Hegseth Says ‘Epic Fury’ Goals in Iran Are ‘Laser-Focused’



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Since early morning Feb. 28, American forces in the U.S. Central Command area of operations have been involved in an intense bombing campaign against Iran that has already resulted in the death of Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

As part of Operation Epic Fury, which started at 1:15 a.m. EST, American forces have already targeted the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps command and control facilities, Iranian air defense capabilities, missile and drone launch sites and military airfields.

Secretary of War Pete Hegseth said that while there is no

timeline for the military operation, there are clearly defined goals for what the United States hopes to achieve.

“The mission of Operation Epic Fury is laser-focused,” Hegseth said today during a briefing at the Pentagon. “Destroy Iranian offensive missiles, destroy Iranian missile production, destroy their navy and other security infrastructure, and they will never have nuclear weapons.”

For decades, Iran has been in pursuit of a nuclear weapons capability, through both enrichment of weapons-grade nuclear material and development of missiles that can carry a nuclear warhead.

In June 2025, during Operation Midnight Hammer, the United States struck Iran’s Fordow Fuel Enrichment Plant using 30,000-pound GBU-57 “massive ordnance penetrator” bombs. That operation, Hegseth said, obliterated Iran’s nuclear program.

Nevertheless, Hegseth said, the Iranians have persisted in pursuing a nuclear capability and in building conventional capabilities to protect their nuclear ambitions.

“Iran was building powerful missiles and drones to create a conventional shield for their nuclear blackmail ambitions,” he said. “Our bases, our people, our allies, all in their crosshairs — Iran had a conventional gun to our head as they tried to lie their way to a nuclear bomb.”

The secretary said the clear goals for Epic Fury mean it will be unlike past American conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan.

“Our ambitions are not utopian; they are realistic, scoped to our interests and the defense of our people and our allies,” he said. “This is not Iraq. This is not endless. … This is the opposite. This operation [has] a clear, devastating, decisive mission: destroy the missile threat, destroy the navy, no news.”

Hegseth said Epic Fury doesn’t include nation-building or democracy building goals.

Air Force Gen. Dan Caine, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said planning for an operation such as Epic Fury has been underway for a significant amount of time.

“This marked the culmination of months, and in some cases, years, of deliberate planning and refinement against this particular target set,” Caine said. “From precision strikes against key military infrastructure to persistent intelligence and targeting integration to the close coordination of the components across vast distances, this operation again demonstrated America’s reach, readiness and professionalism, and that of our joint united force.”

Setting the Force

Over the last 30 days, at the direction of the secretary, Caine said, the joint force repositioned forces around the region in order to provide President Donald J. Trump with options, if he intended to act.

“These movements ensured that U.S. forces remained postured, protected and ready to respond decisively [to] any emerging threat,” he said.

That effort included thousands of service members, hundreds of advanced fighter aircraft, refueling tankers, a sustained flow of munitions, fuel and supplies, and the USS Abraham Lincoln and USS Gerald R. Ford carrier strike groups, along with their air wings. More capabilities continue to flow into the region, Caine said.

“This rapid buildup of forces demonstrated the joint force’s ability to adapt and project power at the time and place of our nation’s choosing,” Caine said.

The final word that Epic Fury was going to happen, he added,

came Friday afternoon from the president.

“Operation Epic Fury approved. No aborts. Good luck,” Caine said, relaying the message from the president.

“In the region, every element of the joint force made their final preparations,” he said. “Air defense batteries readied themselves, checking their systems to respond to Iranian attacks. Pilots and crews rehearsed their strike packages for the final time. Air crews began loading their final weapons, and two carrier strike groups began to move towards their launching points across the globe.”

Epic Fury

U.S. Cyber Command and U.S. Space Command, he said, initiated action with non-kinetic effects to disable Iran’s communications ability. And then, at 1:15 a.m. EST, 9:45 a.m. Tehran time, Epic Fury kicked off.

“More than 100 aircraft launched from land and sea: fighters, tankers, airborne early warning, electronic attack, bombers from the states and unmanned platforms forming a single synchronized wave,” he said. “This was a daylight strike based on a trigger event conducted by the Israeli Defense Forces, enabled by the U.S. intelligence community.”

On the sea, the U.S. Navy launched Tomahawk missiles at Iran and attacked Iranian naval forces. While on the ground, he said, coordinated salvos of precision standoff weapons from across the region have neutralized hundreds of preplanned targets.

“This was a massive, overwhelming attack across all domains of warfare, striking more than 1,000 targets in the first 24 hours,” Caine said. “We are now roughly 57 hours into the operation. In the initial phase, Centcom’s focus was systematic, targeting of Iranian command and control, infrastructure, naval forces, ballistic missile sites and

intelligence infrastructure — designed to daze and confuse them."

As a result of strikes in Iran, Caine said the U.S. has established local air superiority, which enhances the ability to protect U.S. forces and allows them to continue operations there.

"Operation Epic Fury stands as a reminder of what the United States military uniquely delivers: the ability to project power on a global scale with speed, surprise, precision and overwhelming force, when and where our nation requires it," Caine said. "What we've demonstrated over the past several days reflects years of investment in readiness, joint integration and professionalism of the joint force."

During the briefing, Hegseth also directly addressed U.S. troops who are participating in Epic Fury, telling them that both he and the president have their backs.

"We will finish this on 'America First' conditions of President Trump's choosing — nobody else's — as it should be," Hegseth said. "And know this above all, President Trump and I have your back, always. Through fire, through criticism, through fake news, through everything, we unleash you because you are the best, most powerful, most lethal fighting force the world has ever seen."