

White House press briefing [via Newsmax]

04/08/26

1:31:38 p.m.

8 minutes and 5 seconds

KAROLINE LEAVITT: I've seen a lot of inaccurate coverage today from the media about these negotiations and these plans already, so let me be clear and correct the record. The Iranians originally put forward a ten point plan that was fundamentally unserious, unacceptable, and completely discarded. It was literally thrown in the garbage by President Trump and his negotiating team. Many outlets in this room have falsely reported on that plan as being acceptable to the United States, and that is false. With the President's deadline fast approaching and the United States military completely decimating Iran with each passing hour, the regime acknowledged reality to the negotiating team. They put forward a more reasonable and entirely different and condensed plan to the President and his team. President Trump and the team determined the new modified plan was a workable basis on which to negotiate and to align it with our own 15 point proposal. The President's red lines, namely the end of Iranian enrichment in Iran, have not changed and the idea that President Trump would ever accept an Iranian wish list as a deal is completely absurd. The President will only make a deal that serves in the best interest of the United States of America, and he isn't negotiating team will focus on this effort over the next two weeks, so long as the Strait of Hormuz remains open with no limitations or delays. These extraordinarily sensitive and complex negotiations will take place behind closed doors over the course of the next two weeks. I would strongly advise the media against running with narratives that have no basis in fact what Iran says publicly or feeds to all of you in the press is much different than what they communicate to the United States. The President and his team privately never underestimate President Trump's ability to successfully advance America's interests and broker peace. President Trump has a proven track record of achieving good deals on behalf of the United States and the American people, and he will only accept one that puts America first. With that, I will take your questions today. I'm sure you have a lot of them. In our new media seat, we have Shane Harris with the AMAC Newline. Shane, thank you for being here. Why don't you kick us off?

SHANE HARRIS: Yeah, thanks for having me, Karoline. Two questions for you. First, following the President's announcement of the ceasefire, if this is indeed the end of hostilities in Iran, what is the President's message to the American people about what was achieved for our country through Operation Epic Fury?

LEAVITT: Sure. I think I just laid out a significant portion of that in my opening remarks. Six weeks ago, the President looked the American people in the eye directly, and he told them that he launched this operation to take out the imminent threat that was posed by Iran, and that threat has now been greatly destroyed. Their navy, their missiles, their defense industrial base and their desire and their plan to build a nuclear bomb inside their country is no longer going to be allowed, can no longer happen, thanks to the remarkable success of Operation Epic Fury. Over the course of the last 38 days, that has been absolutely achieved. And now we're moving into the next phase of this, which is negotiating period, to put some fine points on this and to hopefully broker an agreement that can achieve long term peace in the Middle East.

HARRIS: Yeah. And then second, what is the President's message to American seniors who have a much higher voter participation rate and they're likely to be a key swing vote in the midterm elections?

LEAVITT: Well, the President loves our seniors across the country. And as you know, the President signed the One Big, Beautiful Bill, the Working Families Tax Cut last year, which greatly reduced taxes on Social Security for our seniors. In fact, thanks to the Working Families Tax Cut, nearly 90 percent of seniors will no longer pay tax on their Social Security. That's a huge win for our seniors and also for our middle class and working families across the country. With the no tax on tips provision and the no tax on overtime, next week is tax week. You'll hear a lot from the President about how his policies have benefitted the American people. And I'm proud to report that the President will be traveling next week to the great state of Nevada and Arizona to tout this historic accomplishment over the course of the next week. Thank you for being here, Shane. [TO GUTIERREZ] Gabe.

GABE GUTIERREZ: Thank you, Karoline. Iranian state media is saying that Iran is now closed off the Strait of Hormuz today in response to Israeli attacks on Lebanon. What's the White House response to that? And you just listed many military successes. I understand that, but strategically, how is the administration arguing that Iran does not have more economic leverage than now than it did before the start of the war?

LEAVITT: Sure. Well, with respect to the first reporting out of Iranian state media, the President was made aware of those reports before I came to the podium. That is completely unacceptable. And again, this is a case of what they're saying publicly is different privately. We have seen an uptick of traffic in the Strait today, and I will reiterate the President's expectation and demand that the Strait of Hormuz is reopened immediately, quickly, and safely. That is his expectation, and it has been relayed to him privately that that is what's taking place in these reports publicly are false.

GUTIERREZ: Karoline, the President yesterday threatened that "a whole civilization would die" if a ceasefire deal wasn't reached. Understanding that Iranian leaders have previously said Death to America, but why is it appropriate for the President of the United States to use that kind of language when talking about civilian targets? And was the President mocking Islam by signing off his true social post over the weekend, "praise be to Allah." Wouldn't that antagonize Muslim allies across the world?

LEAVITT: Well, I understand the questions about the President's rhetoric, but what the President cares most about is results. And in fact, his very tough rhetoric and his tough negotiating style is what has led to the result that you are all witnessing today. Iran publicly acknowledging last night that they have agreed or that they wanted this ceasefire with the United States because they no longer could tolerate being bombed by our very powerful and lethal military, and that they have committed to the reopening of the Strait of Hormuz, which the President will hold them accountable for. And it's something the administration is closely monitoring in real time. [TO KEMP] Danny.

