



ARASH KHAMOOSHI NYT

Supporters of the Iranian regime march in Tehran, Iran, after weekly prayers on Friday to protest Israeli attacks. Iran sent a barrage of missiles into Israel on Friday that struck several places, according to Israeli broadcasters and the country’s main emergency service.

NEWS ANALYSIS

# With strike his predecessors avoided, Trump takes huge gamble

BY DAVID E. SANGER  
NYT News Service

WASHINGTON

Over the past two decades, the United States has used sanctions, sabotage, cyberattacks and diplomatic negotiations to try to slow Iran’s long march to a nuclear weapon.

At roughly 2:30 a.m. Sunday in Iran, President Donald Trump unleashed a show of raw military might that each of his last four predecessors had deliberately avoided, for fear of plunging the United States into war in the Middle East.

After days of declaring that he could not take the risk that the mullahs and generals of Tehran who had survived Israel’s strikes would make a final leap to a nuclear weapon, he ordered a fleet of B-2 bombers halfway around the world to drop the most powerful conventional bombs on the most critical sites in Iran’s vast nuclear complexes.

The prime target was the deeply buried enrichment center at Fordo, which Israel was incapable of reaching.

For Trump, the decision to attack the nuclear infrastructure of a hostile nation represents the biggest – and potentially most dangerous – gamble of his second term.

He is betting that the United States can repel whatever retaliation Iran’s leadership orders against more than 40,000 U.S. troops spread over bases throughout the region. All are within range of Tehran’s missile fleet, even after eight days of relentless attacks by Israel. And he is betting that he can deter a vastly debilitated Iran from using its familiar techniques – terrorism, hostage-taking and cyberattacks – as a more indirect line of attack to wreak revenge.

Most importantly, he is betting that he has destroyed Iran’s chances of ever reconstituting its nuclear program. That is an ambitious goal: Iran has made clear that, if attacked, it would exit the Nuclear Nonproliferation

Treaty and take its vast program underground. That is why Trump focused so much attention on destroying Fordo, the facility Iran built in secret in the mid-2000s that was publicly exposed by President Barack Obama in 2009. That is where Iran was producing almost all of the near-bomb-grade fuel that most alarmed the United States and its allies.

Trump’s aides were telling those allies Saturday night that Washington’s sole mission was to destroy the nuclear program. They described the complex strike as a limited, contained operation akin to the special operation that killed Osama bin Laden in 2011.

“They explicitly said this was not a declaration of war,” one senior European diplomat said late Saturday, describing his conversation with a high-ranking administration official.

But, the diplomat added, bin Laden had killed 3,000 Americans. Iran had yet to build a bomb.

In short, the administration is arguing that it was engaged in an act of preemption, seeking to terminate a threat, not the Iranian regime. But it is far from clear that the Iranians will perceive it that way. In a brief address from the White House on Saturday night, flanked by Vice President JD Vance, Secretary of State Marco Rubio and Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth, Trump threatened Iran with more destruction if it does not bend to his demands.

“Iran, the bully of the Middle East, must now make peace,” he said. “If they do not, future attacks will be far greater and a lot easier.”

“There will be either peace,” he added, “or there will be tragedy for Iran far greater than we have witnessed over the last eight days. Remember, there are many targets left.” He promised that if Iran did not relent, he would go after them “with precision, speed and skill.”

In essence, Trump was threatening to broaden his

military partnership with Israel, which has spent the last eight days systematically targeting Iran’s top military and nuclear leadership, killing them in their beds, their laboratories and their bunkers. The United States initially separated itself from that operation. In the Trump administration’s first public statement about those strikes, Rubio emphasized that Israel took “unilateral action against Iran,” adding that the United States was “not involved.”

But then, a few days ago, Trump mused on his social media platform about the ability of the United States to kill Iran’s 86-year-old supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khomeini, anytime he wanted. And Saturday night, he made clear that the United States was all in, and that contrary to Rubio’s statement, the country was now deeply involved.

Now, having set back Iran’s enrichment capability, Trump is clearly hoping that he can seize on a remarkable moment of weakness – the weakness that allowed the American B-2 bombers to fly in and out of Iranian territory with little resistance.

After Israel’s fierce retaliation for the Oct. 7, 2023, terror attacks that killed over 1,000 Israeli civilians, Iran is suddenly bereft of its proxies, Hamas and Hezbollah. Its closest ally, Syria’s Bashar Assad, had to flee the country. And Russia and China, which formed a partnership of convenience with Iran, were nowhere to be seen after Israel attacked the country.

That left only the nuclear program as Iran’s ultimate defense. It was always more than just a scientific project – it was the symbol of Iranian resistance to the West, and the core of the leadership’s plan to hold on to power.

Along with the repression of dissent, the program had become the ultimate means of defense for the inheritors of the Iranian revolution that began in 1979. If the taking of 52 American hos-

tages was Iran’s way of standing up to a far larger, far more powerful adversary in 1979, the nuclear program has been the symbol of resistance for the last two decades.

One day historians may well draw a line from those images of blindfolded Americans, who were held for 444 days, to the dropping of GBU-57 bunker-busting bombs on the mountainous redoubt called Fordo. They will likely ask whether the United States, its allies or the Iranians themselves could have played this differently.

