

White House actively discussing sending ground troops to Iran

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The White House has held meetings this week to discuss sending ground troops to Iran, according to a report published Wednesday in the *Wall Street Journal*. President Donald Trump “is leaning toward expanding U.S. military operations in Iran after days of briefings from top aides,” the *Journal* wrote, citing US officials, with the options including “sending ground forces to seize Iranian islands near the Strait of Hormuz.”

A ground invasion of Iran would mark the war’s most dangerous escalation to date. Four and a half months of war, beginning February 28, have left the Iranian government in place, Iran’s stockpile of enriched uranium sealed underground and shipping through the strait nearly halted. Washington is turning toward ground forces because bombing has failed.

Trump convened a meeting in the White House Situation Room Tuesday evening “to discuss the potential seizure of Kharg Island and other territory along the Strait of Hormuz using U.S. troops, as well as the potential bombing of a tunnel complex at Pickaxe Mountain,” the *Journal* reported. The discussion “was one of multiple formal and informal conversations Trump has held in recent days” with senior officials about an escalation of the war.

Trump told Fox News Tuesday: “Sometimes you need a ground campaign, but we have other people that will do the ground campaign for us.” In the same interview, he said it was unlikely that US forces would seize Kharg Island, Iran’s main oil export terminal, but would not rule it out: “If we degrade them far enough and deep enough back, I would do that.”

On June 14, Washington announced a “memorandum of understanding” to suspend direct attacks. Under the agreement, signed June 17, the United States lifted its naval blockade and paused oil sanctions in exchange for a 60-day guarantee of safe passage through the

strait.

The “ceasefire” was condemned by all factions of the political establishment. Former Vice President Mike Pence, writing in the *Journal* on June 22, said the agreement “smacks of the kind of appeasement” Trump once rejected and urged him to “let the armed forces finish the job.” Democratic Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer called it the “art of surrender,” and Democratic Senator Chris Murphy of Connecticut described it as “essentially surrender to Iran.”

Trump declared the “ceasefire” over on July 8, and in a July 10 letter informed Congress that the United States had resumed “military action” against Iran—a notification the White House claims reset the 60-day clock set by the War Powers Act for the president to seek congressional approval of military operations. The bombing resumed the following night, and on Monday Trump announced the reimposition of the naval blockade, which took effect Tuesday afternoon.

Reuters reported Wednesday, citing US officials, that the strikes aimed at forcing open the Strait of Hormuz are “also targeting Iranian military capabilities the U.S. would want to destroy before executing more complex operations against Iran.” One of the officials called the strikes “shaping operations” and said: “This is helping set the stage, if needed.” Reuters wrote that another official said Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth “has been an advocate of escalating the military operation against Iran.”

Retired Marine General Frank McKenzie, who ran US military operations across the Middle East from 2019 to 2022, advocated a ground invasion of Kharg Island on CBS’s *Face the Nation* program Sunday: “That’s something we should think about doing because possession of Iranian soil would be a significant factor in future negotiations with Iran.”

The International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) estimates that Iran fields some 570,000 active-duty troops and 350,000 reserves, backed by coastal missile batteries, naval mines and swarms of fast attack boats. The US military said its strikes overnight July 7-8 hit more than 80 targets, including over 60 of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps' small attack boats, but Reuters reported Wednesday that Iran is still fielding missiles and drones despite heavy losses. Retired General Philip Breedlove told Fox News this week that the 2003 invasion of Iraq required more than 300,000 US troops staged in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia; the American force now in the region number 50,000, but few are ground troops.

Manouchehr Mottaki, Iran's foreign minister from 2005 to 2010 and a sitting member of parliament, said in a state media interview Wednesday that if US forces seize Iranian territory, Iran should storm a US base "through a combined helicopter-borne and ground assault" and take American soldiers hostage.

The bombing has now run six consecutive nights. The wave that ended Wednesday night reached the Parchin military complex and the city of Pakdasht, near Tehran—the first strikes close to the capital in this round of the war—and hit a civilian airport in Semnan province, where Iran builds its ballistic missiles and runs its space program. A sixth wave began at 2:00 p.m. Eastern Time Thursday "to further degrade Iranian military capabilities," the US military announced; Iranian state media said a bridge between Bandar Abbas and Lar and an airport in Iranshahr, in the country's southeast, had been struck.

On Wednesday, US missiles struck Greater Tunb Island, one of three islands commanding the approaches to the Strait of Hormuz, and a barracks of the army's 388th Mechanized Infantry Brigade, where Iranian state television said at least 13 missiles killed seven soldiers. At least 35 people have been killed and more than 300 wounded this month, according to Iran's Health Ministry.

Iranian officials said a US strike Wednesday night hit near Shahid Baqaei Hospital, a children's cancer center in Ahvaz, forcing the evacuation of 211 chemotherapy patients. Foreign Ministry spokesman Esmail Baghaei called it "a cowardly war crime against the most innocent of human beings—children who are bravely fighting for their lives."

Iran struck back Thursday at air bases housing US forces in Jordan, Kuwait and Bahrain, with the Guard citing the strike near the Ahvaz hospital as justification. Parliament Speaker Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf, Iran's chief negotiator, declared Wednesday: "We are in an essential and existential war with America." Iranian army spokesman Brigadier General Mohammad Akraminia warned Thursday that if Trump carries out his threats against Iranian infrastructure, "All the infrastructure in the region will be crushed under the steel blows of the powerful armed forces of the Islamic Republic of Iran."

The US military is now enforcing the naval blockade by attacking civilian ships. Within 17 hours of its taking effect, the military said it had "redirected" two commercial ships, and on Wednesday a US aircraft fired Hellfire missiles into the smokestack of the Belma, a Curaçao-flagged tanker sailing for Kharg Island, disabling it. "The ship is no longer transiting to Iran," the military announced.



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