Former Trump envoy calls for ground invasion of Iran as US losses mount

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The United States bombed Iran for the 10th consecutive night on Monday, with Iranian media reporting explosions around the northwestern city of Tabriz, near Bushehr, home of the country's only operating nuclear power plant, and in the port cities of Bandar Abbas, Chabahar and Konarak.

Washington resumed the bombardment on July 11, when US President Donald Trump pronounced the June 17 ceasefire "over," and has widened its targets from military installations to bridges, rail lines, ports and the power grid.

The rapid escalation of the Iran war, and the mounting death toll for US troops, have triggered a crisis for the administration, which faces the failure of its goals of overthrowing the Iranian government, breaking the power of its military and securing American domination of the Strait of Hormuz.

In the face of this deepening crisis, the administration is moving more openly toward the deployment of ground troops, and retired Lt. Gen. Keith Kellogg, who served as Trump's special envoy for Ukraine until the end of last year, publicly called for a ground invasion.

Kellogg told Fox News' *America Reports* Monday that "airstrikes alone" would not end the war: "You're going to need ground troops to do something. That doesn't mean they go all the way to Tehran. ... But you could take a couple key strategic targets, that gives the president leverage and controls their economy."

Trump has refused to rule out sending ground troops into Iran, and the *Wall Street Journal* reported July 15 that he is "leaning toward expanding U.S. military operations in Iran," with options including "sending ground forces to seize Iranian islands near the Strait of Hormuz." The *Journal* reported that a White House Situation Room meeting discussed "the potential seizure of Kharg Island and other territory along the Strait of Hormuz using U.S. troops."

The calls for a ground invasion come amid warnings that the United States lacks the missiles and bombs necessary for a protracted campaign. "We do not have enough to safely sustain operations, and I don't think the White House is aware of that," a US official told the *Washington Post* in an article published Sunday. The official warned that American stocks of air-defense and long-range missiles are running down, and that damaged bases can absorb only so many additional troops and aircraft.

Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian declared Monday that Iran "is engaged in a full-scale war." Iranian missiles and drones struck Kuwait and Bahrain, both hosts of US bases. In Yemen, the Iranian-backed Houthis declared a naval blockade of Saudi Arabia's Red Sea shipping—the kingdom's main outlet since the strait closed—threatening another 7 percent of the world's oil supply.

Iranian missiles killed two soldiers at Jordan's Muwaffaq Salti Air Base last week: Pvt. Isabella Gonzales, 19, of Carrollton, Texas, the youngest of the war's identified American dead, and 1st Lt. Tyler James Feehan, 25, of Ewa Beach, Hawaii, who died the next day of his wounds. A third soldier was killed in northern Iraq on Saturday during the disposal of a downed Iranian drone. Remains found at the Jordanian base are believed to be those of a fourth soldier, listed as missing.

The missile that killed Gonzales and Feehan struck the prefabricated units where troops were sleeping, the *Wall Street Journal* reported Monday. The base was hit three times in the space of a day: Debris from the first missile fell on the gym, the second hit an empty hangar, and the third landed among the shipping-container quarters. "The sirens sounded for a third time, but not

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everyone made it to the bunkers," the *Journal* wrote.

Asked by reporters this weekend about the deaths, Secretary of State Marco Rubio said: "A missile got through. We shot down almost all the missiles. One leaked through, hit the wrong place, and tragically, and it's heartbreaking."

Only on Monday, after days of refusal, did the Pentagon acknowledge the scale of its losses: nearly 100 soldiers wounded since July 7. Sean Parnell, the chief Pentagon spokesman, said the "vast majority" of the injuries were "mild concussions" and that 96 percent of the wounded have returned to duty. The *New York Times* reported Monday that in the week before the fatal attack, Iran struck US forces in Jordan three more times, wounding dozens of soldiers and damaging helicopters—strikes the Pentagon never disclosed.

The Pentagon's public casualty database, static for days at 14 dead and 427 wounded, was quietly updated Monday evening to 18 dead and 447 wounded, the *Washington Post* reported. The Pentagon has not held a press briefing on the war since early May. "Claims of concealment are fabrications meant to further distress the American people," Parnell said.

Iran has posted satellite photographs on social media that it says show the damage, including to the housing area. In April, Washington pushed the commercial satellite companies to withhold imagery of the damaged American bases, a step officials said would protect US forces.

A *Journal* investigation published in late June documented the damage at one base. Iranian missiles and drones, striking repeatedly between late February and June, devastated Naval Support Activity Bahrain, the base from which the U.S. Navy has run its Middle East operations for over 30 years.

The Fifth Fleet's headquarters building, whose construction cost the *Journal* put at $200 million, can no longer be used, according to a US official. A dozen or more other buildings were struck, two satellite communications terminals were knocked out, and the Navy evacuated most of the base's staff. The Pentagon has never publicly acknowledged the damage.

Working from satellite imagery and verified social media footage, the *Journal* catalogued the destruction: the security forces' training building destroyed, and the ambulance warehouse damaged. A water tank, the main dining hall, a barracks built for roughly 450 sailors and the Navy drone unit's warehouse bay were all hit. The *Journal* put the construction cost of the damaged buildings at about $400 million.

At least 20 American military and diplomatic sites had been hit by late June, the *Journal* reported, in the course of the war that began February 28. Iranian attacks smashed structures at Ali Al Salem Air Base in Kuwait, damaged Al Dhafra Air Base in the United Arab Emirates and destroyed E-3 Sentry radar planes at Prince Sultan Air Base in Saudi Arabia.

The *Journal* reported in June that US officials said the military was weighing a retreat from its exposed positions: pulling back from Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, shifting bases and command functions westward out of missile range, burying command posts underground and stationing American forces in Israel.

The Pentagon has refused to tell Congress what the damage costs. Asked at a May hearing for an estimate, Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth replied: "What is the cost of Iran obtaining a nuclear weapon?" Jay Hurst, the Pentagon comptroller, said in congressional testimony in May that the department's war-cost estimate—then $29 billion—left out the damage to American bases. The Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), in a June report, put the war's total cost at about $40 billion, including $2.2 billion to $5.1 billion in damage to bases.

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