

USS Gonzalez Departs Norfolk for Deployment



NAVAL STATION NORFOLK, Va. (March 16, 2026) – Cmdr. Michael Shenk, commanding officer of the Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyer USS Gonzalez (DDG 66), speaks to local news media outlets prior to the ship's departure from Naval Station Norfolk to begin operations in support of its scheduled deployment. The ship's departure comes after months of training, maintenance, and certification events. (U.S. Navy photo by Chief Mass Communication Specialist Matthew Jackson)

From U.S. 2nd Fleet, 17 March 2026

NORFOLK, Va. – Arleigh Burke-class guided missile destroyer USS Gonzalez (DDG 66) got underway from Naval Station Norfolk March 16, 2026, to begin operations in support of its scheduled deployment.

The ship's departure comes after months of training, maintenance, and certification events.

"The crew is ready and this ship brings significant combat capabilities to the fight," emphasized Capt. John Benfield, commodore of Destroyer Squadron 22. "They are prepared to act at a moment's notice to deter or defeat any threat as necessary."

Gonzalez, stationed in Norfolk, Va, with a crew of approximately 300 Sailors, is a multi-mission guided-missile destroyer with air warfare, anti-submarine warfare, naval surface fire support, and surface warfare capability.

"A truly incredible amount of training and energy went into ensuring our crew was prepared for this deployment," said Cmdr. Michael Schenk, commanding officer, USS Gonzalez. "Additionally, the guidance and assistance provided by Surface Force Atlantic, Carrier Strike Groups Four and Ten, Surface Group Mid-Atlantic, Destroyer Squadron Twenty-Two, and the Mid-Atlantic Regional Maintenance Center exemplified the full team support behind this ship being ready for any challenge we may face. Thank you to our families and the Norfolk community for your continued support as we head out to sea."

Gonzalez is the U.S. Navy's 16th Arleigh Burke-class destroyer. The ship was named for Marine Sgt. Alfredo Cantu Gonzalez, a Medal of Honor recipient in the Vietnam War. The keel was laid down on Feb. 3, 1994, at Bath Iron Works in Bath, Maine, and christened on Feb. 18, 1995.

U.S. 2nd Fleet, reestablished in 2018 in response to the changing global security environment, develops and employs maritime ready forces to fight across multiple domains in the Atlantic and Arctic in order to ensure access, deter aggression and defend U.S., allied, and partner interests.

For more U.S. 2nd Fleet news and photos, visit [facebook.com/US2ndFleet](https://www.c2f.usff.navy.mil/), <https://www.c2f.usff.navy.mil/>, X –

@US2ndFleet,

and

<https://www.linkedin.com/company/commander-u-s-2nd-fleet>.

Bell Completes SPINE Upgrades on First Two H-1 Aircraft



The first AH-1Z and UH-1Y to be completed under the Structural and Power Improvements for NextGen Effects (SPINE) program, formerly SIEPU, have left the Amarillo Assembly Center From Bell Textron

AMARILLO, Texas. (March, 17 2026) – [Bell Textron Inc.](#), a Textron Inc. (NYSE: TXT) company, has announced the completion of the first AH-1Z and UH-1Y aircraft to receive full upgrades to their structure and power delivery mechanisms under the US

Marine Corps' SPINE program. The program was recently renamed from Structural Improvement and Electrical Power Upgrade (SIEPU) to the Structural and Power Improvements for NextGen Effects (SPINE) program to emphasize the importance of this essential modernization effort and to highlight the increased survivability and lethality SPINE will enable throughout the lifetime of the H-1 fleet.

The completed aircraft departed the Amarillo Assembly Center and are now at Naval Air Station (NAS) Patuxent River for continued flight testing. These tests will determine the final SPINE configuration to be modified in Amarillo and fielded to the USMC in future contracted efforts. □

The SPINE program will enable the H-1 fleet to utilize enhanced weapons systems and other future capabilities and is part of the H-1 program's modernization plan to increase lethality and enhance survivability by improving modern warfighting capabilities.

