Trump administration sends aircraft carrier and up to 10,000 troops toward Iran, threatens to resume bombing

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The Trump administration is sending the aircraft carrier USS Theodore Roosevelt and three amphibious warships carrying about 2,000 Marines to the Middle East. The ships will reinforce the US forces arrayed against Iran with as many as 10,000 sailors and Marines, the *Wall Street Journal* and Bloomberg News reported Thursday, citing US officials.

The deployment follows US President Donald Trump's threat before the UN General Assembly on September 22 to "annihilate the Islamic Republic and do it quickly" and to "drive them into hell with no chance of survival and no hope of future greatness or generations." Two days later, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu told the General Assembly that Iran's "murderous regime will be toppled," declaring: "This evil regime will fall, and we will all celebrate that day."

The buildup puts the White House on a course to massively accelerate the war following the US midterm elections on November 3, which are expected to reflect the overwhelming unpopularity of the war among workers and young people. But while the Democrats may be the beneficiaries of the elections, they have pledged, like Trump, to ensure the subjugation of Iran to American interests.

The *Journal* reported September 25 that Trump "has told aides he expects to resume bombing Iran after the November midterms." The *Journal* wrote Thursday, citing US officials, that the ships would arrive by late November.

Bloomberg, citing a US official, wrote that the deployment "gives American commanders more options if President Donald Trump chooses to escalate attacks on Iran."

Axios quoted a US official Thursday as saying the region "could potentially have up to three aircraft carrier strike groups. This is much more firepower."

The Roosevelt sailed from San Diego on Sunday, and the USS Makin Island amphibious group followed on Monday. Whether the Roosevelt will add to the carriers already in the region or replace one of them has not been decided, Axios reported, citing a second official. The United States already has more than 50,000 troops in the region.

In recent weeks the Trump administration has also sent two more Patriot missile batteries to Saudi Arabia and Qatar, Axios reported Thursday, to protect energy facilities "in case President Trump decides to resume major combat operations against Iran."

Asked by reporters on Wednesday about Iran's leaders, Trump said, according to CBS News: "We have to make that decision: We blow them up or make a deal."

On Thursday, as he left the White House, Trump said: "They'll either sign a very fair deal, or they won't exist any longer," The Hill reported.

In an interview with Time magazine conducted Monday and published Thursday, Trump was asked whether he would "ramp up bombing after the midterms." He answered: "Possible."

Pressed again, Trump said: "We have a lot of weapons. You know, we've been stocking up for the last six months." Reminded of his threat at the UN to "annihilate" Iran, he said: "Yeah, I would do that. It's possible."

Dominant sections of the US media are agitating for an escalation of the war.

In an editorial headlined "The Battle of Hormuz Is

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Turning," the *Journal's* editors declared Thursday that the US military had "turned around the battle of the Strait of Hormuz." They wrote: "This is what progress looks like: Iran's oil is blocked while the world's oil increasingly gets through."

The editorial concluded: "The challenge now is to sustain the pressure and push the US tactical advantage to accomplish strategic objectives—finishing the nuclear program or the regime itself."

At least five tankers have come under attack in or near the Strait since Monday, the shipping news site Riviera reported Friday. On Thursday the Kuwaiti supertanker Kazimah III caught fire after it was struck by what the UK Maritime Trade Operations center called "an unknown projectile."

The US Navy has blockaded Iran's ports since July. By Wednesday it had redirected 125 commercial ships, according to the US military, and on September 26 Trump boasted that the blockade was "a wall of steel."

Reuters reported Thursday, citing three senior Iranian officials and an insider, that Iran is preparing "a broader and more forceful response if the United States resumes large-scale military attacks." According to the news agency, "Senior commanders are reviewing plans to expand potential targets beyond US-linked assets to countries that support US military operations and possibly to locations outside the Middle East."

Official figures compiled by Al Jazeera count at least 3,527 people killed in Iran by US and Israeli bombing between February 28, when the two powers launched the war, and August 28. By September 28, the US military had counted 19 American service members dead and 861 wounded.

Leading Democrats spent the past week attacking Trump for losing the war and for "weakness" toward China.

Democratic Senator Ruben Gallego of Arizona told CNN on Wednesday that Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth should be "figuring out how to win this war in Iran."

Democratic Representative Jake Auchincloss of Massachusetts accused Trump of losing the war in an interview with CNN on September 25. Trump, he said, had sent Russian President Vladimir Putin and Chinese President Xi Jinping a message "of appeasement and weakness."

In remarks on Capitol Hill about Xi's state visit last week, aired Sunday on "Fox News Sunday," Democratic Senator Richard Blumenthal of Connecticut denounced Trump for "feting and celebrating Xi while he is aiding Iran, which is trying to kill our sons and daughters." He said he was "shocked and deeply alarmed that the president, in effect, is kowtowing to him and failing to release the money that Taiwan needs to defend itself."

Democratic Senator Mark Kelly of Arizona, interviewed Sunday on ABC's "This Week," declared: "We can't leave the Strait in the hands of the Iranians."

The buildup against Iran is proceeding alongside the escalation of the US-NATO war against Russia, which Moscow has answered with the threat to use nuclear weapons if NATO moves to cut off Kaliningrad, the Russian exclave on the Baltic Sea between Poland and Lithuania.

"Russia would be ready to use all its arsenal, including nuclear weapons, to defend its territory if NATO countries try to isolate Kaliningrad region from the rest of the country," the Russian embassy in Ireland wrote on September 29.

Russian President Vladimir Putin repeated the threat Thursday at the annual meeting of the Valdai Discussion Club, a Russian foreign-policy forum. "If it comes to a direct attack on the Russian Federation—in this case, Kaliningrad, although it could potentially involve other territories as well—the question of Russia using all the weapons at its disposal would inevitably and immediately arise," he said.

Asked about Russia's warning at a Euronews conference in Brussels on Wednesday, NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte responded: "We will defend every inch of NATO territory."

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