

## **“Trump’s Attack on Iran Is Reckless,” New York Times Editorial, Feb. 28, 2026**

In his 2024 presidential campaign, Donald Trump promised voters that he would end wars, not start them. Over the past year, he has instead ordered military strikes in seven nations. His appetite for military intervention grows with the eating.

Now he has ordered a new attack against the Islamic Republic of Iran, in cooperation with Israel, and Mr. Trump said it would be much more extensive than the targeted bombing of nuclear facilities in June. Yet he started this war without explaining to the American people and the world why he was doing so. Nor has he involved Congress, which the Constitution grants the sole power to declare war. He instead posted a video at 2:30 a.m. Eastern on Saturday, shortly after bombing began, in which he said that Iran presented “imminent threats” and called for the overthrow of its government. His rationale is dubious, and making his case by video in the middle of the night is unacceptable.

Among his justifications is the elimination of Iran’s nuclear program, which is a worthy goal. But Mr. Trump declared that program “obliterated” by the strike in June, a claim belied by both U.S. intelligence and this new attack. The contradiction underscores how little regard he has for his duty to tell the truth when committing American armed forces to battle. It also shows how little faith American citizens should place in his assurances about the goals and results of his growing list of military adventures.

Mr. Trump’s approach to Iran is reckless. His goals are ill-defined. He has failed to line up the international and domestic support that would be necessary to maximize the chances of a successful outcome. He has disregarded both domestic and international law for warfare.

The Iranian regime, to be clear, deserves no sympathy. It has wrought misery since its revolution 47 years ago — on its own people, on its neighbors and around the world. It massacred thousands of protesters this year. It imprisons and executes political dissidents. It oppresses women, L.G.B.T.Q. people and religious minorities. Its leaders have impoverished their own citizens while corruptly enriching themselves. They have proclaimed “Death to America” since coming to power and killed hundreds of U.S. service members in the region, as well as bankrolled terrorism that has killed civilians in the Middle East and as far away as Argentina.

Iran’s government presents a distinct threat because it combines this murderous ideology with nuclear ambitions. Iran has repeatedly defied international inspectors over the years. Since the June attack, the government has shown signs of restarting its pursuit of nuclear weapons technology. American presidents of both parties have rightly made a commitment to prevent Tehran from getting a bomb.

We recognize that fulfilling this commitment could justify military action at some point. For one thing, the consequences of allowing Iran to follow the path of North Korea — and acquire nuclear weapons after years of exploiting international patience — are too great. For another, the costs of confronting Iran over its nuclear program look less imposing than they once did.

Iran, as David Sanger of The Times recently explained, “is going through a period of remarkable military, economic and political weakness.” Since the Oct. 7, 2023, attacks, Israel has reduced the threats from Hamas and Hezbollah (two of Iran’s terrorist proxies), attacked Iran directly and, with help from allies, mostly repelled its response. The new recognition of Iran’s limitations helped give rebels in Syria the confidence to march on Damascus and oust the horrific Assad regime, a longtime Iranian ally. Iran’s government did almost nothing to intervene. This recent history demonstrates that military action, for all its awful costs, can have positive consequences.

A responsible American president could make a plausible argument for further action against Iran. The core of this argument would need to be a clear explanation of the strategy, as well as the justification for attacking now, even though Iran does not appear close to having a nuclear weapon. This strategy would involve a promise to seek approval from Congress and to collaborate with international allies.

Mr. Trump is not even attempting this approach. He is telling the American people and the world that he expects their blind trust. He has not earned that trust.

He instead treats allies with disdain. He lies constantly, including about the results of the June attack on Iran. He has failed to live up to his own promises for solving other crises in Ukraine, Gaza and Venezuela. He has fired senior military leaders for failing to show fealty to his political whims. When his appointees make outrageous mistakes — such as Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth sharing advanced details of a military attack on the Houthis, an Iranian-backed group, on an unsecured group chat — Mr. Trump shields them from accountability. His administration appears to have violated international law by, among other things, disguising a military plane as a civilian plane and shooting two defenseless sailors who survived an initial attack.

A responsible approach would also involve a detailed conversation with the American people about the risks. Iran remains a heavily militarized country. Its medium-range missiles may have failed to do much damage to Israel last year, but it maintains many short-range missiles that could overwhelm any defense system and hit Saudi Arabia, Qatar and other nearby countries. Mr. Trump did acknowledge this in his overnight video, saying, “The lives of courageous American heroes may be lost and we may have casualties.”

He should have had the courage to say so in his State of the Union address on Tuesday, among other settings. When a president asks American troops and diplomats to risk their lives, he should not be coy about it.

Recognizing Mr. Trump's irresponsibility, some members of Congress have taken steps to constrain him on Iran. In the House, Representatives Ro Khanna, Democrat of California, and Thomas Massie, Republican of Kentucky, have proposed a resolution meant to prevent Mr. Trump from starting a war without congressional approval. The resolution makes clear that Congress has not authorized an attack on Iran and demands the withdrawal of American troops within 60 days. Senator Tim Kaine, Democrat of Virginia, and Senator Rand Paul, Republican of Kentucky, are sponsoring a similar measure in their chamber. The start of hostilities should not dissuade legislators from passing these bills. A robust assertion of authority by Congress is the best way to constrain the president.

Mr. Trump's failure to articulate a strategy for this attack has created shocking levels of uncertainty about it. He has called for regime change and offered no sense of why the world should expect this campaign to end better than the 21st-century attempts at regime change in Iraq and Afghanistan. Those wars toppled governments but understandably soured the American public on open-ended military operations of uncertain national interest, and they embittered the troops who loyally served in them.

Now that the military operation has begun, we wish above all for the safety of the American troops charged with conducting it and for the well-being of the many innocent Iranians who have long suffered under their brutal government. We lament that Mr. Trump is not treating war as the grave matter that it is.