President Considering Major Air Attack on Iranian Civilians to End War

Joint Chiefs' Report Estimates 20,000 More American Military Deaths if Ground War Continues

The Associated Press

U.S. troops continue to suffer heavy losses as they move inland from the Iranian coast, facing stiff resistance from Iranian military forces. The war began three months ago, in response to increased American economic sanctions imposed after UN inspectors discovered evidence of a covert Iranian nuclear weapons facility, in violation of Iran's agreement to dismantle its nuclear weapons program. Iranian Air Force jets launched a surprise attack on the USS Theodore Roosevelt in international waters in the Persian Gulf, sinking the U.S. aircraft carrier, killing 2,403 sailors and injuring 1,178. After the United States Senate and House of Representatives voted unanimously to declare war on Iran, U.S. forces retaliated immediately with large-scale airstrikes that destroyed all of Iran's nuclear infrastructure, air defenses, and all Iranian Air Force bases and planes. When Iran rejected the United States' demand for the "immediate and unconditional surrender" of the Iranian government, the President ordered a ground invasion by U.S. Marines and Army forces designed to destroy the Iranian military and replace the government of Iran.

An estimated 100,000 Iranian civilians would be killed in the air strike

Since U.S. troops first landed on Iranian beaches three months ago, the American advance has slowed considerably. Over 10,000 American troops have been killed in the fighting thus far, including almost 4,000 in just two weeks of intense urban fighting in the city of Shiraz, the bloodiest battle for the U.S. military since World War II.

The President has issued multiple public statements that "the United States will accept nothing less than the unconditional surrender of the Iranian regime." In response, Ayatollah Khamenei, the supreme leader of Iran, has regularly told cheering crowds in Tehran that "the Iranian nation will never surrender to anyone."

The President has been considering options for ending the war as soon as possible. Yesterday, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff delivered a report to the President including an option called the "shock strategy," which would authorize a major expansion of air strikes against Iran. The report was leaked to the Associated Press by a high-ranking administration official.

Until now, the United States has restricted its air strikes to conventional weapons against military targets in Iran. The "shock strategy," however, would target a major air attack, utilizing hundreds of planes and missiles, directly on Mashhad, the second largest city in Iran, in the effort to undermine civilian support for the war and pressure the Iranian government to surrender. Much of the city is expected to be destroyed. The report estimates that the air strike would kill approximately 100,000 Iranian civilians living in the city, including both immediate deaths and long-term fatalities from the strike. Since Iran's air defenses were destroyed in the first days of the war, no American military deaths are anticipated in the air strike.

20,000 more American military deaths expected if Iran does not surrender

According to the Joint Chiefs' report, if the United States continues the ground war, it will eventually defeat Iran, but doing so would require heavy fighting to reach and capture the heavily defended capital, Tehran, and would likely result in an additional 20,000 American military deaths.

The report does not recommend a specific course of action.