GUTIERREZ: So, should the — should the world not take his words seriously?

LEAVITT: The world should take his word very seriously and understanding that the President is always most interested in results. And it was the Iranians who backed down, not President Trump. He said that they would face very grave consequences, as you just laid out by the 8 p.m. deadline, if they did not agree to reopening the Strait of Hormuz. And what did they do last night? They agreed to reopen the Strait of Hormuz. [TO KEMP] Danny.

DANNY KEMP: Thanks, Karoline. Would President Trump like to see Lebanon included in this peace deal? As you know, there have been increased Israeli strikes on Lebanon today with dozens of casualties there.

LEAVITT: Sure, Lebanon is not part of the ceasefire that has been relayed to all parties involved in the ceasefire. As you know, Prime Minister Netanyahu put out a statement last night in support of the ceasefire in support of the United States's efforts, and he's also assured the President they'll continue to be a helpful partner throughout the course of the next two weeks.

KEMP: Is there any thought, though, that the President might like to see Lebanon included in a future date, given that it seems to be causing or potentially undermining the Iran ceasefire?

LEAVITT: Again, this will continue to be discussed, I am sure, between the President and Prime Minister Netanyahu, the United States and Israel and all the parties involved. But at this point in time, they're not included in the ceasefire deal. [TO MASON]

JEFF MASON: Thank you, Karoline.

LEAVITT: Sure. Will the U.S. take part in talks with Iran in Islamabad on Friday?

LEAVITT: I can announce that the President is dispatching his negotiating team, led by the Vice President of the United States, J.D. Vance, Special Envoy Witkoff and Mr. Kushner to Islamabad for talks this weekend. The first round of those talks will take place on Saturday morning local time, and we know we look forward to those in-person meetings.

MASON: What role does the President see for the U.S. in monitoring or helping with the Strait of Hormuz going forward?

LEAVITT: I think the President commented on that this morning. We're going to continue to monitor it very, very closely. We will be helpful in any way that we can, but we fully expect Iran to do this. And the President has made that quite clear as well. It's again, as his statement said last night, this ceasefire is subject to the safe reopening of the Strait of Hormuz. Again, this was just determined last night. We understand things take time, but that's the President's expectation and he will hold everyone to it.

(...)

1:40:00 p.m.

1 minute and 29 seconds

ANDREW FEINBERG: So, regarding the President's rhetoric, when the U.S. invaded Iraq in 2003, George W. Bush said in a message to the Iraqi people that the military campaign was directed against the lawless men who rule your country and not against you. Yesterday, the President threatened to destroy Iran's civilization, the entire civilization, not the Iranian government, but the Iranian civilization, the Iranian people. The U.S. has been a moral leader for most of its history by fighting wars against other governments, not against civilizations. How can the President claim that America can ever have the moral high ground if he's threatening to destroy civilizations and not casting wars as fights against other governments?

LEAVITT: Andrew, I think you should take a look at the actions of this President over the course of the past six weeks and the actions of our brave men and women in our United States military who have taken out the essentially taken out the military of a rogue Islamic regime that is chanted Death to America for 47 years, that has killed and maimed thousands of American soldiers over the course of the last five decades. The President absolutely has the moral high ground over the Iranian terrorist regime. And for you to even suggest otherwise is, frankly, insulting.

FEINBERG: With all due respect, Karoline —

LEAVITT [TO *POLITICO* REPORTER]: Go ahead. Go ahead.

FEINBERG: — with all due respect, there is —

LEAVITT [TO *POLITICO* REPORTER]: Go ahead.

(...)

1:42:07 p.m.

2 minutes and 20 seconds

REAGAN REESE: I have a question for you on Iran and the question on the Dignity Act as well.

LEAVITT: Sure. On Iran, it's been reported that the cease fire was struck after the involvement of two unlikely factors: J.D. Vance and China. What role did those parties play in striking a deal?

LEAVITT: Well, Vice President Vance has played a very significant and a key role in this since the very beginning. Of course, he's the President's right hand man. He is the Vice President of the United States. He's been involved in all of these discussions. And as I just announced, he'll be leading this new phase of negotiations in Islamabad later this week. With respect to China, there were conversations that took place between top levels of our government and China's government. The President has great respect for President Xi and a great working relationship with him and with that country, and he looks forward to visiting China in just a few weeks.

REESE: And on the Dignity Act, it's getting a fresh push through Congress. It would give some illegal immigrants in the country a path to citizenship. What's the White House's position on this legislation and would the President sign it if it made it to his desk?

LEAVITT: Honestly, Reagan, I haven't spoken to the President about the legislation, but I will have that conversation and we'll get you our formal position on it as soon as we can.

REESE: Thank you.

LEAVITT: You're welcome. [TO THOMAS] Go ahead.

KEN THOMAS: The President suggested in a Truth this morning that he would support and join U.S.-Iranian venture to charge tolls for ships going through the street. Does the President believe that the U.S. should earn revenue from the Strait of Hormuz going forward?

