

# Facing mounting crisis, Trump reverses course on escorting ships through the Strait of Hormuz

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US President Donald Trump announced Tuesday evening that he was pausing the day-old US military operation to escort commercial ships through the Strait of Hormuz “for a short period of time,” claiming what he said was “great progress” toward an agreement with Iran.

The reversal, posted to Trump’s Truth Social platform, came only hours after Secretary of State Marco Rubio had insisted at a White House briefing that the United States was now “fully focused” on the new mission and that the war on Iran had moved into a separate, post-combat phase.

“The operation is over. Epic Fury—as the president notified Congress—we’re done with that stage of it,” Rubio told reporters. “We’re now onto this Project of Freedom.”

Hours later, the project Rubio had just declared the focus of US efforts was suspended. At the same time, the US blockade of Iranian ports, Trump said, would “remain in full force and effect.”

The reversal came amid a deepening crisis for the Trump administration. Iran has effectively closed the Strait of Hormuz, the chokepoint through which roughly a fifth of the world’s seaborne oil and gas passed before the war the United States and Israel launched on February 28. Some 1,600 commercial vessels carrying 20,000 seafarers remain trapped in the Persian Gulf; before the war, around 130 ships transited the strait each day.

Trump announced the escort operation Sunday, with the US Navy guiding commercial ships along a pathway declared free of Iranian mines. The cease-fire that had held for nearly four weeks broke down within hours. Iranian forces shot at two commercial vessels

Monday; the missiles were intercepted by US forces.

In two days of the escort operation, only three commercial ships made it through: two Monday and one Tuesday. The first US-flagged vessel to exit, the Maersk-operated Alliance Fairfax, transited Monday under what the Pentagon called a defensive “umbrella” of guided-missile destroyers, fighters, helicopters, drones and 15,000 service members. US forces shot down Iranian cruise missiles and drones and destroyed six Iranian speedboats, according to US Central Command. A senior Iranian military official denied on state media that any boats had been sunk.

The same day, Iran fired drones and missiles at the United Arab Emirates and Oman. The attacks left three Indian sailors injured at an oil industrial zone in Fujairah; an oil tanker was struck; and air defense missiles detonated overhead in Dubai. Two people were injured in the Omani coastal town of Bukha. The UAE imposed airspace restrictions through May 11 and reported GPS jamming. They were the first such strikes on the UAE since a fragile cease-fire took effect on April 8. Iran neither claimed nor denied them.

Iran on Tuesday announced a new “Persian Gulf Strait Authority” to oversee traffic in the waterway, requiring vessels to obtain transit permits by email. Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps Navy warned that the only safe route was an Iranian-designated corridor and that “action” would be taken against ships deviating from it.

The *Telegraph* reported Tuesday that the US offer of protection had not allayed the fears of stranded seafarers. An Iranian high-explosive drone fired at a tanker hugging the Omani coast would reach impact in around twenty minutes; an Iranian sea-skimming

missile would reach the same target in under a minute. US Central Command commander Adm. Bradley Cooper acknowledged that no ship was being directly escorted: “There’s no specific escort.”

“Two days after Donald Trump announced the start of Operation Project Freedom there has been little sign so far that vessels have rushed to take the chance and make a break for it,” the *Telegraph* reported. Maritime experts told the *Telegraph* that commercial ship owners and their insurers remained unclear how the US protection would work, or whether it would be effective.

Underlying the reversal is a deepening strategic crisis. A *New York Times* analysis Tuesday by Steven Erlanger, “Trump Looks for a Silver Bullet to End the Iran War. There May Be None,” documented Trump’s serial pivots: airstrikes meant to “obliterate” the nuclear program in June 2025; the February air campaign with Israel meant to force regime change; the blockade of Iranian shipping; now the escort operation. Each has failed to break Iranian resistance.

A Reuters analysis by Matt Spetalnick concluded that the standoff “could leave Trump worse off than before he went to war.” Jon Alterman of the Center for Strategic and International Studies told Reuters: “Iran has realized that, even in a weakened state, it can shut off the Strait at will.”

A *New York Times* analysis Tuesday by David E. Sanger, “White House Insists Iran War Is Over, Even While Missiles Fly,” documented the gap between the administration’s claims and the reality on the ground. “For the White House, the insistence that the war was over was the latest rhetorical leap in an effort to put a war that has created the greatest political crisis of Mr. Trump’s presidency in the rearview mirror,” Sanger wrote. “But the mere proclamation does not make it true. Missiles were still flying. Both sides insist they control traffic in the waterway.”

The Democratic Party and the establishment press have criticized Trump from the right—condemning his failure to secure the Strait of Hormuz rather than the criminal character of the war itself. The *New York Times* editorial board wrote last month that “Iran continues to defy a central part of the deal and block most traffic from crossing the Strait of Hormuz. Mr. Trump’s irresponsibility has left the United States on the cusp of a humiliating strategic defeat.”

The Pentagon hit roughly 13,000 targets in 38 days of combat operations. Of the five major war goals Trump stated on February 28—preventing Iran from ever getting a nuclear weapon, destroying its ballistic missiles and launchers, sinking its navy, ending its support for Hezbollah and Hamas, and creating conditions for the Iranian people to topple their government—only the destruction of the Iranian navy has been accomplished.

Trump’s own language has shifted. He called the war a “miniwar” at a White House small-business event Monday; in earlier speeches he has called it an “excursion” and a “detour.” On the eve of the cease-fire he had warned that “a whole civilization will die tonight, never to be brought back again.”

Gen. Dan Caine, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said Tuesday that Iran has attacked US forces more than ten times since the cease-fire took effect, but that the attacks have all been “below the threshold of restarting major combat operations.” Caine acknowledged that defining the threshold “is a political decision.” Pressed by reporters hours later to specify it, Trump said, “You’ll find out, because I’ll let you know.”

The Pentagon said the war so far has cost \$25 billion, with lawmakers expecting the administration to ask Congress for another \$100 billion later this year. Hegseth will testify next week on a roughly \$1.5 trillion fiscal year 2027 Pentagon budget request.



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