

Pentagon press briefing [via Newsmax's *Wake Up America*]

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SECRETARY OF WAR PETE HEGSETH: Good morning. I'll start, as we often do here at the Department of War, with the bottom line up front for the world to hear and the press to actually admit that the United States is decimating the radical Iranian regime's military in a way the world has never seen before. Never before has a modern, capable military, which Iran used to have been so quickly destroyed and made combat ineffective, devastated. We said it would not be a fair fight and it has not been. As I stated during our first press conference on day two, that was ten short days ago. The combination of the world's two most powerful air forces is unprecedented and unbeatable between our Air Force and that of the Israelis, over 15,000 enemy targets have been struck. That's well over 1,000 a day. No other combination of countries in the world can do that. So, today, as we speak, we fly over the top of Iran and Tehran, fighters and bombers all day, picking targets as they choose as our intelligence gets better and better and more refined. Looking up, the IRGC and Iranian regime sees only two things on the side of aircraft: the Stars and Stripes and the Star of David, the evil regime's worst nightmare. Iran has no air defenses. Iran has no air force, Iran has no navy, their missiles, their missile launchers and drones being destroyed or shot out of the sky. Their missile volume is down 90 percent. Their one way attack drones yesterday, down 95 percent. And as the world is seeing, they are exercising sheer desperation in the Straits of Hormuz, something we're dealing with, we have been dealing with it, and don't need to worry about it. We're on plan to defeat, destroy, disable all of their meaningful military capabilities at a pace the world has never seen before. But it's not just that Iran doesn't have a functioning Air Force, or that their entire navy is at the bottom of the Persian Gulf, or their missile force is shrinking daily. Even more importantly, they also don't have the ability to build more. That's the most important component I'd like to emphasize. Today, soon and very soon, all of Iran's defense companies will be destroyed. For example, as of two days ago, Iran's entire ballistic — ballistic missile production capacity, every company that builds every component of those missiles has been functionally defeated, destroyed. Buildings, complexes, and factory lines all across Iran destroyed. So, we're shooting down and destroying what missiles they still have in stock, but more importantly, ensuring that they have no ability to make more their production lines, their military plants, their defense innovation centers defeated. Iran's leadership is in no better shape. Desperate and hiding, they've gone underground, cowering. That's what rats do. We know the new so-called, not-so-supreme leader is wounded and likely disfigured. He put out a statement yesterday. A weak one, actually, but there was no voice and there was no video. It was a written statement. He called for unity, apparently killing tens of thousands of protesters is his kind of unity. Iran has plenty of cameras and plenty of voice recorders. Why a written statement? I think you know why. His father dead. He's scared, he's injured, he's on the run, and he lacks legitimacy. It's a mess for them. Who's in charge? Iran may not even know. With every passing hour, we know and we know they know that the military capabilities of their evil regime are crumbling. They can barely communicate, let alone coordinate. They're confused and we know it. Our response?

We will keep pressing. We will keep pushing, keep advancing. No quarter, no mercy for our

enemies. Yet, some in this crew in the press just can't stop. Allow me to make a few suggestions. People look up at the TV and they see banners. They see headlines. I used to be in that business, and I know that everything is written intentionally. For example, a banner or a headline "Mideast War Intensifies," splashing on the screen the last couple of days, alongside visuals of civilian or energy targets that Iran has hit because that's what they do. What should the banner read instead? How about "Iran Increasingly Desperate" because they are? They know it, and so do you, if it can be admitted. Or more fake news from CNN: "Reports that the Trump administration underestimated the Iran war's impact on the Strait of Hormuz." Patently ridiculous, of course. For decades, Iran has threatened shipping in the Strait of Hormuz. This is always what they do hold the Strait hostage. CNN doesn't think we thought of that. It's a fundamentally unserious report. The sooner David Ellison takes over that network, the better. Another example of a fake headline that I saw yesterday: "War Widening." Here's a real headline for you for an actual patriotic press. How about "Iran Shrinking, Going Underground"? You see, Iran's leaders are hiding in bunkers and moving into civilian areas. The only thing that is widening is our advantage, not to mention our Gulf partners stepping up even more now, going on the offense and have always been with us on the defense with collective and integrated air defenses. Our will? It is unshakable. Our options? Maximized and our capabilities still building. We're going up. They're going down. As I said from the start, President Trump holds the cards. He'll determine the pace, the tempo and the timing of this conflict. His hand firmly on the wheel as well as on the throttle, setting America First, peace through strength in action.

