

Trump Says He Is Reimposing the U.S. Blockade of Iran

Oil rises sharply as U.S. move amplifies tensions in the standoff over control of Hormuz

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Vessels in the Strait of Hormuz. Razieh Poudat/ISNA/Associated Press

President Trump said Monday he is reimposing the U.S. blockade on Iranian shipping, escalating a standoff over control of the strategic Strait of Hormuz.

His comments came after the U.S. launched additional strikes against [Iran](#), which defied American demands that it publicly declare the strait open and instead closed the waterway. Oil prices jumped, with Brent crude [trading more than 8% higher](#). Speaking later in a radio

interview with Hugh Hewitt, Trump said U.S. forces would resume strikes against [Iran](#) on Monday.

“We’re going to hit them very hard tonight, and we’re gonna hit them hard tomorrow. And there’s not a damn thing they can do about it.”

The president also said he is weighing strikes on Pickaxe Mountain, the location for a highly fortified tunnel complex near the Natanz nuclear-enrichment facility. At Pickaxe Mountain, Iran could potentially do nuclear work out of reach of even the most powerful U.S. weapons.

He said it was a target “for a nice big fat shot right in the front door.” Trump added, “We’re going to take out Pickaxe Mountain. Tell the Iranians to be ready.”

Trump asserted that the strait remains open under American protection and said the U.S. would charge 20% of every cargo shipment as compensation for its costs. He didn’t detail how that would work but said procedures would be formulated immediately. In a statement posted later on social media, U.S. Central Command said American forces would resume the blockade of Iranian ports at 4 p.m. ET on Tuesday.

“The U.S.A. will be, from this point forward, known as ‘THE GUARDIAN OF THE HORMUZ STRAIT,’” the president said on social media.

Iran’s armed forces said, “We will under no circumstances allow the United States to interfere in the management of the Strait of Hormuz.”

The dueling comments signal the likelihood of a continued standoff over control of the strait that is undermining Trump’s deal and adding further pressure on global oil markets.

They come after several days of [back-and-forth strikes](#) that started after Iran fired on ships last week to stop traffic using a U.S.-backed route through the strait. The skirmishes represented the highest level of military activity between the two foes since the ceasefire went into effect last month.

Trump’s announcement that the U.S. would collect payments contradicts what top officials in his administration have been saying for weeks about the legality of charging tolls to transit the waterway.

“It’s an international waterway. No country is allowed to charge tolls or fees on an international waterway,” Secretary of State Marco Rubio said on June 23 in Abu Dhabi. “That’s existing international law.”

That same month, U.S. Ambassador to the U.N. Mike Waltz called it “completely unacceptable and frankly illegal in international law” for Iran to charge a toll. A June 25 statement by the U.S. and Gulf partners issued by the State Department rejected “any tolls, fees, or attempts to assert control over the Strait.”

The rising risks for shipowners are already cutting short a recovery in traffic that began after Trump signed the deal on June 17.

Data firm Kpler, which tracks ships via satellite imagery and other data, said confirmed traffic through the Strait of Hormuz over the weekend fell by more than half from the previous weekend, to just 19 ships a day, similar to levels that prevailed before the preliminary peace deal was signed. Most ships used the channel approved by Iran or clandestine routes, while traffic through the corridor near Oman backed by the U.S. dried up, Kpler said.

Analysts say [taking over Hormuz militarily](#) would require a substantial ground invasion or a risky naval operation. Trump so far has decided against that route, which risks high U.S. casualties.

Trump's [memorandum of understanding](#) with Iran was aimed at opening the Strait of Hormuz diplomatically to ease pressure on the global economy. It initially pushed oil prices down sharply, but also set off a test of wills that has escalated into regular exchanges of fire.

The [root of the dispute](#) is Paragraph 5, which says Iran will make arrangements to restore shipping through the strategic waterway and then work with Oman to determine how to administer it in the future. But it also includes an Iranian pledge to ensure safe passage and remove military obstacles such as mines.



A target during strikes on Iran in an image from a video released by U.S. Central Command. U.S. Central Command/Reuters

Senior Trump administration officials said Friday that the text clearly requires Iran to open

the strait and stop shooting at ships. Iranian hard-liners, however, have used it to push for exclusive control over the waterway as a source of leverage.

Iran has been pressuring Oman, which controls the southern side of the strait, to go along with its plan to take control. Instead, Oman has been operating a channel through the strategic waterway that runs through its territorial waters and skirts the lanes managed by Tehran.

During a visit by Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi on Saturday, Oman offered a compromise under which no tolls would be charged in Oman's territorial waters and Iran would decide what it wants for its own maritime corridor, a Middle East official said.

Iran rejected the compromise. The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps signaled its displeasure with the idea by firing at ships in the waterway, and Iranian state media condemned the outcome of the meeting as a result of U.S. pressure.

Iran struck Oman during the exchanges of fire in recent days, escalating the conflict. The Middle East official said Iran hit the port town of Duqm and an Omani naval base in Musandam, which serves as an operations center for monitoring traffic in the strait.

Tit-for-tat exchanges between the two sides intensified over the weekend, with the American military responding to Iranian attacks on shipping with strikes on a range of targets and Tehran retaliating against several of Washington's regional allies.

Iran fired at sites in Kuwait, Bahrain and Qatar.

About 20% of the world's oil flowed through the strait before Iran effectively shut it down during the war. Trump administration officials have grown pessimistic about negotiations with Tehran and frustrated by Iran's continued attacks on ships.

On Friday, the senior officials told reporters that a nuclear deal was increasingly unlikely and warned that there would be serious consequences if Iran didn't guarantee safe passage for ships.

The military said the U.S. has helped facilitate the successful transit of more than 800 commercial vessels and 380 million barrels of crude oil since early May, even as Iran threatened ships transiting without its permission.

Shipping traffic, however, remains well below prewar levels.