LEAVITT: It's something — it's an idea the President has floated, as you know, and it's something that will continue to be discussed over the course of the next two weeks. But the immediate priority of the President is the reopening of the strait without any limitations, whether in the form of tolls or otherwise.

THOMAS: On the highly enriched uranium, has Iran given the administration any indication that it would simply turn over the enriched uranium, or is this an expectation that the President has that he would have to send in ground troops in order to do that?

LEAVITT: This is on the top of the priority list for the President and his negotiating team as they head into this next round of discussions. And, as I said in my opener, that is a red line that the President is not going to back away from, and he's committed to ensuring that takes place. We hope it will be through diplomacy.

THOMAS: Have they given any —

LEAVITT: They have.

THOMAS: — indication that they would turn it over?

LEAVITT: They have. Yes.

(...)

1:45:54 p.m.

1 minute and 5 seconds

KATIE ROGERS: I'm — just given the gravity of what he said yesterday, what was your understanding of what he meant when he said, I'm — this civilization is going to be eliminated?

LEAVITT: I think it was a very, very strong threat from the President of the United States that led the Iranian regime to cave to their knees and ask for a cease fire and agree to reopening the Strait of Hormuz. So it was a very strong threat that led to results. And as the Secretary of War stated at the Pentagon this morning, it was not an empty threat by any means. The Pentagon had a target list that they were ready to hit go on at 8 p.m. last night if the Iranian regime had not agreed to open the strait, which they did. And I think that's something we should all be grateful for.

ROGERS: Does he see the United States as a moral leader in the world given that he's —

LEAVITT: I was asked this exact same question by your colleague Andrew in the back. And I think, again, the insinuation by anyone in this room that Iran somehow has the moral high ground over the United States of America is insulting —

ROGERS: No one is [inaudible]

LEAVITT: — considering the atrocities that they have —

ROGERS: — civilization off the map. That's different.

LEAVITT: — considering the atrocities that they have committed against our people and our military over the past five decades.

(...)

1:49:25 p.m.

1 minute and 18 seconds

ELINA SHIRAZI: On family and friends in Iran, I myself am Iranian, and I've been talking to them through the blackout. One of my family members yesterday said goodbye to me. So, what message should we be sending Iranians when they message me saying, what should they be doing right now? How should they stay safe? Because they really don't know what to do.

LEAVITT: I think the President's main priority, in my main priority as his spokeswoman, is to make sure that clear messages are sent to the American people, of course, which is my job today. With respect to the Iranian people, the President, you know, has taken out the imminent threat that was posed by their military to the United States, to our allies in the region, to our forces in the region. And, of course, as the President has long said, he hopes that Iran will be a country of peace, of prosperity. And we're moving into this next round of negotiations to hopefully come to an agreement with this new regime that will create long term stability in the Middle East area.

SHIRAZI: He has said that they should stay inside of their homes and also take back their country. So, how — there's a contradiction there. So how do you address that?

LEAVITT: Again, we're moving into this next round of negotiations with the remnants of the

regime and those that we are speaking with now, to hopefully reach a place of peace long term for the region. And that includes the Iranian people as well.

(...)

1:51:16 p.m.

1 minute and 3 seconds

MARY MARGARET OLOHAN: Two questions. One on the deportations of Iranian officials and then on the negotiations. Are there still security concerns about Vice President Vance being part of these peace talks [with] Steve Witkoff, Jared Kushner? And then, two, given the ongoing deportation of General Soleimani's niece, does the Trump administration plan to deport more relatives or people in the families of Iranian officials that are in the U.S.?

LEAVITT: Certainly anyone who is here fraudulently, I understand one of the individuals who their visa was revoked by Secretary Rubio and they were deported by ICE. They had a fraudulent asylum claim. That's against the laws of the United States. So, anyone who is here illegally or fraudulently is subject to our nation's immigration laws and will be removed from our country. And I know this continues to be a top priority for the State Department, working in conjunction with the Department of Homeland Security. With respect to the safety of the Vice President, we fully trust the United States Secret Service to do their job, to keep the Vice President and the President's negotiating team safe. They do a tremendous job, and we fully trust them to do that.

(...)

1:52:59 p.m.

1 minute and 1 second

LYNDSAY KEITH: Secretary Hegseth said this morning that U.S. troops would be sticking around. Can you expound upon that? What we should expect from U.S. troops in theater for the next two weeks and beyond?

LEAVITT: I would refer you to the Pentagon for any specifics on — on assets that have been in place in the Middle East. But take the Secretary at his word. And also the President has reiterated this as well, in his own words, that we're not going to move anything immediately. Again, this is a two-week ceasefire where we hope at the end and we expect at the end we'll have a good agreement between the United States and Iran. But in the meantime, we're going to ensure that our military is always at the ready of the commander in chief. I'll take a couple more in the back. [REPORTERS SHOUTING] On NATO. I'll take your question.

LEONARD FELDMAN: Thank you, Karoline. On NATO, can you tell me, is the United States still considering withdrawing from NATO? Is that still a possibility?

LEAVITT: It's something the President has discussed, and I think it's something the President will be discussing in a couple of hours with Secretary General Rutta, and perhaps you'll hear

directly from the President following that meeting later this afternoon.