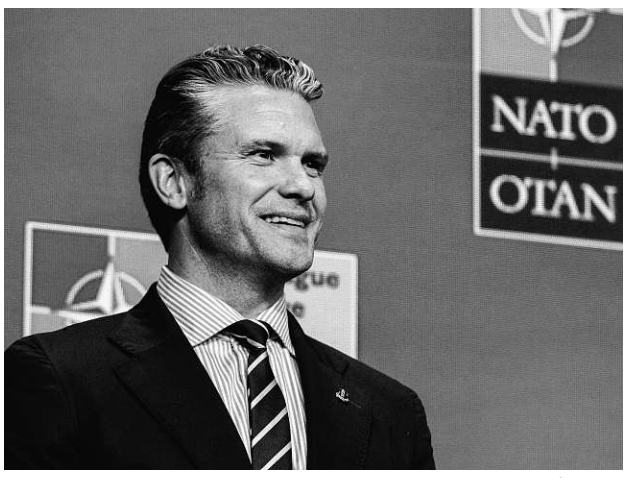
US officials delve into details, not results of Iran strikes

BY ERIC SCHMITT
NYT News Service



JONAS ROOSENS ANP/Sipa USA

U.S. Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth attends a press conference Wednesday following the NATO summit at The Hague.

Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth and Gen. Dan Caine, the chair of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, offered Thursday the Trump administration's most detailed descriptions yet of the planning and execution of U.S. airstrikes on Iranian nuclear facilities.

But Hegseth and Caine offered no new assessments of the state of Iran's nuclear program or the damage to the sites. Both men referred those questions to the nation's spy agencies.

Neither man repeated President Donald Trump's assertion that the strikes had "obliterated" the Iranian facilities, even as they pushed back against a preliminary classified Defense Intelligence Agency report that said the bombings set back the country's nuclear program by only a few months.

Hegseth began what was only his second news conference at the Pentagon by saying that the news media, in his view, had not been kind to Trump. "Searching for scandals, you miss historic moments like recruiting at the Pentagon, historic levels in the Army, the Air Force and the Navy."

Hegseth has fashioned himself as an amplifier of Trump, as part of his role as defense secretary.

Caine played videos of the bombing attack on the nuclear sites and described how they were carried out. He steered clear of Hegseth's political points, and instead focused on the personnel who developed the 30,000-pound bombs that the B-2s dropped, the bomber crew members who flew the 37-hour-round-trip mission and the troops who defended a major American base from Iranian retaliation.

Caine said only two Patriot missile defense batteries remained at Al Udeid Air Base in Qatar when Iran retaliated for American strikes with a missile barrage Monday. The oldest American soldier on the base was a 28-year-old captain, he said, and the youngest was 21. He painted a portrait of tension on the base, in an almost lyrical way.

"At 7:30 p.m. in Qatar, as the sun sets in the west, Iran attacks," he said.

Asked later if he had been pressured to provide a rosy assessment of the mission, Caine, an F-16 pilot, said: "No, I have not, and no, I would not."



ERIC LEE NYT

Elizabeth MacDonough, the parliamentarian who enforces the Senate's rules, has not yet ruled on all parts of the Republicans' sweeping domestic policy bill. The tax changes at the centerpiece of President Donald Trump's agenda are still under review.

Top Senate official rules against key parts of policy bill

BY CATIE EDMONDSON
NYT News Service

WASHINGTON

A top Senate official on Thursday rejected a slew of major provisions in Republicans' sweeping domestic policy bill, sending party leaders rushing to find other ways to help offset the massive cost of the legislation a week before the July 4 deadline President Donald Trump set for its enactment.

Elizabeth MacDonough, the parliamentarian who enforces the chamber's rules, said several measures in the legislation that would provide hundreds of billions of dollars in savings could not be included in the legislation in their current form. They include one that would crack down on strategies that many states have developed to obtain more federal Medicaid funds and another that would limit repayment options for student loan borrowers.

MacDonough has not yet ruled on all parts of the bill. The tax changes at the centerpiece of Trump's agenda are still under review.

The decisions dealt a blow to Senate Republicans as they push to pass the behemoth legislation by Trump's deadline. Party leaders had hoped to begin voting on the bill this weekend, in order to allow time for the House, which must give final approval to any changes, to pass it early next week, clearing it for the president's signature.

They were the latest provisions struck down by MacDonough, after she rejected several other sections, including Republicans' initial plan to slash the food assistance program known as SNAP and a move to limit federal judges' power to enforce injunctions against the Trump administration.

Republicans are moving the bill through Congress using special rules that shield it from a filibuster, depriving Democrats of the ability to block it. But to qualify for that protection, the legislation must comply with a rigorous set of budgetary restrictions established by the Senate to govern that process.

The Senate parliamentarian, an official appointed by the chamber's leaders to enforce its rules and precedents, must evaluate those measures to ensure that every provision meets those requirements.

MacDonough's rulings are closely held by senators and are not released to the public. So it was unclear whether she had suggested the provisions were essentially unsalvageable or merely needed to be modified.

Republicans on the Senate Agriculture Committee, for example, believe they will be able to restore the provision that MacDonough struck that would push some SNAP costs to the states.

If Republicans are unable to make revisions and are forced to remove all the provisions MacDonough has ruled on, it would eliminate more than $500 billion of the bill's intended spending cuts, according to a rough analysis by Bobby Kogan, a former Democratic Senate Budget Committee staffer and White House budget official who is now the senior director of federal budget policy at the left-leaning Center for American Progress.

