

As third carrier strike group arrives, Trump orders Navy to “shoot and kill” Iranian boats in the Strait of Hormuz

Kevin Reed
23 April 2026

On Thursday, as the US ceasefire entered its fifteenth day, President Trump issued an order to “shoot and kill” small Iranian boats in the Strait of Hormuz. Meanwhile, the US Navy seized an oil tanker associated with Iran in the Indian Ocean.

These developments, along with the arrival of a third US aircraft carrier strike group in the region, represent an escalation of the war against Iran and the deepening crisis inside the Trump administration’s military and political leadership.

On Thursday morning, Trump posted on Truth Social an order for the US Navy to take lethal action against Iranian boats that he claimed are laying mines in the Strait of Hormuz. In his 8:45 a.m. post, Trump wrote, “I have ordered the United States Navy to shoot and kill any boat, small boats though they may be (Their naval ships are ALL, 159 of them, at the bottom of the sea!), that is putting mines in the waters of the Strait of Hormuz.”

He went on, “There is to be no hesitation. Additionally, our mine ‘sweepers’ are clearing the Strait right now. I am hereby ordering that activity to continue, but at a tripled up level!”

Trump’s threat directive and authorization for immediate lethal force against Iranian boats is a war crime. There are no independently confirmed reports that Iran is currently and actively mining the Strait of Hormuz.

In any case, despite the US and its imperialist and regional supporters assertion that Iran has no right to mine the waterway, doing so is a justified defensive act following weeks of an air war by the US and Israel that has been followed by repeated threats of an imminent amphibious invasion of the country from the strait.

Meanwhile, Trump’s naval order followed the US seizure of a second oil tanker in the Indian Ocean on Thursday. The vessel was linked to Iranian oil transport and was seized as part of the administration’s broader effort to shut down Tehran’s export routes and use force to blockade the country beyond the Persian Gulf.

According to the Pentagon and AP reporting, the tanker is called the M/T Tifani. US forces boarded it in the Bay of Bengal, between India and Southeast Asia, and said the seizure was conducted “without incident.” US officials claimed it was an oil tanker previously sanctioned for smuggling Iranian crude and was carrying Iranian oil at the time of the interdiction.

The vessel was reported to be Botswana-flagged, but treated by the Pentagon as “stateless” in the sense used in the interdiction notice. The military said it would decide within days whether to tow it away or transfer it to another country. The US justification was also that the action was part of a global enforcement campaign against ships tied to Tehran, with the Pentagon warning that it would pursue all such vessels internationally.

This latest operation is also significant because it shows the war continues to expand beyond the immediate waters around Iran. As with the sinking of an unarmed Iranian naval ship on March 4 off Sri Lanka, in which at least 87 sailors were killed, the US is reaching into the Indian Ocean to intercept vessels it claims are connected to Iran.

Under the cover of a “pause” in the war, the White House is combining blockade tactics, interdiction and lethal naval actions to tighten the grip around Iran. The arrival of the Nimitz-class carrier USS George H.W. Bush and accompanying warships in the US Central Command area of responsibility, which covers

American military operations across the Middle East, is also an aspect of this strategy.

The presence of a third aircraft carrier strike group in or near the theater shows that Trump is now preparing for sustained war operations in the region. Carrier strike groups are among the most powerful tools of US military power, bringing fighter aircraft, surveillance, missile systems, destroyers and logistics support. Their deployment signals readiness for prolonged strikes, control of the seas and escalation across multiple domains.

The presence of three carrier strike groups brings a level of force which is surrounding Iran, and the Middle East as a whole, with overwhelming American naval power. The deployment of the USS George H.W. Bush and its escorts are part of the military operations that will act on the administration's "shoot and kill" order.

The resignation of Navy Secretary John Phelan late Wednesday, announced by the Pentagon, is one of the clearest signs that the war against Iran is resulting in sharp conflicts at the top of the US defense establishment. While no official reason was given for Phelan's departure, reports have pointed to differences inside the administration, and the timing strongly suggests that the conflict over the conduct of the war is intensifying.

A senior civilian naval official leaving in the middle of a major military escalation is not routine. It indicates a level of crisis within the Trump regime that is severe enough to rupture the normal chain of military command.

The forced resignation of Phelan reveals that the war is not proceeding smoothly. While the Trump administration is publicly projecting unity, the resignation portrays a deep crisis over the illegal war against Iran. When the departure of a senior military leader occurs in the middle of a war amid escalating naval operations, it is a sign of extraordinary instability and points to the likelihood of tensions over the direction of the military campaign. It comes only a month after the forcing out of Army Chief of Staff General Randy George, again at the direct order of Secretary of War Pete Hegseth.

The human toll of the war against Iran is immense. Iranian authorities have reported that the death toll has reached 3,468. Thousands of deaths in such a short period of time means widespread destruction of

infrastructure, civilian suffering and social dislocation. The impact of the killing and destruction of communities, the destabilization of the country on a massive scale will have a lasting impact.

On Thursday, Lebanese and Israeli representatives met at the White House as part of ongoing talks about the Israeli invasion and annexation of southern Lebanon. The talks reportedly extended the ceasefire in Lebanon by three weeks. However, Israel has repeatedly stated that it will not withdraw from southern Lebanon during the talks, proving that this ceasefire, like the Iran ceasefire, only applies to one side in the conflict.



To contact the WSWs and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact