

White House threatens to “unleash hell” against Iran, as US surges troops to Middle East

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As the Trump administration surges thousands of ground troops toward the Persian Gulf, the White House threatened Wednesday to massively escalate its war of aggression against Iran unless it accepts US demands.

“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, President Trump will ensure they are hit harder than they have ever been hit before,” White House Press Secretary Karoline Leavitt declared. “President Trump does not bluff, and he is prepared to unleash hell.”

Leavitt claimed the US was on the verge of victory in Iran. “That’s why you are beginning to see the regime look for an exit ramp,” she said.

A reporter then asked Leavitt how the deployment of the 82nd Airborne Division—a force usually sent at the beginning of conflicts, not the end—was consistent with claims the war is winding down. Leavitt evaded the issue: “The president likes to maintain options at his disposal. It’s the Pentagon’s job to provide those options to the commander-in-chief.”

According to multiple reports, between 2,000 and 3,000 paratroopers from the 82nd Airborne Division’s Immediate Response Force have received written deployment orders for the Middle East. The 82nd Airborne is an elite Army paratrooper force designed for rapid insertion into combat zones—the unit the Pentagon sends when it intends to strike, not negotiate.

The paratroopers would augment two Marine amphibious groups now closing in on the Gulf: the Tripoli, with 2,200 Marines of the 31st Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU), and the Boxer, which left San Diego last week carrying 2,500 Marines of the 11th

MEU. The Tripoli is expected to reach the theater Friday, according to the *Wall Street Journal*, the day Trump’s five-day “pause” on strikes against Iran’s power grid expires.

In last year’s attack on Iran’s nuclear facilities, in the January kidnapping of Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro and in the current war, Trump has used negotiations as a cover for military escalation. War Secretary Pete Hegseth, standing beside him, dispensed with the pretense entirely: “We negotiate with bombs. You have a choice as we loiter over the top of Tehran.” He praised the president for ordering the military to “close with and destroy the enemy as viciously as possible from moment one.”

The *New York Times* reported that the administration transmitted a 15-point list of demands to Iran via Pakistan. The demands include the dismantling of Iran’s nuclear facilities at Natanz, Isfahan and Fordow, a permanent ban on uranium enrichment, the handover of all enriched uranium to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), limits on ballistic missiles and the end of Iranian support for Hezbollah and allied militias. These demands amount to a total abrogation of Iranian national sovereignty—the surrender of the country’s defensive capabilities to the government that is currently bombing it. The 15-point list is designed to be rejected. As Trump said Monday: if Iran does not accept, “we just keep bombing our little hearts out.”

The *Wall Street Journal* stated the administration’s calculations bluntly. “The new deadline to ward off escalation is Friday, when some 2,200 Marines are due to arrive in the region,” the *Journal* wrote. “Will this regime again challenge Mr. Trump to deliver on his threat? And was that the President’s plan all along?”

The newspaper answered its own question: “Call it Trump-style diplomacy: One hand extends while the other visibly winds for a punch.”

The *Financial Times* published a detailed assessment Tuesday of how a US assault on Kharg Island—the terminal through which 90 percent of Iran’s oil exports pass—could unfold. It reported that US forces have already struck more than 90 military targets on the island, including naval mine storage and missile bunkers, in what military analysts described as “preparing the battlefield.” The operation would involve Marines landing by V-22 Osprey tilt-rotor aircraft or by sea, with the 82nd Airborne and Army Rangers potentially seizing terrain ahead of the amphibious force.

Former US Central Command intelligence director Karen Gibson told the *Financial Times* that while the US is capable of taking the island militarily, the challenge is “not just seizing the island ... it’s holding it under continued pressure.” Kharg sits just 15 miles from the Iranian mainland, well within range of missiles, drones and artillery. US troop casualties would be, in the words of the *Financial Times*, “all but certain.”

Seth Krummrich, former chief of staff of US Special Operations Central, told the newspaper that any operation to seize Kharg would be “economic warfare” fought “in a completely different and more complex space.” He added that it would be harder to justify to the American people “with the midterm elections looming in November.” The *Financial Times* noted that even if the operation succeeded, Iran might destroy its own oil infrastructure rather than surrender it—and that the seizure “may change little for the US position in the Iran war.”

Two Israeli officials told the *New York Times* that Israel plans to ramp up attacks on Iran over the next 48 hours, worried that Trump might end the war before Israel has achieved its goals, including the destruction of Iran’s weapons programs. CNN reported Wednesday that Iran is building up its defenses on Kharg Island in anticipation of a US ground assault, moving additional military personnel and air defense systems to the island.

The bombing campaign has killed thousands of civilians over four weeks. HRANA (Human Rights Activists News Agency) puts the confirmed civilian

death toll at 1,443, including 217 children, though the actual number is far higher given the communications blackout that has sealed off Iran’s 90 million people from the outside world since February 28. Amnesty International documented one strike alone—on a school in the city of Minab—that killed 168 people, most of them girls. On Tuesday, 12 more people were killed in south Tehran.

In Lebanon, the death toll from the Israeli assault that began March 2 has reached 1,072, with 2,966 wounded. One hundred eighteen of the dead are children. Forty are medical workers. A fifth of Lebanon’s population—1.2 million people—has fled northwards. Israeli Defense Minister Israel Katz ordered what he called an “acceleration of demolition” in border villages, citing the destruction of Gaza’s Beit Hanoun and Rafah as his models. Israeli Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich declared the Litani River should become Israel’s “new border.” Five bridges across the Litani have been destroyed, and Israel has declared a 30-kilometer military zone across the south of Lebanon.

According to a Reuters/Ipsos poll released this week, only 35 percent of Americans support the strikes on Iran, while 61 percent oppose them. Trump’s overall approval has dropped to 36 percent, the lowest of his second term, with just one in four Americans approving of his handling of the cost of living. Fourteen US service members have died in the Persian Gulf region since February 28.



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