

Middle East war**US hits tanker heading for Kharg Island under renewed Iran blockade**

Military clashes over control of Strait of Hormuz threaten global oil supplies



US President Donald Trump has vowed to continue striking Iran this week and next week © US Navy/Getty Images

Steff Chávez in Washington

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The US has struck a tanker headed for Iran's oil export hub Kharg Island, the first time American forces have fired on a commercial vessel since reimposing their blockade of the Islamic republic's ports.

The tanker "ignored multiple warnings as it attempted to violate the US blockade" so American "aircraft disabled the vessel after firing Hellfire missiles into the ship's smokestack", said US Central Command, which oversees military operations in the Middle East.

The disabling of the Curaçao-flagged M/T Belma marks the latest action in escalating clashes between Tehran and Washington over control of the Strait of Hormuz, through which a fifth of the world's oil and natural gas flowed before the conflict.

The US launched two rounds of strikes against Iran on Wednesday, the eighth and ninth salvos since President Donald Trump resumed air strikes just over a week ago.

The renewed military exchanges have largely shut the strait, ending a brief surge of shipments through the waterway. Trump last month lifted the blockade of Iran's ports, which had been in force since April, as part of a shortlived ceasefire deal with Tehran.

The US has blamed Iran for breaking the ceasefire with its attacks on shipping trying to transit the strait. Iran attacked seven commercial ships in the first week of the renewed hostilities, according to Centcom commander Admiral Brad Cooper.

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Footage release by US Central Command shows American forces striking a vessel © CENTCOM/X

Trump has vowed to continue striking Iran this week and next week. Centcom on Wednesday said that in the first 24 hours of the reimposed blockade, US forces have also turned around two other commercial ships.

“They want to settle so badly,” Trump said during an event at the US Army War College on Wednesday. “They don’t like what we’re doing and they do want to settle. We’ll find out whether or not we settle with them, or we just finish it off.”

“They’re nasty people. They want to make a deal,” the president said, adding that “today we gave them a little daytime shot”.

Trump told Fox Business, as he travelled to the college, that “we received a call just as I was coming here . . . They want to meet. They always want to meet.”

Iran has retaliated against the US’s strikes by launching attacks on American military targets and neighbouring Gulf countries.

Oil prices fell sharply after the ceasefire was announced last month, dropping from about \$100 a barrel to just above \$70. Brent crude was up 0.5 per cent at \$85.38 in Asian trade on Thursday.

Trump said the price of oil has gone up “because I had to take tough action because [Iran] did not obey what they’re supposed to obey . . . So we took a little action”.

But “when that settles down, I think you’re going to have \$55 oil”, Trump added.

“We’ll have Iran defeated soon. They’ll be defeated very soon,” he said.

Later on Wednesday, the president posted on Truth Social that an American held in Iran since December 2024 had been released.

“She is now safely outside of Iran, and in good condition. The United States of America appreciates this gesture of Goodwill by Iran!” he wrote.

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Steff Chávez