regime to open the country’s energy reserves to US capital. US imperialism miscalculated disastrously with its belief that an operation

could be pulled off with similar ease against Iran, but it is nonetheless continuing to pursue the goal of sabotaging Chinese economic relations throughout the entire Middle East. Whether this takes the form of a continuation of the war or a “grand bargain” with Iran, the objective logic of this conflict, which is irresolvable under capitalism, is a catastrophic military conflagration between nuclear-armed powers. As North observed in his Berlin lecture,

The historical parallel that imposes itself is not the Gulf War of 1991 or the invasion of Iraq in 2003, but August 1914. The First World War began as a regional conflict in the Balkans and expanded, through the logic of alliances, imperial rivalries and miscalculation, into a global catastrophe that destroyed four empires and killed 20 million people.

The only way out is through the building of an international anti-war movement led by the working class to put an end to the capitalist profit system and establish socialism. Workers in Iran and throughout the Middle East must unify their struggles against imperialist aggression with the working class in the imperialist centres of North America and Europe, who confront a vicious onslaught on their living standards to pay for endless war and the enrichment of the financial oligarchy, and with workers in China and Russia, whose interests collide with the efforts of these two capitalist-restorationist regimes’ attempts to accommodate themselves within crisis-ridden capitalism. This is the programme fought for by the International Committee of the Fourth International and *World Socialist Web Site*.



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