From day one, as our nation expects and the President demands, our warriors have fought with lethality, precision, and rapid innovation. In fact, today will be yet again the highest volume of strikes that America has put over the skies of Iran and Tehran. The number of sorties and number of bomber pulses, the highest yet ramping up and only up, and quantity has a quality of its own. As we continue to ramp up every tool of AI, of cyber, of space, EW, counter, UAS, you name it, we're employing it blinding, confusing and deceiving our enemy because we know who the good guys are here. And the American people do too. And that makes my job simple. I serve God, the troops, the country, the Constitution, and the President of the United States and answer only to those all in service of victory on the battlefield and the military objectives that we've laid out from day one: defeat the missiles, missile launchers, and defense industrial base, which I laid out today. Defeat the navy and deny Iran the ability to have a nuclear weapon. Clear, decisive, achievable. And Admiral Cooper knows the CENTCOM commander, who we spent a couple of hours with last night, that in pursuit of those objectives, we have his back in every way. His commanders know that, and so do the troops in harm's way. Admiral Cooper gets what he needs the assets, the authorities, the munitions, you name it. We will stop at nothing to win. War is hell. War is chaos. And as we saw yesterday with the tragic crash of our KC-135 tanker, bad things can happen. American heroes, all of them. And as I have with all of them, as we have, we will greet those heroes at Dover, and their sacrifice will only recommit us to the resolve of this mission. But war, in this context and in pursuit of peace, is necessary, which is why each day on bended knee, we continue to appeal to heaven, to Almighty God's providence, to watch over and give special skill and confidence to our leaders and to our warriors. To those warriors who this nation prays for every single day, I hear from all of you out there who pray for them every day. Stay on bended knee and pray for them. I continue to say to them, Godspeed. May the Lord bless you and keep you and keep going. Mr. Chairman, over to you.

GENERAL DAN CAINE: Thank you, Mr. Secretary, and good morning, ladies and gentlemen, and thank you for joining us today. Before I start with an update, I also want to address the tragic loss of our KC-135 refueling aircraft yesterday. The incident occurred over friendly territory in western Iraq while the crew was on a combat mission and again was not the result, as CENTCOM has said — was not the result of hostile or friendly fire. We're still treating this as an active rescue and recovery operation. As CENTCOM announced this morning, four airmen have been recovered, and the Air Force and U.S. Central Command will provide updates as information becomes available. Please keep these brave airmen, their families, friends and units in your thoughts in the coming hours and days. Our service members make an incredible sacrifice to go forward and do the things that the nation asks of them. It's a reminder of the true cost of the dedication and commitment of the joint force. We're also aware of a fire on board the USS Gerald R Ford. We're thinking about the crew there who were injured in the fire. We believe and hope that everyone will be okay, and we're grateful for that. And for any further questions on that, we'd refer you to Navcent or to the Navy. This morning, we enter the 13th day of Operation Epic Fury, and we continue to make progress towards our military objectives. As the Secretary said, today will be our heaviest day of kinetic fires across the operating area. CENTCOM continues to attack ballistic missile and drone capabilities so that they are no longer a threat to U.S. forces, our bases, or our partners. They're continuing to destroy the Iranian navy to ensure freedom of navigation. And this means going after Iran's mine laying capability and destroying their ability to attack commercial vessels. And we're targeting their defense industrial base so they cannot rebuild the capabilities that can harm America's interests or our partners in the future. As Admiral Cooper said in his update on Wednesday, Iranian combat power continues to decline as a result of the continued strikes as the secretary talked about. We've attacked over 6,000 targets and our strike packages continue to launch every hour, and we've maintained an unprecedented number of sorties up over our head of Iran. CENTCOM is now persistently over the enemy, and as a result, we've seen a reduction in missile in one way attack fires. As the secretary said, in less than two weeks, we've rendered the Iranian navy combat ineffective and continue to attack naval vessels, including all of their Soleimani-class warships, which were armed with anti-ship missiles and anti-aircraft weapons. We've made progress, but Iran still has the capability to harm friendly forces and commercial shipping, and our work on this effort continues. But I want to make something clear. The only thing preventing commercial traffic and flow through the Straits right now, which there is some through the Straits, is — is Iran. They are the belligerents here holding — holding the Strait closed, although there is some traffic moving through there. We've made it a priority to target Iran's mine laying enterprise, their minelayers, the naval bases and depots, in addition to the missiles that could influence the Strait. And CENTCOM continues to attack those efforts. And we continue to make progress on the industrial base to include factories, weapons, warehouses that are stored in. And we will continue to do so in the coming days, especially today.

