

itself has pursued these complaints. These complaints have been raised under the headings of "imposing navigation restrictions" and "unlawful seizure of vessels". Naturally, for as long as the seizure of vessels continues, all material and moral rights of ship owners, cargo owners, and crew must be considered and preserved, and the protection of these persons and properties is the responsibility of the party that has executed the seizure. The Americans' action in seizing vessels is, from an ethical standpoint, nothing other than "piracy"; however, from a legal perspective, this term is imprecise because piracy is not ordinarily carried out in an official manner with a documented identity.

In response to the American blockade, Iran has also raised the issue of closing the Strait of Hormuz. Some believe this action is likewise indefensible from a legal standpoint. On the other hand, the Strait of Hormuz is considered part of Iran's territorial waters. Please explain what legal regime gov-



erns international straits and high seas, and how do you distinguish between the two?

We have a convention from the year 1982 of the IMO that the Islamic Republic of Iran has still neither signed nor ratified in the Parliament. Nevertheless, even based upon that same convention, navigation in coastal zones must be conduct-

ed as "innocent passage". In the Strait of Hormuz, we have in practice only prevented hostile nations; that is to say, we control vessels that intend to conduct military activities against us or naval operations harmful to Iran's sovereignty and territorial integrity. However, this does not signify the complete closure of the Strait

USS Rafael Peralta (DDG 115), near what the US Central Command said was a vessel attempting to sail to an Iranian port, enforces the US blockade on Iranian ports, at an unknown location in April 2026. US CENTCOM

of Hormuz. At present, many vessels from various countries, including Turkey, Iraq, India, Pakistan, or even Qatar, following a behavioral modification that occurred, are transiting the Strait of Hormuz.

On the other hand, the Islamic Republic of Iran, under a specific legal process and regime, and in cooperation with Oman, manages the transit through the Strait of Hormuz. We do not claim to impose unilaterally our rights upon all international waterways and expect other nations to comply; rather, our actions in the Strait of Hormuz are based solely upon the interests of regional nations, the prevention of transit by harmful vessels, and the securing of the rights of the Iranian people.

Another topic raised these days concerns the collection of tolls upon vessels transiting the Strait of Hormuz. Does Iran possess the right to collect tolls in order to provide security or compensate for environmental pollution caused by vessel transit through its territorial waters?

Yes, absolutely. The conventions ratified by the IMO, which operates under the United Nations, have rendered mandatory for all IMO member states certain requirements for environmental protection, prevention of water pollution, control of vessels' ballast water, and prevention of the discharge of garbage and vessel waste into the sea. Accordingly, when we speak of tolls, we mean the costs of monitoring and enforcing the implementation of these very conventions.

It is natural that any vessel intending to transit this region must pay the costs associated with the protection and safeguarding of the environment. From air pollution, such as the non-use of high-sulfur fuels, to water pollution resulting from oil spills or vessel fuel discharges, all such phenomena are forms of pollution, and their control and remediation entail specific costs. For these costs to be borne by the nation using the region's waters, the collection of tolls is an entirely reasonable and logical matter.

Trump's Iran blockade snatches defeat from jaws of victory

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OPINION

It appears Donald Trump once again snatched defeat from the jaws of victory by heeding the hawkish counsel of the warmongers at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies (FDD).

As I have argued before, the fragile cease-fire disproportionately favored the United States over Iran: Trump secured his central objective — a swift exit from a costly war — while Iran forfeited its primary source of leverage, namely the inflationary pressure of elevated oil prices. Tehran, by contrast, remained unable to achieve its core objective — meaningful sanctions relief — without entering a difficult diplomatic process with Washington. The asymmetry was stark: Trump could afford strategic patience, whereas Iran risked squandering the most consequential gains the conflict could have yielded if negotiations faltered or collapsed.

In short, this emerging status quo could have constituted a quiet but decisive victory for Trump. Yes, Iran would retain control over the strategically vital Strait of Hormuz — but it does so today as well and would do so in almost any scenario. But the status quo would have seen oil prices drop as the Iranians would allow tankers to transit in order to collect fees. And as long as oil prices came down, Trump's position at home and vis-à-vis Iran would have strengthened.

But then Trump committed a familiar and consequential error. Once again, he followed the advice of Israel and one of its key supporters in Washington, the FDD advocacy group.

Strangulation of Iran: take 5023

FDD argued that blockading the Persian Gulf would swift-

ly cripple the Iranian economy and coerce Tehran into capitulation, allowing Trump to achieve through economic strangulation what he had failed to secure through military force. In short, it was sold to him as a silver bullet. More on that later.

