

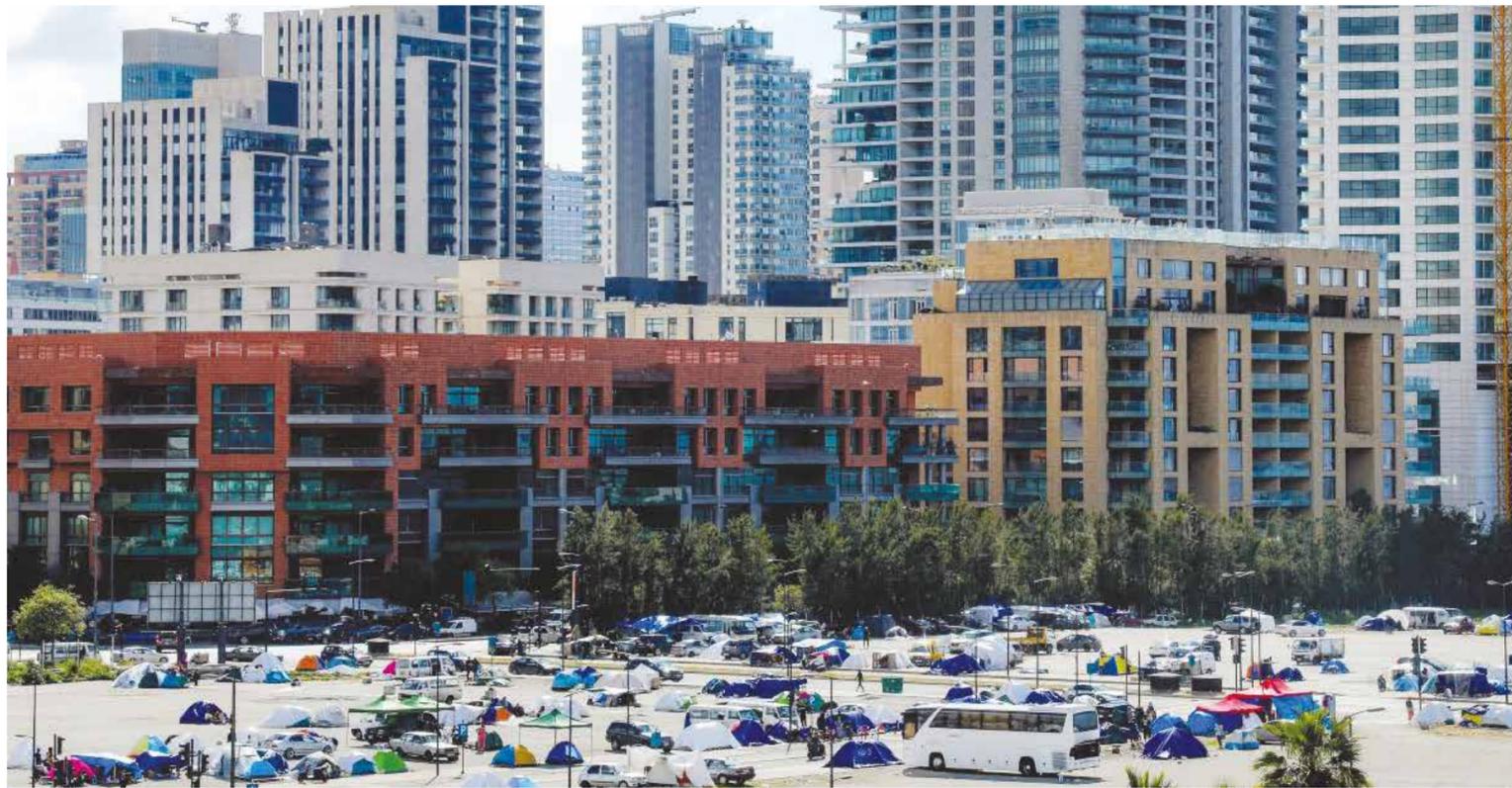
Israel said it had struck targets in Tehran as well as a submarine development facility in the central city of Isfahan

Iran would target Red Sea shipping in event of US invasion: local media

Tehran, Iran

Iran would target shipping in the Red Sea, a crucial conduit for global oil and other goods leading to the Suez Canal, if the United States launches a ground invasion, an unnamed military official told local media yesterday.

"If the enemy attempts a ground operation on Iranian islands or anywhere else on our territory, or if it seeks to impose costs on Iran through naval manoeuvres in the Persian Gulf and the Sea of Oman, we will open other fronts as a 'surprise,'" the official was quoted as saying by the Tasnim news agency. "The Bab el-Mandeb Strait is among the most strategic straits in the world, and Iran has both the will and the capability to pose a fully credible threat against it," the official said.



Makeshift tent encampments for people displaced from their homes by war are pictured at a parking area near Beirut's waterfront

15-point US plan

Trump is moving thousands of airborne troops and extra marines to the Gulf amid speculation that he might order a ground invasion to either seize Iranian oil assets in the Gulf or secure the strategic Strait of Hormuz. The White House meanwhile appeared to stick to the four to six-week timeline it has previously given for the war.