"To have these first two aircraft completed under the SPINE program is a huge moment for us," said Scott Sims, H-1 program director, Bell. "At Bell, crew safety and aircraft effectiveness remain the number one priority on everything we do. These upgrades will ensure that our H-1 aircraft remain the most capable aircraft available, while operating at the forefront of modern missions. They will continue to excel at the job they were designed to do for many years to come."

Bell's effort to modify these first two aircraft began at the company's Drives System Center (DSC) and Repair and Overhaul Center (ROC) and culminated in the aircraft electrical and structural modifications that took place over the last 19 months at the Amarillo Assembly Center. Successful execution has been a result of years of work between U.S. Government, Bell, and industry partners. The

completion of the first modification effort at the Amarillo Assembly Center sets the stage for future growth as Bell looks to support modification of the Marine H-1 fleet over the next decade.

“In the competitive world that the H-1 lives and thrives in, it’s vital to remain competitive with current and future capabilities and to excel in every environment where these aircraft are deployed,” said Danielle Markham, program manager, Bell.

“The SPINE program represents the next step in the H-1 evolution, ensuring the platform has structural strength, electrical capacity, and digital foundation needed to operate as a fully interoperable member of the modern joint force.”

**13th MEU Forms Complete
Marine Air-Ground Task
Force with Full F-35
Squadron**



A U.S. Marine Corps F-35B Lightning II aircraft assigned to Marine Fighter Attack Squadron (VMFA) 211, Marine Aircraft Group 13, 3rd Marine Aircraft Wing, conducts a vertical landing on the flight deck of the amphibious assault ship USS Tripoli (LHA 7) as part of Steel Knight 24 while underway in the Pacific Ocean, Dec. 3, 2024. (U.S. Marine Corps photo by Sgt. Luc Boatman)

From the 13th Marine Expeditionary Unit, March 16, 2026

CAMP PENDLETON, Calif. – The 13th Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU) has officially formed as a complete Marine Air-Ground Task Force with the addition of its major subordinate elements, bringing the MEU's full capability together under one command.

The 13th MEU Command Element welcomed Battalion Landing Team (BLT) 2/4, which will serve as the Ground Combat Element; Combat Logistics Battalion (CLB) 13, which will serve as the Logistics Combat Element; and Marine Medium Tiltrotor Squadron (VMM) 364 (Reinforced) and Marine Fighter Attack Squadron (VMFA) 211, which together form the Aviation Combat Element.

VMFA-211 will provide a full squadron of F-35B Lightning II aircraft, significantly expanding the aviation capabilities of the unit.

Together, these units form a Marine Air-Ground Task Force (MAGTF), enabling command and control of ground, aviation, and logistics capabilities and forming a single, rapidly deployable force capable of executing a wide range of missions from the sea.

“Compositing the 13th MEU brings together the full capabilities of a Marine Air-Ground Task Force,” said Col. Richard Alvarez, commanding officer of the 13th MEU. “That integration gives national leaders another flexible, lethal, sea-based force ready to respond when needed.”

As the Ground Combat Element, BLT 2/4, provides the infantry forces of the MEU and serves as the principal ground maneuver element of the MAGTF.

The Aviation Combat Element, comprised of VMM-364 (Rein.) and VMFA-211, provides the MEU with a full spectrum of Marine Corps aviation capabilities in support of MAGTF operations.

CLB-13, the Logistics Combat Element, provides a broad range of sustainment capabilities that allow the MEU to operate and sustain itself in any environment.

“The strength of The Fighting 13th has always been its Marines and Sailors,” said Sgt. Maj. Gerald Furnari, the senior enlisted advisor of the 13th MEU. “Every generation that serves in this unit adds to its legacy, and today’s team stands ready to answer the nation’s call.”

The composite of the MEU marks the beginning of an intensive training cycle during which the command, ground, aviation, and logistics elements will train together before deploying aboard U.S. Navy amphibious ships as part of an Amphibious Ready Group.

The 13th MEU was established at Camp Pendleton on Feb. 1, 1985, as the 13th Marine Amphibious Unit, and was redesignated as the 13th Marine Expeditionary Unit on Feb. 5, 1988. Known as "The Fighting 13th," the unit has deployed around the world in support of combat operations, crisis response missions, and humanitarian assistance efforts.