According to this logic, the blockade would "effectively zero out" Iran's export revenues within days, inflicting losses of nearly \$500 million per day. With oil exports halted, Iran's limited storage capacity would be filled within weeks, forcing the costly and technically damaging shutdown of its oil wells. This, FDD claimed, would dramatically reverse the strategic balance — transforming the Strait of Hormuz from a perceived Iranian asset into a crippling Achilles' heel, while

handing Washington the invaluable advantage of time. Pressure on Iran would escalate sharply while pressure on the United States would rapidly dissipate. Trump was fully on board. His long-sought subjugation of Iran suddenly appeared tantalizingly within reach. "The blockade is genius," the president told reporters. "Now, they have to cry uncle; that's all they have to do. Just say, 'We give up.'" (Notably, an FDD staffer has reportedly since joined Steve Witkoff's team.)

Predictably, the opposite occurred. FDD's confident calculations and tidy logic were, as so often, rooted more in wishful thinking than in hard reality. By its own projections, Iran should have exhausted its storage capacity nearly a week ago. Yet satellite im-



There is a pathology in US policy on Iran that transcends administrations and party affiliations: The incessant search for an escalatory silver bullet that brings Iran to its knees, forces it to capitulate, and enables the US to assert its superpower dominance and avoid a compromise with the Islamic Republic. Countless diplomatic opportunities have been sacrificed, and face-saving exit ramps have been burnt in the process. Yet, the quest continues.

The illustration depicts US President Donald Trump wearing a military helmet backward that has blinded him. THE ECONOMIST/GETTY IMAGES

agency shows Tehran still actively loading oil onto tankers at Kharg Island. While the blockade has undeniably increased economic pressure, there is no sign of the acute storage crisis — or the cascading collapse — FDD confidently promised Trump.

But by targeting Iran's oil exports, Trump did more than complicate an already fragile diplomatic pathway — he tightened global pressure and drove prices upward. In fact, thanks to the blockade, oil prices now exceed the levels seen during the war itself. Exxon's CEO told shareholders recently that gasoline prices are poised to rise even further, noting that "the market hasn't seen the full impact of [the Iran conflict] yet." Meanwhile, Joe Kent, Trump's former director of the National Counterterrorism Center, cautions that "the blockade is now triggering a global fertilizer shortage that will cause major food security crises and potential famines." In short: the desperately needed pressure release Trump secured through the cease-fire has been entirely undone by FDD's vaunted silver-bullet blockade.

The lure of the silver bullet

There is a pathology in US policy on Iran that transcends administrations and party affiliations: The incessant search for an escalatory silver bullet that brings Iran to its knees, forces it to capitulate, and enables the US to assert its superpower dominance and avoid a compromise with the Islamic Republic.

Across 47 years, the hunt for this fabled silver bullet has echoed on — yet nothing answers back. Countless diplomatic opportunities have been sacrificed, and face-saving exit ramps have been burnt in the process. Yet, the quest continues.

The demand for Iranian capitulation and the enduring faith in elusive silver bullets are deeply intertwined. In January, Trump believed that the mere threat of military force would compel Tehran to surrender. After issuing a series of increasingly explicit warnings that Iran pointedly ig-

nored, he proposed a calibrated strike — one to which Tehran should respond symbolically by targeting an empty American base. Iran refused outright, making clear that any attack would trigger a full-scale war.

Interpreting this defiance as a failure of credibility rather than a rejection of coercion, Trump escalated. He ordered a substantial buildup of military assets in the region, convinced that a critical mass of force would finally deliver the decisive breakthrough — the long-sought silver bullet. It didn't. Indeed, Witkoff revealed in an interview that Trump was frustrated that, despite his military threats, Iran had still not "capitulated".

Clearly, more escalation was needed. The next imagined silver bullet was the assassination of Iran's Leader Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei. Midway through the war, a GCC official told me that Trump had assured regional leaders the conflict would last no more than 100 hours. Israeli media similarly reported that he told Britain's Keir Starmer it would be over within three days. The logic was stark: the killing of Khamenei would trigger either the regime's rapid implosion or its immediate capitulation. It proved to be yet another illusory silver bullet.

Nor did the sweeping bombardment of Iran's civilian infrastructure deliver the long-sought breakthrough. A Bloomberg analysis found that only 32% of the damaged buildings were linked to military targets — the overwhelming majority were civilian. Even this devastating and indiscriminate campaign failed to produce the decisive outcome its architects had promised.

The blockade-on-the-blockade is merely the latest in a long line of delusional silver bullets that American presidents have chased instead of pursuing far less costly and far more effective diplomacy. I suspect that a stunning number of those silver bullets were cooked up by FDD.

The article first appeared on the author's Substack.

