

# US imperialism's debacle in Iran

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On Sunday, the United States and Iran announced a ceasefire agreement in the war that the Trump administration launched on February 28. Despite killing more than 3,000 Iranians and triggering a global food and energy crisis, the United States has failed to achieve the objectives for which it went to war.

A “memorandum of understanding” was digitally signed on Sunday, and a formal signing ceremony is scheduled for Friday in Switzerland. The 60-day framework reportedly provides for the reopening of the Strait of Hormuz, the removal of the US naval blockade and the immediate suspension of military operations, including in Lebanon. It commits both sides to subsequent negotiations on Iran’s nuclear program, sanctions and regional security.

Whether the agreement actually holds remains uncertain. The actual text has not been released. Iran has claimed that some \$25 billion in frozen Iranian assets have been unfrozen, which the US has disputed. Trump has reiterated that “Iran will never have a nuclear weapon” and warned that the United States “could attack Iran again if negotiations fail.” Israel, not a party to the agreement, has rejected it and continued strikes on Lebanon the same day.

Regardless, the outcome represents an unqualified debacle for American imperialism. It is a case of a schoolyard bully picking a fight and winding up with a black eye. The Iranian government remains in power. Its nuclear program is intact. The most concrete deliverable is the reopening of the Strait of Hormuz, a reversion to the prewar status quo.

There is a staggering chasm between the braggadocio with which the war was launched and the reality of its outcome. Trump promised the war would end with Iran’s “unconditional surrender.” Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth declared on March 2 that the United States was waging “the most lethal ... air power campaign in history” with “no stupid rules of

engagement.” Days later he promised reporters “death and destruction from the sky, all day long.”

Having spent the year trying to bring the Iranian government down and calling on Iranians in February to “take over your government,” Trump told the *Wall Street Journal* on Sunday: “I never cared about regime change.”

The media is filled with commentary about the defeat of American imperialism. The *Wall Street Journal* has called it “a strategic retreat short of achieving his war aims.” It is the operational demonstration, before the world, that the period of unchallenged American dominance that began with the dissolution of the USSR in 1991 has come to an end.

The political character of the American ruling class’s response is captured in the editorial published by the *New York Times*, speaking for the Democratic Party, under the headline “President Trump Lost This War.” The *Times*’ concern is not that the war was waged through mass murder and assassination, but that it *failed*.

“Mr. Trump made a terrible mistake starting this war,” the editorial declares. “He prosecuted it recklessly and in open defiance of the law. The United States is emerging weaker—militarily, diplomatically and economically—and will pay strategic costs for years to come.” The *Times* bemoans the fact that “On balance, Iran emerges the strategic winner of the four-month war.” The American military “has shown itself unable to quash a much smaller opponent even as it burned through many of its long-range precision missiles and interceptors. The outcome damages this country’s ability to deter other potential adversaries.”

The editorial’s prescription boils down to the statement: “The Pentagon will also need to modernize and prepare for the wars of the future.”

The wars of the future. The *Times* takes for granted the framework of permanent imperial

confrontation, above all, with China and Russia, for which the Pentagon must “modernize and prepare.” What is in question is only the competence with which the framework is administered.

The Democratic congressional response operates within the same framework. Senator Chris Murphy called the deal “essentially surrender to Iran.” Representative Seth Moulton called it “basically a surrender document from Donald Trump to the supreme leader of Iran.” Senator Jack Reed complained that the United States was getting “less than what we had under the JCPOA,” the Obama-era nuclear deal. The Democrats endorsed the war when it was launched. They complain about it now only because it ended without Iran being destroyed.

There was enormous popular opposition to the war, but this found absolutely no expression within the framework of official politics.

The end of this stage of the war does not mean the end of the war. American imperialism will prepare new wars to recover its position. The 2015 JCPOA framework established under Obama was ended by Trump in 2018 and paved the way for the 2026 war. The 2026 ceasefire framework will pave the way for the war that follows.

The most significant consequences of the debacle, however, will be the consequences within the United States.

The war was launched, in part, in an attempt to stop the structural decline of American capitalism. The European Central Bank reported this month that gold has overtaken the euro to become the world’s second-largest reserve asset, at 27 percent of global reserves, up from 20 percent a year earlier. The federal debt crossed 100 percent of GDP in March for the first time since 1946. The failure of the war has accelerated the dollar’s decline and deepened the structural crisis the war was meant to resolve.

The war was launched against the backdrop of escalating social conflict. In the weeks before the war began, mass demonstrations against ICE intensified after the murder of Renée Nicole Good, a 37-year-old poet, and Alex Pretti, a 37-year-old nurse, by federal agents in Minneapolis. The Trump administration’s launching of the war was, among other things, an attempt to deflect this mounting opposition into the channels of patriotic war fever.

Social opposition will now escalate, and it will be increasingly centered in the working class. Auto parts workers at American Axle struck this month. Railroaders, meatpackers, teachers and nurses have walked out. Wall Street rose on news of the deal Sunday, but fuel and food prices remain far above their prewar levels. PCE (Personal Consumption Expenditures) inflation has hit 3.8 percent, the fastest pace since 2021. Consumer sentiment is at all-time lows, worse than during the Great Recession or the pandemic.

Workers have absorbed the costs of the war through rising prices while the corporations profited. The economic impact will provide fuel for class conflict for years to come, in the United States and internationally. The same crisis that produces the war is producing a global movement of the working class against it.

The Trump administration will respond to deepening social opposition with the methods it has demonstrated: ICE raids, mass detention infrastructure, the deployment of the National Guard against domestic protest, the criminalization of political opposition and the consolidation of authoritarian state power. The defeat in Iran will not moderate this trajectory. It will intensify it. The American ruling class, confronted with the failure of its imperialist offensive abroad, will turn with renewed savagery against the working class at home.

The task is the construction of an independent political movement of the working class that is international in scope, socialist in program and politically conscious in its objectives.



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