Trump to 'unleash hell' if Iran fails to make a deal

Safe passage

Tehran, in a message circulated by the International Maritime Organization (IMO), assured safe passage through the strait to "non-hostile vessels". However, the IMO also cited a statement from Iran's foreign ministry as saying no passage would be granted to vessels belonging to "the aggressor parties -- namely the United States and the Israeli regime".

AFP | Tehran, Iran

The White House said yesterday it was still in talks with Iran despite Tehran reportedly rejecting a US plan to end the war -- but warned President Donald Trump is ready to "unleash hell" if there is no deal.

Iranian state media cited an unidentified official as saying that the Islamic republic had responded "negatively" to the reported overture from Trump as the Middle East war nears the four-week mark.

White House Press Secretary Karoline Leavitt denied that ne-

gotiations with Iran had hit a dead end. "Talks continue. They

'Unleash hell'

Leavitt warned that it was time for Iran to make a deal, asserting that Trump was nearing what the White House says are the key US military objectives of "Operation Epic Fury."

"If Iran fails to accept the reality of the current moment, if they fail to understand that they have been defeated militarily and will continue to be,

are productive," Leavitt told a briefing when asked about the

President Trump will ensure they are hit harder than they have ever been hit before," Leavitt said.

"President Trump does not bluff and he is prepared to unleash hell. Iran should not miscalculate again."

Iran's speaker Ghalibaf warned on Wednesday on X of the possible invasion of an Iranian island with the support of

Iranian report. Leavitt said that there were "elements of truth"

an unnamed regional country. Trump announced that his visit to China to meet Xi Jinping had now been rescheduled for mid-May, having postponed it by six weeks to deal with the conflict. "We've always estimated approximately four to six weeks (for the length of military operations against Iran), so you could do the math on that," Leavitt added.

to media reports on the details of a 15-point US plan setting out demands on Tehran, but said some of the reporting was "not entirely factual."

US and Israeli media said the points involved Iran giving up any right to a nuclear program and agreeing to dismantle its ballistic missile arsenal.

Leavitt declined to say whom the US was dealing with in Tehran. Reports have suggested the Trump administration's interlocutor is Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf, Iran's speaker of parliament and one of its most prominent non-clerical figures.

Trump told reporters in the Oval Office on Tuesday that Iran had given him "a very big present worth a tremendous amount of money", which he said demonstrated that "we're dealing with the right people". The US president did not elaborate further but said it was related to the Strait of Hormuz, which Iran has largely blockaded in retaliation for US and Israeli strikes.

UN condemns Gulf strikes

The UN Human Rights Council condemned Iran's "egregious attacks" on its Gulf neighbours, calling for full and swift "reparation" to all victims of its strikes.

The 47-member council backed a resolution condemning Tehran's actions aimed at closing the Strait of Hormuz, and demanding Iran immediately "cease all unprovoked attacks".

Iran sets five conditions

The Iranian official quoted by Press TV said Tehran has put forward its own five conditions for hostilities to end.

These include ending "aggression and assassinations" against the country and its leaders, setting up a robust mechanism guaranteeing that neither Israel nor the US will resume the war, as well as compensation for the destruction caused.

Iran's conditions also include a cessation of hostilities on all regional fronts and against all "resistance groups" -- an implicit reference to the Tehran-backed Lebanese group Hezbollah.

Tehran also wants international recognition and guarantees of Iran's rights to exercise its sovereignty over the Strait of Hormuz.

How are ships crossing?

Maritime trackers indicate that a handful of vessels are still crossing daily through the Strait of Hormuz, which is guarded by Iran's Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) -- most of them leaving the Gulf.

Some have taken a new Iranian-approved route through its waters, dubbed the "Tehran Toll Booth" by leading shipping journal Lloyd's List.

At least one vetted vessel paid \$2 million to use the corridor around Larak Island just off Iran's coast, it reported.

Lloyd's List cited sources as saying that governments from countries including India, Pakistan and China discussed vessel transits directly with Tehran, with the IRGC establishing a registration system of "approved ships".

On Tuesday, IRGC naval commander Alireza Tangsiri said on X the force had "turned back" a container ship "due to failure to comply with legal protocols and lack of permission to pass through".

Ship tracker MarineTraffic showed that the vessel, the Selen, was bound for Pakistan.

Lloyd's List reported Monday that it had tracked more than 20 ships using the emerging route, most of them Greek-owned but others Indian-, Pakistani-owned or linked to China.

Is Iran acting illegally?

Charging fees to cross the strait would "lack a valid legal basis", Marco Roscini, international law professor at Westminster Law School said. Shipowners risk violating the law and Western sanctions if they pay a toll.

Transit passage rights through straits remain applicable during armed conflicts and suspending commercial navigation through Hormuz "cannot be lawful" barring exceptional circumstances, he added.

However in its statement to the IMO, Iran said it acted in self-defence, taking "necessary and proportionate measures" in line with international law.