NIWC Pacific AI Program to Guide Next-Generation Chip Development



From Darian Wilson, Naval Information Warfare Center, March 16, 2026

SAN DIEGO – A Naval Information Warfare Center (NIWC) Pacific artificial intelligence program is poised to help guide the development of a new generation of American-made microchips, following a high-level summit hosted by the University of Arizona on Feb. 18.

A new coalition of leaders from academia, venture capital, and the semiconductor industry has identified a NIWC Pacific AI program as a lead use case for developing revolutionary chips

that would merge electronics and photonics. The effort aims to create processors that could dramatically reduce power consumption and heat while increasing processing power, a critical need for deploying advanced AI in resource-constrained military environments.

The “Summit on Photonics Heterogeneous Integration” brought together approximately 25 experts from top universities and tech companies to rally behind a national security imperative. A presentation on a NIWC Pacific AI initiative was given by John Wood, lead systems engineer for the NIWC Pacific Command and Control Department. “Bringing together this ecosystem of academic and industry leaders is a pivotal moment,” said Wood. “When we presented the vision for our in-house AI program, it helped crystallize the national security imperative driving this innovation. We’re not just talking about faster chips; we’re talking about securing a technological advantage for the nation.”

The NIWC Pacific program, which is developing a future AI commander-assist system, was seen as an ideal testbed. According to Wood, its near-term development goals and low initial production volume make it a perfect springboard for demonstrating the new chip technology.

The proposed hybrid chips are designed to solve two major hurdles for AI adoption on military platforms: high power draw and immense heat dissipation. By integrating light-based photonics directly with electronics, these new designs are expected to run faster and far more efficiently. This could make it feasible to run complex AI applications aboard ships and other platforms where power and cooling are inherently limited. A key goal of the coalition is to design and fabricate the new chips entirely in the United States, strengthening supply chain security for critical defense components.

“For the Navy, this is another exciting step toward making

heavy AI processing a reality aboard our ships,” said Wood. “These new chips could be the key to deploying advanced AI capabilities directly to the fleet, right where they’re needed most.”

The group plans to hold semi-annual summits, alternating between the University of Arizona and Stanford, to track progress and tackle challenges, according to Wood. The long-term goal is to mature the technology through the NIWC Pacific use case before scaling it for widespread adoption in both military and mainstream AI processors.

NOTICE: AI tools were used to improve readability of this information. Factual accuracy of all content was verified by relevant DoD personnel in compliance with DoD policies.

HII’S Ingalls Shipbuilding Celebrates Apprentice School Graduates



From HII

PASCAGOULA, Miss., March 14, 2026 (GLOBE NEWSWIRE) – HII’s (NYSE: HII) Ingalls Shipbuilding division celebrated 70 apprentice school graduates during a ceremony at the shipyard today. The event honored the newest class to complete the Department of Labor-registered program, which combines classroom instruction, paid on-the-job training and industry-recognized credentials.

“The future of shipbuilding depends on skilled craftsmen and women who care deeply about their work, and today’s graduates should wear that responsibility with pride,” said Ingalls Shipbuilding President Brian Blanchette. “What they have learned is more than a trade, it is the discipline to do what’s right even when no one is watching. And the timing could not be more important; Our Navy is counting on the commitment and capability they bring to the ships our nation depends on.”

Since its founding in 1952, the Ingalls Apprentice School has graduated more than 4,000 shipbuilders and today supports more than 750 students who contribute directly to Ingalls’ operations. The school provides specialized training in 15

U.S. Department of Labor-registered trades, equipping apprentices with the technical skills, strong work ethic and hands-on experience needed to advance into journeyman roles. Apprentices earn competitive wages and receive a comprehensive benefits package beginning 30 days after starting the program.

Annually, Ingalls recognizes apprentices who excel in academics, craftsmanship, leadership and dedication. This year, joiner apprentice Sawyer Briggs set the standard for his class and was named Overall Apprentice of the Year.