And they will almost certainly ask whether Trump’s gamble paid off.

His critics in Congress were already questioning his approach. Sen. Mark Warner of Virginia, the top Democrat on the Intelligence Committee, said Trump had acted “without consulting Congress, without a clear strategy, without regard to the consistent conclusions of the intelligence community” that Iran had made no decision to take the final steps to a bomb.

If Iran finds itself unable to respond effectively, if the ayatollah’s hold on power is now loosened, or if the country gives up its long-running nuclear ambitions, Trump will doubtless claim that only he was willing to use America’s military reach to achieve a goal his last four predecessors deemed too risky.

But there is another possibility. Iran could slowly recover, its surviving nuclear scientists could take their skills underground and the country could follow the pathway lit by North Korea, with a race to build a bomb. Today, North Korea has 60 or more nuclear weapons by some intelligence estimates, an arsenal that likely makes it too powerful to attack.

That, Iran may conclude, is the only pathway to keep larger, hostile powers at bay, and to prevent the United States and Israel from carrying out an operation like the one that lit up the Iranian skies Sunday morning.

## Padilla warns Trump’s Iran strikes risk wider conflict

BY DAVID LIGHTMAN  
dlightman@mcclatchydc.com

WASHINGTON

President Donald Trump’s decision to bomb Iranian nuclear sites “should never have been ordered,” Sen. Adam Schiff said Sunday.

The California Democrat said that “in the absence of evidence that Iran was imminently breaking out to build a bomb, and without congressional approval,” Trump should never have proceeded with the strike, Schiff said on X.

Schiff and Sen. Alex Padilla, D-Calif., were sharply critical Sunday of Trump’s failure to seek congressional authorization — or at least have bipartisan briefings — before the Saturday decision.

“Before any further military action is taken, President Trump must come before Congress,” Padilla said Sunday in a statement. “Trump risks igniting a wider war in a region that puts American lives at risk and that he himself has warned repeatedly against.”

Schiff, speaking on CNN’s “State of the Union,” said failing to brief Democratic lawmakers was “making this just another partisan exercise by the administration when it comes to something as serious as the decision to potentially engage in warfare with another nation.”

While Congress has the power to declare war, it has not formally done so since World War II. It did authorize President George W. Bush to act against Iraq and Afghanistan in the 2000s.

Schiff, a House member from 2001 to 2024, chaired the House Intelligence Committee from 2019 to 2023.

Republicans disputed the idea that Trump acted

irresponsibly.

“Congress can declare war or cut off funding. We can’t be the commander-in-chief. You can’t have 535 commander-in-chiefs,” said Sen. Lindsey Graham, R-S.C., a close Trump ally.

“He had all the authority he needed under the Constitution. They are wrong,” Graham told NBC’s “Meet the Press.”

### CAN TRUMP UNITE THE COUNTRY?

Schiff said Sunday that Trump could have trouble rallying the country.

Trump’s quick decision “means you’re not gonna have the whole country bought into this, which is a real problem. If everything goes well then maybe it works out fine in the sense of not being an issue ... that tears apart the American people.”

But, Schiff said, “If things don’t go well, if Iran retaliates, if we get in an escalating war with Iran and we don’t have the country bought in because the president didn’t seek the approval of congress, because he didn’t make the case to the American ... that’s when you have a real problem engaging in warfare on a partisan basis.”

Other Democrats had similar views Sunday.

“Stopping Iran from having a nuclear bomb is a top priority, but dragging the U.S. into another Middle East war is not the solution,” said Rep. Ro Khanna, D-Santa Clara, in a statement.

Rep. Maxine Waters, D-Los Angeles, called the nuclear strikes “tantamount to a declaration of war.”

“The President must be confronted by Members of Congress to be reminded that the President must come before Congress to seek approval before a declaration of war,” she said.



CRAIG HUDSON Sipa USA

U.S. Sen. Alex Padilla, D-Calif., speaks with U.S. Sen. Adam Schiff, D-Calif., before the Senate Judiciary Committee holds a confirmation hearing for Pamela Bondi to become U.S. attorney general at the Capitol in Washington, D.C., on Jan. 15.

## BIRTHDAYS: JUNE 23

### Britannica

Biographical information from June 23 is from Encyclopaedia Britannica. Explore more at [britannica.com](https://www.britannica.com).

**Zinedine Zidane**, French football player (b. 1972).

**Joss Whedon**, American screenwriter, producer, and director (b. 1964).

**June Carter Cash**, American singer and actress (b. 1929).

**Alan Turing**, British mathematician and logician (b. 1912).

**Edward VIII**, king of United Kingdom (b. 1894).

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### The Kansas City Star

Executive Editor  
**Greg Farmer**  
816-234-4321 | [gfarmer@kcstar.com](mailto:gfarmer@kcstar.com)

Vice President, Opinion Editor  
**Yvette Walker**  
816-234-4079 | [ywalker@kcstar.com](mailto:ywalker@kcstar.com)

VP/Advertising  
**Stephanie Boggins**  
816-234-4069 | [sboggins@kcstar.com](mailto:sboggins@kcstar.com)

VP/Advertising Operations  
**Jane Howard**  
816-234-4896 | [jhoward@kcstar.com](mailto:jhoward@kcstar.com)