Statement on the Threat of Genocide against Iran

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The Lemkin Institute for Genocide Prevention and Human Security is alarmed by reports that U.S. President Trump intends to resume illegal attacks on Iran shortly after the U.S. midterm elections, which are taking place today. According to sources close to both President Trump and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, Israel is placing heavy pressure on the Trump Administration to strike Iran as early as Wednesday. A resumption of this war of aggression, especially at the behest of a country already committing genocide in Palestine, would constitute a strong red flag for the crime of genocide.

The United States has been engaging in "limited strikes" against Iran for the past several weeks, including a strike on Qeshm Island on Sunday. The U.S. Central Command has prepared for a resumption of strikes, moving missile defenses and munitions into the region and warning Gulf states to prepare for a "short and intense operation" after the midterm elections, according to the Wall Street Journal.

Despite the signals that this will be a limited war, there is reason to be concerned about mission creep, escalation, and the devolution of warfare into genocide. This is especially so due to the Trump Administration's apparent dependence on Israel and especially on the Israeli Prime Minister, who is pursuing a Greater Israel project across the region. Whenever a state committing genocide expands its violence beyond the initial site of genocide there is a high chance that violence in the new theater will mimic and resemble the violence of the genocide. This is especially true of "genocidal states," states under the control of regimes that rely on genocide to maintain power and that often have managed to gain the support of their own socities for the genocidal project. Such states have incorporated genocidal thinking so deeply into their institutions that genocidal intent and destruction are normalized and genocidal frameworks become applied to conflict in general. In such a situation, genocide is easily justified and lauded as undertaken for the greater good. Israel is such a state.

The Trump Administration, as we have frequently warned, has demonstrated a vulnerability to genocidal projects in its policies at home and abroad. At home it has embraced authoritarianism, developed a violent personal army accountable only to the White House, and invented cosmic enemies, such as immigrants and trans people, whose continued existence are seen as a threat to the nation. Abroad, its support for

and growing complicity in the genocide in Gaza and the West Bank has demonstrably radicalized the President's language – and possibly his thinking – about its war of aggression against Iran. The extent to which the President has fully signed on to Israel's genocidal project in the Middle East remains unclear.

In this context, the threat of genocide against Iran is not an abstract risk. Since US and Israeli forces began an illegal war against Iran on 28 February 2026, President Trump has repeatedly threatened the Iranian population with annihilation. In early April, he set a deadline for Iran to make a deal or reopen the Strait of Hormuz, warning on Truth Social that "all Hell will reign [sic] down on" Iran within 48 hours. On Easter Sunday, 5 April, he declared that the following Tuesday would be "Power Plant Day, and Bridge Day" in Iran. On 7 April, hours before his deadline, he posted that "a whole civilization will die tonight, never to be brought back again," a threat of collective annihilation about which the Lemkin Institute raised serious concerns at the time. He pulled back about 90 minutes before the deadline, announcing a two-week pause, but the threats resumed. On 4 May, he threatened to blow Iran "off the face of the earth" if it attacked US vessels. In his 22 September address to the UN General Assembly, he asked whether he should annihilate the Islamic Republic and "drive them into hell with no chance of survival and no hope of future greatness or generations." Asked in an interview with TIME, published on 1 October, how a self-described president of peace could call for annihilating a people, he answered that by annihilating Iran he would create peace in the world and reiterated that he was ready to do it.

Concerns about a war of annihilation have mounted since Sunday, when former Fox News host Tucker Carlson posted a warning on X that Prime Minister Netanyahu was pressuring President Trump to use nuclear weapons against a suspected Iranian nuclear site at Pickaxe Mountain. According to him, since February the Trump Administration has been revising U.S. nuclear doctrine to ease the offensive use of "battlefield nukes,", which, if true, is an alarming development that the American people should know about. Carlson rightly underscores the disaster that the use of a nuclear weapon would cause to the Iranian people, the Gulf water supply, the global economy, and international peace and security. "After the first nuclear strike, World War Three is inevitable," Carlson wrote. "That war would be short and final."

President Trump has officially ruled out the use of nuclear weapons in Iran. In mid-October, he told the right-wing news source Newsmax, "I wouldn't use nuclear. We don't have to. We're the greatest nuclear power in the world." He did not rule out, however, the use of the U.S.'s most lethal non-nuclear munition, the "Mother of All Bombs" (MOAB), against Iran.

Regional mediators have continued their diplomatic efforts to end the undeclared war against Iran. Iran has consistently signalled its willingness to negotiate, but has also warned of an "immediate and crushing response" to any military campaign against it, involving military *and civilian* targets in the Gulf and beyond. It is unclear how committed the United States is to any long-term peace deal, particularly given the Israeli Prime Minister's insistence that the Iranian regime must be completely destroyed. The United States has twice attacked Iran during on-going negotiations.

President Trump's ultimate decision about whether and how to attack Iran may hinge on domestic politics and the extent to which he emerges from the midterms dependent on Israel for his continued power. Most observers expect the Republicans to face heavy losses on Tuesday, with the opposition Democrats picking up control of the House of Representatives and possibly the Senate. Prime Minister Netanyahu, who failed to secure a majority for his right-wing coalition in Israel's elections last week, has a clear interest in attacking Iran with maximal force to save his political skin and avoid prison. Together they may intend to create "facts on the ground" that ensure their continued domination for the next decade.

Whatever their reasons, one principle is nonnegotiable: Whether people in Iran live or die cannot depend on a leader's needs to shore up power, distract from electoral defeat, build a coalition, or avoid prison. The right to life is not a bargaining chip in anyone's domestic politics.

The world's security is increasingly beholden to two states that are committing genocide in Palestine, have extended genocidal forms of warfare to Lebanon, and pose a threat of genocide to Iran. Our current situation was predictable after October 7, 2023, when the international community, and especially the United States, failed to pull Israel back from the mass murder pattern of genocide and instead chose the path of active participation and complicity. Ongoing impunity will only lead to greater destruction and suffering.

As we wrote in our April *Statement on the U.S.-Iran Ceasefire Negotiations*, "genocide remains an imminent threat from the United States so long as the current power arrangement between the U.S. and Israel is in force. The two countries are currently in a dangerous, self-radicalizing spiral of genocidal violence. They reinforce and radicalize one another's genocidal tendencies, causing immense global devastation and suffering. The whole world must act to bring this relationship to an end."

The Western powers have created a world in which certain states can commit mass atrocity crimes with absolute impunity. They have do so in full view of the Western public

and with the support of the media, which parrots genocidal propaganda and provides cover for genocidaires. Apart from Palestine, we need only witness the West's silence surrounding Azerbaijan's genocide in Artsakh and the UAE-sponsored genocide in Sudan to see this impunity in action. The Lemkin Institute calls on all people of conscience, all INGOs, think tanks, governments, and media that still operate with independence, to work to bring an end to the U.S. and Israel's endless expansion of violence before it is too late for everyone. The UN security council should urgently convene an emergency session on the threat of renewed strikes on Iran and insist that civilians and civilian infrastructure be protected and diplomacy be resumed.