“I’m proud of the journey that has brought me to this point in my career at Ingalls,” said Briggs. “This program prepared me with the skills and confidence needed to build the ships that support our Navy and our nation, and I take great pride in the craftsmanship we deliver every day.”

Ingalls Shipbuilding, the largest manufacturing employer in Mississippi, has designed, built and maintained amphibious ships and destroyers for the U.S. Navy for more than 87 years. The apprentice school is widely regarded as the backbone of Ingalls’ workforce, with many graduates advancing from craft roles into leadership positions and senior management throughout their careers at the shipyard.

Learn more about the Ingalls Apprentice School at: www.hii.com/careers/ingalls-apprentice-school/

Dismantling Iran Threat,

Protecting Homeland, Sharpening Arctic Readiness



March 13, 2026 | By David Vergun, DoW News

More than 50,000 service members are supporting Operation Epic Fury, which started Feb. 28, said Pentagon Press Secretary Kingsley Wilson today in the War Department's Weekly Sitrep video.

Those forces have established control over air and sea domains

and struck thousands of identified Iranian targets, demonstrating operational dominance, she said.

This is what we did this week at the WAR DEPARTMENT: pic.twitter.com/hRyK3iUWmC

– DOW Rapid Response (@DOWResponse) [March 13, 2026](#)

“We continue to deliver devastating combat power. Every day our resolve increases and the regime’s ability to threaten our forces, our partners and the American people, is being systematically dismantled,” Wilson said.

Yesterday, U.S. Central Command reported about 6,000 targets struck, with more than 60 ships and 30 minelayers damaged or destroyed to date, reflecting substantial progress in diminishing hostile capabilities.

Weapons employed in the operation, per the fact sheet, include a wide range of bombers, fighter jets, electronic warfare and reconnaissance aircraft, unmanned aerial systems, missile defense platforms, artillery systems, warships, counter-drone equipment, refueling assets and cargo aircraft.

On March 11, Centcom issued a warning to civilians that the Iranian regime is using civilian ports along the Strait of Hormuz to conduct military operations that threaten international shipping.

“This dangerous action risks the lives of innocent people. Civilian ports used for military purposes lose protected status and become legitimate military targets under international law,” the warning reads.

The War Department honors the American heroes who made the ultimate sacrifice in support of Operation Epic Fury, Wilson said, adding, “These patriots paid the price in full, and the Department of War will deliver total victory in their name.”

Shifting to homeland security, the District of Columbia National Guard activated the 260th Special Purpose Brigade at the D.C. National Guard Armory, March 7, Wilson said. It is the only brigade in the Army specifically designed to coordinate military support to civil authorities and protect critical infrastructure in the nation's capital.

The brigade was created in response to President Donald J. Trump's Executive Order 14339 and a subsequent directive from Secretary of War Pete Hegseth, calling for the immediate establishment, training and equipping of a dedicated National Guard unit to support public safety operations.

"The brigade will coordinate military support to civil authorities and enable National Guard forces to rapidly integrate with federal and local agencies responsible for safeguarding our capital," Wilson said.

"Partnerships like this are essential in Washington," said U.S. Marshal Jurgen Soekhoe at the brigade's activation ceremony. "The 260th Special Purpose Brigade brings a level of coordination and readiness that allows federal law enforcement and the National Guard to operate as a unified team when security demands it."

This week, the North American Aerospace Defense Command and U.S. Northern Command concluded Arctic Edge 2026, a three-week, multidomain field training exercise conducted across Alaska and Greenland, Wilson said.

U.S., allied and interagency partners trained together to sharpen Arctic operations, improve interoperability and strengthen homeland defense capabilities in the high north, she said.

Key objectives of the exercise, according to a Northcom press release, were:

- Cruise missile defense;
- Coordination with interagency partners on the protection of critical infrastructure such as power grids in Alaska;
- Counter-small UAS defense;
- Joint and service-level experimentation and technology demonstrations;
- Arctic survival and mobility training in Greenland.

