

US to send another 10,000 ground troops to Middle East, as war with Iran escalates

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The *Wall Street Journal* and Axios reported Thursday that the Trump administration is making plans to deploy an additional 10,000 ground troops to the Middle East as the US war of aggression against Iran enters its fifth week. “If President Trump gives the go-ahead, the U.S. could soon have more than 17,000 ground troops on Iran’s doorstep,” the *Journal* reported.

The troop surge comes as Secretary of State Marco Rubio told G7 foreign ministers in Paris Thursday that the war will continue for at least another two to four weeks, according to Axios. Asked about ground troops, Rubio said: “The President has to be prepared for multiple contingencies, which I’m not going to discuss in the media.”

The buildup of ground troops capable of launching an invasion of Iran is the real content of Trump’s claims that he is negotiating with Iran. The administration has repeatedly used talk of negotiations as cover for military escalation—in last year’s bombing of Iran’s nuclear facilities, in the January kidnapping of Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro and now in the current war. On Wednesday, President Trump extended his “pause” on strikes against Iran’s power infrastructure to April 6, even as Israeli strikes intensified—hitting a uranium processing facility in Yazd, the Khondab Heavy Water Complex and two of Iran’s largest steel plants on Thursday alone.

Any ground invasion of Kharg Island, a major focal point of planned operations, would involve significant US casualties. The *Wall Street Journal* reported that US ships heading for the Strait of Hormuz would have to pass through “narrow, shallow waters, flanked by Iranian forces armed with missiles and drones and potentially seeded with sea mines.” Seth Jones of the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS)

told the *Journal* that “supersonic antiship missiles could travel from the Iranian mainland in a matter of seconds.”

Iran has fortified Kharg Island, through which 90 percent of its oil exports pass, with additional troops, air defense systems and land mines along its coastline, according to CNN.

The *Washington Post* reported Thursday that the US has fired more than 850 Tomahawk cruise missiles in four weeks of war, with only a few hundred manufactured per year. Pentagon officials described the supply as “alarmingly low,” with one official warning the military was approaching “Winchester,” military slang for out of ammunition.

The BBC published an investigation Thursday based on footage gathered by independent journalists inside Tehran, documenting the destruction of the Resalat residential district in eastern Tehran. Between 40 and 50 people were killed in a single Israeli strike targeting a Basij building surrounded by apartment blocks. A mother waited days for rescue workers to dig her daughter and young grandchild from the rubble; both were found dead. Military experts told the BBC the weapons used were consistent with 2,000-pound Mark 84 bombs. Two international humanitarian law experts told the BBC the use of such weapons in a densely populated area would be “possibly unlawful.”

The bombing campaign, now in its 28th day, has killed thousands of Iranian civilians. The Human Rights Activists News Agency (HRANA) has documented at least 1,500 civilian deaths, including 217 children. The *Washington Post* reported Thursday that nearly 1,500 Iranian civilians have been confirmed killed. Non-government Iranian health officials estimate the actual death toll at approximately 32,000.

The World Health Organization (WHO) has

documented 13 attacks on Iranian health facilities since the war began. Hospitals struck include Khatam-al-Anbia and Gandhi hospitals in Tehran, Aboozar Children's Hospital in Ahvaz and facilities across multiple provinces. The Iranian Red Crescent reported by March 7 that 5,535 residential units, 65 schools and 14 medical centers had been targeted across 131 counties.

Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch (HRW) confirmed that a US strike on the Shajareh Tayyebah girls' elementary school in Minab on the first day of the war killed 168 people, most of them children. CNN reported that the US used outdated targeting intelligence, having aimed at a nearby Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) naval facility. Iranian state media reported that a separate strike on a sports hall in the city of Lamerd killed at least 18 civilians, including girls who were practicing at the time. According to Iran's cultural heritage authorities, more than 120 museums and historical sites have been damaged, including the Golestan Palace, a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Iran's 90 million people have been sealed off from the outside world by a near-total internet blackout for 28 days. The internet monitoring group NetBlocks reported that connectivity has dropped 98 percent since February 28. According to Human Rights Watch, the government has threatened legal action against citizens who use virtual private networks (VPNs) or share circumvention tools. Iranians abroad cannot reach family inside the country.

According to Iranian officials, strikes on the South Pars gas field on March 18 shut down two refineries with a combined capacity of 100 million cubic meters per day, approximately 12 percent of Iran's total gas production. Gas flows to Iraq have been severed. A desalination plant on Qeshm Island, which supplies drinking water to 30 villages, was struck in early March. The UN University Institute for Water called the targeting of desalination infrastructure in a water-scarce region an attack on civilians.

In Lebanon, the Israeli assault launched under cover of the Iran war has killed at least 1,116 people and wounded 3,229 since March 2, including 121 children and 40 healthcare workers. The UN estimates 1.2 million Lebanese have fled their homes, roughly 20 percent of the population. The WHO documented 28

attacks on healthcare infrastructure in the first two weeks alone, killing 30 medical workers. According to Israeli military statements, three divisions are now operating inside the country. Israeli Defense Minister Israel Katz ordered the "acceleration of demolition" of border villages, citing "the Beit Hanoun and Rafah models" from Gaza. Israeli Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich declared: "Very soon, Dahieh will look like Khan Younis."

Ten American service members were wounded Thursday when Iranian missiles and drones struck Prince Sultan Air Base in Saudi Arabia, two of them seriously. More than 300 US troops have been wounded in four weeks of war. Thirteen American service members have been killed since February 28.



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