Now, as I often do, I want to share a little bit about our incredible joint force. Today, I'm going to talk about our incredible artillery force comprised of American soldiers and Marines who have been sinking ships, destroying depots, and launching Army tactical missiles, missile systems, or ATACMS precision strike missiles or PRISMS, and high mobility rocket systems, or HIMARS from outside Iran. Our army and marine artillery are hitting sites that Iran relies on to project power beyond their borders and protect our deployed. In just the first 13 days of this operation,

our artillery forces have made history. They fired the first precision strike missiles ever used in combat, reaching deep into enemy territory. They've used Army ATACMS to sink multiple ships, including a submarine, and they've done all of this with the precision and determination that comes from relentless training and trust in each other and in their weapon systems.

Yesterday, I had the incredible honor and privilege of speaking with some of our young soldiers from the Third Battalion, 27th Field Artillery Regiment out of Fort Bragg, North Carolina, the unit and the crew that fired the first precision strike missiles. The soldiers I met came from all over this great country: New York, Texas, Delaware, California. One had been in the Army only six months and had been in the unit for two months and was already deployed. He was the youngest at 20, but you would not know it from the way that they talked about their mission. The others were 22 and 28 years old. They spoke with the sense of calm, pride, purpose and clarity that tells you clearly they understand the weight of what they're doing and the people who depend on them. I asked him to walk me through a fire mission. I asked not just what they do, but what they feel, especially those first crew members on this particular mission. These soldiers basically live in these vehicles behind us, the cab very tight. Two folks sit next to each other with the crew commander behind them. It's jammed inside there with their personal weapons and kit, and they sit and wait for a fire mission. And when that fire mission comes, they close the armored doors and begin to program the systems. They then throw three simple toggle switches and 10 to 15 feet behind them, a rocket motor ignites and the round is headed downrange to do the nation's work.

I asked these youngsters, these young, awesome Americans, what does that feel like? And one of them just looked at me and said, 'it's awesome.' No drama, no hesitation. In the middle of the day, in the middle of the night, in the sun, the rain and the snow. Flawless execution. Their Marine counterparts are out there doing the same thing every night. Same work, same pressure, same expectations, same results. And we hand tremendous and enormous responsibility to these young Americans, and they carry it with a level of maturity, grit, professionalism, and tenacity that makes me incredibly proud to be a part of their joint force. Their parents and families, what could and should be incredibly proud and their leaders. And I trust them to do the deeds that they must do in difficult circumstances every single time. I also want to touch today a moment — I want to touch for a moment today on their leadership. These young Americans are led by extraordinary young leaders out at the tactical edge. Yesterday, the battery commander and her NCO were there with this crew on the same video screen. The two of them hardly said a word. They didn't have to in their eyes — and in particular, the commander's eyes — you could see the quiet trust and confidence she had in these soldiers and the rest of their battery. It came through loud and clear, and we appreciate their leadership. When I asked these soldiers yesterday, what is it that you need from the Secretary and I? They looked at each other, paused for a moment and look back at me and said, 'more rounds, sir.' It was awesome. So, thank you to those soldiers and Marines out on the firing line supporting our mission. And thank you to their families. Our joint force will continue today to deliver dynamic fires against the enemy from the land, sea, and air. We remain deeply grateful for their service. And, for the third time today, I'll mention that today will be our busiest day. This mission remains complex, dangerous, and difficult, and every service member has a family waiting for them to return home. And I want to thank all of the families today who are supporting their deployed forces and those doing the work here in the States. On a personal note today, I also want to thank the Joint Staff and the team that I have the

