

Trump's threat to "annihilate" Iran: The criminalization of imperialist foreign policy

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US President Donald Trump told the United Nations General Assembly on Tuesday that he is deciding whether to "annihilate the Islamic Republic" of Iran and "drive them into hell with no chance of survival."

The American president asked: "Do I annihilate the Islamic Republic and do it quickly, never giving them a chance to kill and destroy people and countries again?"

Trump's murderous language marks a new stage in the criminalization of imperialist foreign policy amid the eruption of global war. It is without precedent in modern politics outside the discourse of Adolf Hitler's regime, which waged a *Vernichtungskrieg*, a war of annihilation, against the Soviet Union.

Unlike Trump, however, Hitler did not announce his war of extermination in public. He gave the order in private, to his generals. On March 30, 1941, in a closed meeting with some 200 senior officers, he told them the coming invasion would be a *Vernichtungskampf*, "a war of extermination," according to the diary of his army chief of staff, Franz Halder.

The extermination of the population of Iran, which has resisted Trump's efforts to subjugate the country through war, is in fact being actively discussed at the White House. The journalist Seymour Hersh reported on June 10 that Trump had raised using nuclear weapons against Iran, a country of 93 million people, in a secret meeting with his senior staff.

Trump's criminal war of aggression against Iran had killed at least 3,468 people and wounded more than 26,500 by June 10, according to Iran's Health Ministry. Last week, a UN fact-finding mission found "reasonable grounds to believe that the United States committed war crimes," citing the US missile attack on February 28 on an elementary school in Minab that killed more than 150 people, 120 of them children.

The war against Iran is one component of the US-Israeli onslaught throughout the Middle East, whose highest

expression is the genocide in Gaza, which has killed 73,919 Palestinians, according to Gaza's Health Ministry.

The threat against Iran was one item in a series. Trump boasted that the US military had penetrated "deep into the Venezuelan capital" and "arrested" Maduro, and that the reward was "the largest oil deal in history," 65 billion barrels. "To the victor belong the spoils," Trump declared. Cuba "is an absolutely failed state ... and it will fall." Greenland is to pass under the "permanent control" of the United States, with two "very major military bases."

During Trump's speech, only the delegations of Iran and Cuba, whose government Trump threatened to overthrow, left the hall in protest. The representatives of the European imperialist powers, for all their constant talk of democracy and human rights, sat there and did nothing. Khalilur Rahman, the Bangladeshi foreign minister who presides over the Assembly, thanked the American president.

The UN Charter was signed in San Francisco on June 26, 1945, seven weeks after the surrender of Nazi Germany, "to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war, which twice in our lifetime has brought untold sorrow to mankind."

Its Article 2 binds every member to "refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state." Trump's speech was such a threat, made in the building constructed to outlaw it by the leader of a state almost seven months into an illegal war of aggression. Trump's speech itself is indictable as a violation of international law.

The European counterpoint to Trump was given Tuesday by French President Emmanuel Macron, who spoke of "the return of imperialism, of arrogance, the return of unrestrained force which knows no rules ... A world in which some believe that they can undermine the

international order so as to push their borders outwards.”

He added, “War crimes have been industrialized. We’ve seen the destruction of civilian infrastructure, human rights violations.”

But while some commentators took his remarks as a veiled critique of Trump, he never named the American president. Rather, his speech was a vocal and explicit denunciation of Russia and a declaration of intent to continue, alongside Trump, to fund and arm Ukraine.

Macron declared that “Russia has been waging a cruel war on civilians. It’s been occupying the territory of a sovereign state. France will continue providing unstinting support” for Ukraine in its war against Russia.

In Macron’s view, the appropriate response to Russia’s “imperialism” and “war crimes” is for the European imperialist powers to intensify their war against Russia. Macron made no effort to square his claims that the war against Russia is a war for democracy with the fact that Trump, his ally in that war, had just threatened to exterminate the population of an entire country.

In 1920 Lenin described the League of Nations, the UN’s predecessor, as “a league of mad dogs who are snatching each other’s bones.” The phrase is perhaps somewhat quaint. The UN General Assembly of 2026 is an active planning center for war.

After meeting Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky the same day, Macron announced a contract to supply Ukraine with radars and air-defense missiles, the *Kyiv Independent* reported Tuesday. Trump, for his part, also met Zelensky on Tuesday and confirmed that the manufacture of Patriot air-defense missiles in Ukraine was under discussion.

As the Trump-Zelensky meeting opened, a British reporter told Trump that “a lot of people in the UK are very worried about the mood music from the UK and other European leaders about the inevitability of direct conflict between us and Russia,” and asked: “Can you stop that happening?” Trump refused to give a serious answer.

In fact, Trump’s blood-curdling threats against Iran, and the fact that they provoked no serious protest among the leaders of the imperialist powers, demonstrate the extent to which global war, and its corollary, the extermination of entire populations, has been normalized by world capitalism.

The Democrats are not an alternative to this warmongering. Just days earlier, they had given Trump a blank check to escalate the war not only against Russia but against Iran. On September 16, 58 House Democrats

voted for the Lindsey O. Graham Sanctioning Russia and Iran Act, which authorizes the president to tax imports from China, India and the other largest purchasers of Russian oil at rates as high as 100 percent and extends for five years the sanctions on Iran’s energy and arms sectors. Thirty-six of the 45 Senate Democrats had voted for it on August 7.

House Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries voted no because, he said, the bill did not go far enough against Russia: “You have to confront the bully, not appease the bully.” A Democratic majority in Congress after November 3 would take the war further and faster.

The day before his speech, Trump met New York Mayor Zohran Mamdani, a member of the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA), at Gracie Mansion. Mamdani said nothing about the war and told reporters: “We appreciate the president’s commitment to the city.”

Trump began his speech by boasting of “the golden age of America,” declaring, “The entire world is being lifted by the wealth, strength, spirit, and momentum of a newly energized and a very powerful United States of America.”

In fact, Trump presides over a social order and political system that is rotting on its feet—what Trotsky described on the eve of World War II as “the death agony of capitalism.” The same crisis is producing its opposite: the growth of social opposition, mass protests and global class struggle.

The opposition to Trump’s criminal warmongering will come neither from the European imperialist powers nor from the Democrats and their accomplices in the DSA. It will come from the international working class, armed with the program of international socialism.



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