

# Hegseth says Iran blockade “going global,” as US announces new sanctions on Chinese shipping

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The United States is expanding its naval blockade of Iran into a global operation against shipping in any ocean, Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth said Friday. Hours earlier the Treasury Department sanctioned a major Chinese oil refinery and 40 shipping companies for buying Iranian crude.

“Our blockade is growing and going global,” Hegseth told reporters at a Pentagon briefing on April 24. “No one sails from the Strait of Hormuz to anywhere in the world without the permission of the United States Navy.” He said 34 ships had been turned back since the blockade began this month and the U.S. Navy had seized two Iranian ships in the Indian Ocean this week.

The blockade and the sanctions are aimed at China. The U.S. Navy this week seized the M/T Tifani, a tanker carrying about 2 million barrels of Iranian crude bound for Chinese refineries, in the Bay of Bengal between Sri Lanka and the Strait of Malacca. China is the largest buyer of Iranian oil and depends on Iran for more than 10 percent of its crude supply.

The Treasury Department imposed secondary sanctions Friday on Hengli Petrochemical, a private refinery at the Chinese port of Dalian with a processing capacity of roughly 400,000 barrels per day, accusing it of buying Iranian oil. The Treasury also sanctioned 40 shipping companies and ships and froze \$344 million in cryptocurrency wallets used by Iranian intermediaries.

A spokesperson for the Chinese embassy in Washington said Friday that the sanctions “undermine international trade order and rules” and “infringe upon the legitimate rights and interests of Chinese companies and individuals.” The action came on the eve of a planned meeting between US President Donald Trump and Chinese President Xi Jinping.

General Dan Caine, the top US military officer, appearing with Hegseth, addressed ship operators worldwide: “If you do not comply with this blockade, we will use force.” US forces, Caine added, “remain postured and ready to resume major combat operations at literally a moment’s notice.”

The threats came on the day the aircraft carrier USS George H.W. Bush, accompanied by three guided-missile destroyers and 5,000 sailors, entered the Middle East war zone. It is the third aircraft carrier moved into the region by the Trump administration. The three carrier strike groups now hold more than 200 combat aircraft and 15,000 sailors and Marines. Another 4,200 Marines will arrive with the Boxer Amphibious Ready Group by the month’s end. The *Financial Times* reported it is the largest US naval buildup in the Middle East since 2004.

At the same Pentagon briefing Hegseth demanded that European governments join the war, telling them to “start doing less talking and having less fancy conferences in Europe and get in a boat.”

A Pentagon memo, authored by Under Secretary of Defense for Policy Elbridge Colby and leaked to *Politico* on April 24, proposes to formally punish NATO members who refuse to send warships to enforce the blockade. The memo recommends throwing Spain out of NATO planning meetings, putting the British claim to the Falkland Islands back into question, cutting French access to US intelligence and canceling joint exercises with the German military. The targets are treaty allies. The United States launched the war on Iran without consulting NATO or gaining authorization from the United Nations Security Council.

Israeli Defense Minister Israel Katz said Thursday

that Israel is preparing to renew its bombing of Iran. “We are awaiting a green light from the United States, first and foremost to complete the elimination of the Khamenei dynasty,” Katz said, “and additionally to return Iran to the Dark Age and the Stone Age by destroying key energy and electricity facilities and dismantling its national economic infrastructure.” When the attack resumes, Katz added, “it will be different and lethal, adding devastating blows at the most sensitive points.”

The death toll inside Iran has reached 3,375, including 376 children and 496 women, with more than 26,500 wounded, according to the *Al Jazeera* live tracker for April 25. The Iranian Red Crescent reports more than 125,000 civilian buildings damaged or destroyed. The Iranian Workers’ House reports 1.3 million jobs destroyed and 3.2 million people internally displaced.

Among targets struck in the past 48 hours: a Tehran University student dormitory in Amirabad, where the Human Rights Activists News Agency reported 14 students killed and 31 wounded; an apartment block in Bandar Abbas the US military described as a “naval logistics target”; people standing in line for bread in Ahvaz, per Tasnim and HRANA; and a Red Crescent triage station in Khorramabad. In Lebanon, the Health Ministry reports 2,491 killed and 7,719 wounded, including at least 177 children and 91 medics. CNN, citing satellite imagery analysis, says 523 buildings have come down in southern Lebanon over the past three weeks. Israeli officials, in reports by *Al Jazeera* and *Haaretz*, describe the policy as “Gazafication.”

The escalation comes as the Pentagon’s missile stockpiles fall below half their prewar level. The Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) reported this week that the US has burned through as many as 1,430 of its 2,330 prewar Patriot interceptors—over 60 percent of the stock—each priced at nearly \$4 million. “A war against a capable peer competitor like China will consume munitions at greater rates than in this war,” the report said. “Prewar inventories were already insufficient; the levels today will constrain US operations should a future conflict arise.”

The economic costs of the war are being paid by working people around the world. Brent crude oil closed Friday at \$106 a barrel, roughly 60 percent above prewar levels. Gold reached \$4,697 an ounce.

The International Energy Agency (IEA) has called the disruption to global energy markets “the worst energy crisis in history” and executed its largest coordinated reserve release ever, 400 million barrels. JPMorgan projects Brent at \$150 a barrel if the Strait of Hormuz remains closed into mid-May.

Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent told the Associated Press that Iran “in the next two, three days ... they’re going to have to start shuttering production, which will be very bad for their wells.” Republican Senator Roger Marshall of Kansas, in a Newsmax interview Wednesday, said of the embargo: “We’re literally starving them, both financially, and they can’t feed themselves either.”

In the same interview Marshall endorsed nuclear escalation. Asked whether the US “will have to go in and finish this job” if negotiations fail, he replied: “I think that’s right. Previous presidents have had the same issues on what to do. Think about President Truman’s decision on dropping the bomb, and D-Day for President Eisenhower.” Truman ordered the nuclear destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.



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