pleasure of working with, some of them right here in this room. They are working 24 hours a day to deliver the options that we must to the Secretary and to the president. Today, as I close, I ask that we remember our fallen and those participating in the recovery operations to bring home our lost KC-135 crew. that we keep those service members and their families in their thoughts and prayers. Those are very, very, very tough days when that knock comes on the door for people on both sides of the door. Again, thank you to our deployed thank you, to our fallen and to their families and to the Joint Force. And with that, I'll turn it back to you, sir. Mr. Chairman.

ALEXANDRA INGERSOLL: Alexandra Ingersoll, One America News. Can you tell us a little bit more about the Strait of Hormuz and when it might be fully operational again, and how do we ensure our objective of denying Iran a nuclear weapon if they continue to align with our adversaries?

HEGSETH: So, I'll take it and chime in, Mr. Chairman, if you'd like at all. I want to emphasize what the chairman said about that. The only thing prohibiting transit in the streets right now is Iran shooting at shipping. It is open for transit, should Iran not do that. Now, there's a reason why we chose as one of our primary objectives destroy the navy. We understood the ability to interdict. Shipping is something Iran has done for 40 years. It's key terrain. They've used it as leverage. The world is seeing what they'll do to fight back in that context. And so, we've heard them talk about taking various measures and we're planning for all of them, so we have a plan for every option here. We're working with our interagency partners. And that's — that's not a straight we're going to allow to remain contested or with a lack of flow of — of — of commercial goods. So, we're — we're aware of that. We're laser focused on our military objectives, but also want to make sure our partners across this government understand we're working with you to make sure that energy flows, and that's that's an important part. And the second question was on the nuclear capability. As we said from the beginning, their strategy shifted just from defense of their nuclear facilities to a conventional umbrella of so many missiles that no one would challenge their ability to their the opportunity to defeat their missile, their nuclear capabilities. And it was growing by the day. So, with Iran at its weakest moment, taking, going at that ballistic missile capability creates an opportunity to ensure at any point in time that Iran give up their nuclear capabilities or if need be, you prevent them from doing it, as the president has done once already with Operation Midnight Hammer, obliterating those capabilities. So, the conventional side is a huge part at getting at denying nuclear capabilities. [TO CAINE] If you have anything you want to add.

CAINE: I appreciate the question. I'm not going to comment on what we may or may not be thinking about any options that the joint Force could be tasked to do in the future, whether it's on the nuke matter or anything else. Thank you.

HEGSETH: But we have options.

INGERSOLL: [Inaudible] say anything about the mine that are in the Strait of Hormuz and our ability to, you know, obliterate them?

CAINE: We retain a range of options to solve a whole variety of problems. And that is one set of

options that we have, you know, that we hold on to, so thank you.

MARY MARGARET OLOHAN: Thank you, Secretary Mary Margaret with Daily Wire. Thank you both for the update. ABC News has updated its story from yesterday, clarifying that the FBI report on Iran possibly striking California was unverified. I just wanted to ask you, what impact did that original reporting have on the public? And does Iran even have the ability to conduct such a strike? And then just really quickly, on another note, what role did Vice President Vance play in counseling the president on this conflict? Can you speak to some of the media reporting suggesting that there is a division there?

HEGSETH: That reporting on California obviously had no impact on us. Also, we're used to bad reporting. We're used to ill-informed reporting. And so, it doesn't change how we operate, but we engage with it to prove that it's not true, as CENTCOM has done so well. Ultimately, I look at the reports on a daily basis of threat — our interagency is all over it. My partners across government are all over looking for indications and warnings, keeping the American people safe. There's a lot of things Iran has said it can do for — for a long time, thankfully, including engaging their proxies and getting them involved in the fight, which they haven't been able to do. So, we're watching that very closely. As far as — as far as the Vice President, he's an incredible member, leader of this team as well, alongside the President and the Secretary of State. I can't say enough great stuff about this team, how it works together, how it provides options to the President and — and the Vice President, every single day, is a key voice in that, an indispensable voice in that, actually.