On March 8, at the direction of U.S. Southern Command commander, Marine Corps Gen. Francis L. Donovan, Joint Task Force Southern Spear conducted a lethal kinetic strike on a vessel operated by a designated terrorist organization, achieving its objective without U.S. casualties, Wilson said.

Intelligence confirmed the vessel was transiting along known narco-trafficking routes in the eastern Pacific, and the operation resulted in the elimination of six male narco-terrorists, she said.

USCGC William Hart Returns

Home After 48-Day Operation Blue Pacific Patrol in Oceania



Henry Helsabeck, son of U.S. Coast Guard Lt. Cmdr. Jason Helsabeck, awaits the return of fast response cutter USCGC William Hart (WPC 1134) on Coast Guard Base Honolulu March 15, 2026. Helsabeck, the cutter's commanding officer, led his crew on a 48-day patrol throughout Oceania, visiting Samoa, Cook Islands, American Samoa, Tonga and Kiribati. (U.S. Coast Guard photo by Chief Petty Officer Corinne Zilnicki)

Coast Guard Oceania District External Affairs, March 15, 2026

Editor's Note: Click [here](#) to download high-resolution video.

HONOLULU – The crew of Coast Guard Cutter William Hart (WPC 1134) returned to Honolulu Sunday following a 48-day patrol in support of Coast Guard Oceania District's Operation Blue Pacific in Oceania.

The William Hart crew departed Coast Guard Base Honolulu in January and traveled more than 7,000 nautical miles, making port calls in Apia, Samoa, Rarotonga, Cook Islands, Pago Pago, American Samoa, Nuku'alofa, Tonga, and Kiritimati, Kiribati.

Patrolling in support of Operation Blue Pacific, the cutter's crew worked alongside Pacific Island partners to bolster maritime security and sovereignty, counter illicit maritime activities and transnational criminal organizations, and protect vital marine resources.

The William Hart crew exercised partnerships with Samoa and Cook Islands through bilateral maritime law enforcement agreements, professional exchanges and community engagements. In total, the William Hart crew and Pacific Island enforcement officers conducted eight boardings of fishing vessels.

The crew conducted one additional boarding of a foreign fishing vessel on the high seas supporting the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission as part of a multinational effort to deter illegal fishing practices throughout Oceania. While on patrol to control, secure and defend the U.S. maritime border and its approaches in American Samoa, the crew worked alongside Coast Guard Sector Honolulu boarding team personnel and conducted a total of six boardings, including a cargo vessel, recreational boats and three passenger vessels in the vicinity of Pago Pago.

In Tonga, the crew hosted U.S. Deputy Secretary of State Christopher Landau and Prime Minister Fatafehi Fakafānuā to facilitate the signing of the new annex to the 2009 bilateral maritime law enforcement agreement between the U.S. and Kingdom of Tonga. This addition significantly strengthened the security partnership between both nations by enhancing the ability to combat illegal fishing, illicit maritime activities, and transnational

crime in Tonga's exclusive economic zone through expanded enforcement authority and technical cooperation.

"This historic patrol advanced critical partnerships with Pacific Island nations, protecting valuable marine resources and strengthening U.S. Coast Guard presence throughout Oceania," said Lt. Cmdr. Jason Helsabeck, commanding officer of the William Hart. "Our crew's dedication to these partnerships ensures a more secure and prosperous future for the region. I am deeply proud of the crew's unsurpassed professionalism, relentless commitment to securing our maritime borders, and the positive impact we've made alongside our trusted partners. We look forward to future deployments in Oceania."

Operation Blue Pacific is an overarching multi-mission Coast Guard endeavor to promote security, safety, sovereignty and economic prosperity in Oceania. Coast Guard cutters, aircrew and personnel deploy throughout Oceania to maintain unrestricted, lawful access to the maritime domain for all nations, improve regional stability, and solidify the Coast Guard as a reliable partner for maritime safety, security and stewardship in the Pacific.

The William Hart is the third 154-foot Sentinel-class fast response cutter homeported in Honolulu. The cutter's primary missions are maritime law enforcement, search and rescue, and national defense.

