

US attacks two Iranian-flagged tankers as Trump escalates war ahead of China summit

Andre Damon
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US Navy aircraft attacked two Iranian-flagged oil tankers in the Gulf of Oman on Friday as part of the US naval blockade of Iran, in the latest escalation of the war. F/A-18 Super Hornets launched from the aircraft carrier USS George H.W. Bush fired precision munitions into the smokestacks of the M/T Sea Star III and M/T Sevda, disabling the vessels. A third Iranian tanker, the M/T Hasna, was disabled in the same way on Wednesday.

The strikes followed by one day the first US strikes on Iranian territory since the April 8 truce. On Thursday, US forces hit Iranian military targets at Bandar Abbas and on Qeshm Island after Iran fired missiles, drones and small boats at three US Navy destroyers transiting the Strait of Hormuz.

Hours after Thursday's strikes, US President Donald Trump issued what was widely understood as a nuclear threat against Iran. Speaking to reporters at the Lincoln Memorial Reflecting Pool in Washington, Trump said: "You're just going to have to look at one big glow coming out of Iran, and they better sign their agreement fast."

The war the United States and Israel launched on Iran on February 28 is in its 70th day. The Pentagon hit roughly 13,000 targets in 38 days of combat operations. The Iranian government has reported 81,000 civilian structures damaged, including 275 medical facilities. The Iranian Human Rights Activists News Agency has documented 3,636 Iranian deaths through April 7, including 1,701 civilians. Israel has reported 24 killed and 7,791 wounded by Iranian missile attacks. Thirteen US troops have been killed and more than 400 wounded; *The Intercept* has reported the actual toll is at least 15. At least nine Gulf state nationals have been killed in Iranian strikes on the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and Oman.

The war's regional dimensions continue to expand. Israel has been bombing Lebanon throughout the cease-fire it agreed to in November 2024, with operations sharply intensifying in recent days. Israeli forces struck Beirut's southern suburbs on Wednesday—the first attack near the Lebanese capital since the cease-fire began—targeting the commander of Hezbollah's elite Radwan Force in the Haret Hreik neighborhood. Israeli strikes across southern and eastern Lebanon have killed at least 13 people in recent days. Israeli jets struck Beirut at 3:00 a.m. local time and the Israeli military issued evacuation orders for civilians across more than 50 villages in southern Lebanon and the Beqaa Valley.

The escalation comes a week before Trump is to meet Chinese President Xi Jinping in Beijing on May 14. The summit will take place as the United States enforces what Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth has called an "iron-clad" naval blockade running from the Gulf of Oman "to the open oceans"—a posture that places effective restrictions on Chinese-flagged shipping calling at Iranian ports and on the seaborne oil trade that supplies the Chinese economy. The blockade now holds an estimated 70 tankers in custody with a combined capacity of 166 million barrels, valued at more than \$13 billion.

China sources approximately a third of its crude oil through the Strait of Hormuz and receives 37.7 percent of all oil that passes through the chokepoint, more than any other country. China is the largest buyer of Iranian oil, taking more than 80 percent of Iran's seaborne exports in 2025. Iranian crude accounted for roughly 12 percent of China's total imported crude last year. Hegseth has called the Iranian blockade "a gift to the world" and said the United States will maintain it "as long as it takes."

The United States has failed to achieve its stated

objectives of crippling the Iranian military and overthrowing its government. US intelligence assessments have concluded that the war has produced “limited new damage” to Iran’s nuclear program; Iran’s stockpile of approximately 440 kilograms of highly enriched uranium—enough for an estimated 10 weapons—remains intact in deeply buried sites that US munitions cannot penetrate. Roughly half of Iran’s prewar conventional missile force has survived. The Iranian government has not been dislodged, and Iran continues to control the Strait of Hormuz.

Iran has inflicted serious damage on US assets across the region. Sixteen US bases have taken Iranian fire since the war began. The Al Udeid Air Base in Qatar lost a \$1 billion radar; Prince Sultan Air Base in Saudi Arabia was struck on March 27, wounding 12 US soldiers and destroying an AWACS aircraft; the Fifth Fleet headquarters in Bahrain was hit on the war’s first day. Nearly half of US Patriot interceptor stocks have been expended, and more than half of THAAD interceptor stocks. Replacement timelines are three to four years.

The depth of the strategic crisis was underscored by a Reuters report published Thursday by Idrees Ali, Erin Banco, and Hatem Maher that the Central Intelligence Agency has assessed Iran can withstand the US blockade for approximately four more months.

The cost of the war is also soaring far beyond the Pentagon’s official numbers. In a *New York Times* op-ed published Friday, “Hegseth Says This War Has Cost \$25 Billion. I Talled Up the True Amount,” University of Michigan economist Justin Wolfers wrote: “The best any economist can do right now is get the order of magnitude right, and my math suggests the Iran war will cost hundreds of billions of dollars, and very possibly trillions.”

Wolfers’s calculation includes munitions, ship and aircraft losses, the readiness backlog at Patriot and THAAD plants, the carrier-deployment surge across CENTCOM and the macroeconomic damage to the US economy from the energy shock and consumer-price spike.

In the face of this debacle, significant sections of the US ruling class are demanding a military escalation by Trump.

The *Wall Street Journal* editorial board, in a piece headlined “Iran Tests Trump’s Will to Fight,” wrote

that “by signaling a deep reluctance to restart major military operations, he encouraged the Iranians to hold out for better terms. By keeping the cease-fire on life support even now, Mr. Trump sends the same message. But rather than wait for Iran, the U.S. could at least resume guiding commercial ships out of the Strait. The regime needs to know it is losing its leverage.”

Marc Thiessen, in a *Washington Post* op-ed published Thursday, “Trump risks snatching defeat from the jaws of victory in Iran,” called for a sweeping escalation. “So, what should Trump do? Simple: finish what he started,” Thiessen wrote.

Resume Project Freedom... If Iran fires at the U.S. or threatens the energy infrastructure of our Gulf allies again, retaliate by striking Iran’s energy infrastructure on Kharg Island, through which over 90 percent of Iran’s oil passes. Then give Israel the green light to resume combat operations, striking leadership, weapons and energy targets across Iran... If Iran still won’t capitulate, Trump can launch a final barrage of strikes... and then begin covert operations to arm the Iranian people to overthrow the regime.

A further escalation of military violence, far from resolving the crisis facing the Trump administration, would only deepen it.



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