On Thursday, Sen. John Thune, R-S.D., the majority leader, played down the adverse rulings, saying the measure was still on track.

"These are speed bumps along the way; we anticipated those, and so we have contingency plans," he told reporters at the Capitol. "Obviously, you have to adjust the timing and schedule a little bit, but we're moving forward."

Other Republicans vented rage against MacDonough and were agitating to overrule her or get rid of her altogether.

"The Senate Parliamentarian is not elected. She is not accountable to the American people. Yet she holds veto power over legislation supported by millions of voters," Rep. Greg Steube, R-Fla., wrote on social media.

In his own post, Sen. Tommy Tuberville, R-Ala., castigated the "WOKE parliamentarian" for rejecting a provision that would reduce Medicaid funding to states that use their own tax revenues to provide health coverage to immigrants lacking legal status.

"This is a perfect example of why Americans hate THE SWAMP," Tuberville wrote. "Unelected bureaucrats think they know better than U.S. Congressmen who are elected BY THE PEOPLE. Her job is not to push a woke agenda. THE SENATE PARLIAMENTARIAN SHOULD BE FIRED ASAP."

Republican senators could vote to steer around her guidance, but that move would deal a substantial blow to the filibuster. The vote would set a new precedent that senators can ignore the parliamentarian on budget matters whenever they can muster a majority to do so, and Thune has repeatedly pledged not to take such action.

Trump says US and Iran will talk next week, war over for now

BY JOSH WINGROVE, JENNIFER A. DLOUHY AND ANNMARIE HORDERN
Bloomberg News

WASHINGTON

President Donald Trump said the U.S. would hold a meeting with Iran next week but cast doubt on the need for a diplomatic agreement on the country's nuclear program, citing the damage that American bombing had done to key sites.

"We're going to talk to them next week," Trump said Wednesday at a press conference during the NATO summit at The Hague, without giving more details. "We may sign an agreement. I don't know, to me, I don't think it's that necessary."

He reiterated that the U.S. strikes on the Natanz, Isfahan and Fordo facilities had "obliterated" them, again disputing an American intelligence assessment that said Tehran's nuclear program had only been set back by a matter of months.

The comments came on day two of a ceasefire between Israel and Iran, ending 12 days of conflict that threatened to escalate into a wider regional war and upend energy markets. As the missiles fell silent and oil prices plunged - wiping out most of their increase during the hostilities – focus has switched to a possible next stage of nuclear diplomacy.

Trump said the conflict was effectively "over" after the U.S. bombing mission – though he also warned: "Can it start again? I guess someday it can. It could maybe start soon."

Iran has been sending signals that it's ready to resume talks, which were underway with the U.S. before Israel attacked. "The logic of war has failed - return to the logic of diplomacy," Iran's mission to the United Nations said Wednesday. The mission didn't immediately respond to requests for comment on Trump's hint at new talks.

Before Israel's June 13 attack on Iran, Trump envoy Steve Witkoff had taken the lead in five rounds of talks with the Islamic Republic, seeking a deal to replace the 2015 nuclear agreement that Trump abandoned during his first term.

"We're hopeful for a comprehensive peace agreement," Witkoff said Wednesday on CNBC when asked what the next steps are for diplomacy with Iran. "We were hopeful when we first started negotiations. It didn't quite work out that way, but today, we are hopeful. The signs are there."

Witkoff said the U.S. has been "having conversations with the Iranians" and that "multiple interlocutors are reaching out to us," adding that his "strong sense" is that "they're ready."

"For Iran, a diplomatic track makes as much sense today as it did before the attack," said Ray Takeyh, a senior fellow at the New York-based Council on Foreign Relations. "It seems that the Iranian program was not fully disabled. This may tempt Israel or the U.S. to conduct additional strikes. A diplomatic process will obviate that possibility."

It's not clear what that would entail. The U.N.'s nuclear watchdog has for decades been central to monitoring of Iranian nuclear activities. But Tehran is in no hurry to resume working with the agency, which it blames for failing to condemn the U.S. and Israeli attacks.

Iran's parliament has approved legislation that would suspend cooperation with the International Atomic Energy Agency until nuclear sites are secured, though any ultimate decision will be taken at higher levels of the state.

The IAEA said Tuesday that inspections in Iran should resume "as soon as possible" to determine what's happened to stocks of uranium enriched to 60% levels, not far short of the 90% required to build a bomb. The IAEA says it last verified those inventories a few days before Israel's June 13 attack and their whereabouts is now unknown, suggesting they may have been moved preemptively from sites targeted by U.S. bombs.

Trump said the U.S. bunker-buster strikes had eliminated some key risks by burying the country's atomic materials under "granite, concrete and steel."

"We think everything nuclear is down there," he said. "They didn't take it out." Pressed about the sources for such findings, he cited new intelligence assessments and also said "we've also spoken to people who've seen the site," without identifying them.

The White House declined to specify to whom Trump was referring.

BIRTHDAYS: JUNE 27

Britannica

Biographical information from June 27 is from Encyclopaedia Britannica. Explore more at britannica.com.

J.J. Abrams, American writer, director, and producer (b. 1966).
Ross Perot, American businessman (b. 1930).
Bob Keeshan, American television producer and entertainer (b. 1927).
Helen Keller, American author and educator (b. 1880).
Charles IX, king of France (b. 1550).

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