RTX's Raytheon Completes \$115

Million Expansion of Alabama Missile Integration Facility



Expansion to increase facility's integration and delivery capacity by more than 50%

HUNTSVILLE, Ala., (March 13, 2026) – Raytheon, an RTX (NYSE: RTX) business, has completed a 26,000 square-foot expansion of its Redstone Raytheon Missile Integration Facility, backed by a \$115 million capital investment that will increase the facility's integration and delivery capacity by over 50% and grow the company's footprint in the state to more than 2,200 employees.

“This expansion marks an important step in our ability to deliver more missiles to our customers faster, and our investment here demonstrates our commitment to making that a reality,” said Barbara Borgonovi, president of Naval Power at Raytheon. “With this significant expansion complete, we are well-positioned to help our customers stay ahead of emerging threats and strengthen the nation's defense posture.”

Since its opening in 2012, the Redstone Raytheon facility has become a cornerstone of the company's missile production and integration capabilities, including nine variants of the Standard Missile family and other advanced weapon systems. The latest expansion highlights the company's ongoing investment in capacity growth and production acceleration to meet both urgent and long-term demands for critical munitions.

"Raytheon's continued investment in North Alabama strengthens both our local economy and our nation's defense. This expansion will ensure our men and women in uniform have the advanced missile capabilities they need, when they need them, while supporting high-quality jobs in our community," said U.S. Representative Dale Strong (AL-5). "This milestone reflects the critical role the Huntsville region plays in America's defense industrial base and demonstrates what can be achieved when we work together to keep our nation safe and prepared for the challenges ahead."

Last month, Raytheon [announced](#) five landmark framework agreements with the U.S. Department of War to significantly increase production capacity and speed deliveries of critical munitions. Production under these agreements will be completed at Raytheon facilities in Tucson, Ariz., Huntsville, Ala., and Andover, Mass.

Blue Angels Mark 80 Years, Certified for 2026 Airshow Season



The Blue Angels fly in formation during winter training in El Centro, California, Feb. 24, 2026. After rigorous training and evaluations, Rear Adm. Max McCoy, Chief of Naval Air Training, officially certified the team “airshow ready.” (U.S. Navy photo by MC2 Maxwell Orlosky)

By [Morgan Galvin](#) of [Chief of Naval Air Training](#). March 10, 2026

EL CENTRO, Calif. – The U.S. Navy Blue Angels successfully completed their annual certification for the 2026 airshow season on Feb. 23, marking the squadron’s 80th anniversary. The “airshow ready” designation was granted after the team completed its demanding winter training, ensuring they meet the highest standards of safety and performance before embarking for their 2026 season.

Since their founding in 1946, the Blue Angels have served as ambassadors of naval aviation. Rear Admiral Max McCoy, Chief of Naval Air Training (CNATRA), gave final approval for the team’s 80th season after observing their last practice demonstration in El Centro.

“Earning this certification is always an honor, but it carries special weight this year as we prepare to celebrate the squadron’s 80th anniversary,” said Capt. Adam Bryan, Blue Angels’ commanding officer. “This team has worked incredibly hard to be ready to honor that legacy and represent the men and women of the U.S. Navy and Marine Corps. We are eager to get the season started.”

This year’s certification was overseen by CNATRA with a unique understanding of the squadron’s mission, as McCoy is the first former Blue Angel to oversee the Naval Flight Demonstration Squadron as CNATRA. McCoy was assigned to Naval Flight Demonstration Squadron in 2001 and 2005.

“For 80 years, the Blue Angels have represented the absolute pinnacle of naval aviation and this anniversary is a testament to a legacy of excellence that few organizations ever achieve,” said McCoy. “Certification for this historic season was exceptionally rigorous because the standard must be met. This squadron demonstrated unwavering precision and commitment, proving they are not only ready to fly, but ready to continue the Blue Angel legacy with the honor it deserves.”

With their certification complete, the Blue Angels will now begin their season tour across the United States. The Blue Angels team consists of 158 active-duty Sailors and Marines, including pilots, aircrew, maintainers, and many other support personnel.

The Blue Angels will host the last show of the season, the Blue Angels Homecoming Air Show at Naval Air Station (NAS) Pensacola on November 6.

Pensacola, Florida is where the Blue Angels call home during the show season and conduct practices in preparation for events across the country.

Headquartered at Naval Air Station Corpus Christi, Texas, the

Chief of Naval Air Training (CNATRA) oversees five training air wings and 17 training squadrons across Florida, Mississippi, and Texas. These squadrons conduct primary, intermediate, and advanced flight training for student naval aviators, naval flight officers, and air vehicle pilots. CNATRA remains steadfast in its mission to train, mentor, and deliver the highest quality naval aviators prepared to win in competition, crisis, and conflict.

Hegseth Says Iran's Defense Industrial Base Nearing Complete Destruction

March 13, 2026 | By Matthew Olay, DoW News

Secretary of War Pete Hegseth told reporters today that, in addition to the extensive damage the U.S. and Israeli militaries have been inflicting upon the Iranian terrorist regime's active combat forces, the country's defense industrial base is now nearing complete destruction as well.

"Soon and very soon, all of Iran's defense companies will be destroyed," Hegseth said while providing an update on Operation Epic Fury from the Pentagon's press briefing room.

"For example, as of two days ago, Iran's entire ballistic missile production capacity – every company that builds every component of those missiles – [has] been functionally defeated [and] destroyed," Hegseth said, also noting that assessment includes buildings, complexes and factory lines all across the

country.

“We’re shooting down and destroying what missiles [the enemy] still have in stock; but more importantly, we’re ensuring that they have no ability to make more. Their production lines, their military plants [and] their defense innovation centers [are] defeated,” Hegseth said.

The secretary added that today marks the highest number of strikes the U.S. has conducted against targets in Iran and its capital city, Tehran, since U.S. Central Command and Israeli forces launched Operation Epic Fury on Feb. 28.

“As we continue to ramp up every tool [of warfare], we’re employing [them], blinding, confusing and deceiving our enemy; because we know who the good guys are here, and the American people do, too,” Hegseth said.

In the 10 days since the conflict started, Hegseth said the U.S. and Israeli air forces have struck over 15,000 enemy targets.

“Looking up, the [Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps] and Iranian regime [see] only two things on the side of aircraft: the Stars and Stripes and the Star of David – the evil regime’s worst nightmare,” Hegseth said.

He also noted that both Iran’s missile launch volume is down 90% and one-way drone attacks are down 95% since Day 1 of the operation.

Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Air Force Gen. Dan Caine, who joined Hegseth at today’s briefing, concurred with Hegseth that this is the heaviest day of anti-regime kinetic strikes in the region.

Of note, Caine discussed the damage U.S. and Israeli forces have inflicted on Iran’s navy.

“In less than two weeks, we’ve rendered the Iranian navy

combat ineffective; and [we] continue to attack all naval vessels, including all of their Soleimani-class warships, which were armed with anti-ship missiles and anti-aircraft weapons," Caine said.

He also noted that, while significant damage has been done to Iran's navy, the regime still has the capability to harm friendly forces and commercial shipping – particularly in the Strait of Hormuz.

"The only thing preventing commercial traffic and flow through the strait right now ... is Iran. They are the belligerents here, holding the strait closed," Caine said.

To remedy that situation, Caine said U.S. Central Command has made it a priority to target Iran's mine-laying capabilities, as well as targeting nearby naval bases and depots.

Both Hegseth and Caine took time during the briefing to remember and pay tribute to the service members who were confirmed killed yesterday when a U.S. Air Force KC-135 refueling tanker crashed in western Iraq.

Four of the six crew members have been confirmed deceased, with rescue efforts continuing as of this morning.

"I ask that we remember our fallen and those participating in the recovery operations ... Those are very, very, very tough days when that [casualty-notification] knock comes on the door – for people on both sides of the door," Caine said.

"American heroes, all of them," Hegseth said of the KC-135 crew, adding that he and other members of the current administration will be on hand to greet the fallen service members at Dover Air Force Base, Delaware, once they are returned stateside.

"And their sacrifice will only recommit us to resolve this mission," Hegseth said.