



# Operation Epic Fury: A Work in Progress

**Jonathan Ruhe**  
*Fellow for American Strategy*

**Ari Cicurel**  
*Associate Director of Foreign Policy*

The United States and Iran tentatively agreed a [two-week ceasefire](#) on April 7, during which the two sides intend to negotiate over competing plans for a longer-term cessation of hostilities. Prior to the ceasefire, JINSA's Iran Policy Project [laid out benchmarks](#) to gauge Operation Epic Fury's success and, to the extent these end states are not achieved, a postwar strategy to prevent the regime from reconstituting its most threatening arsenals.

The current ceasefire comes at a point where, despite the U.S. and Israeli militaries' operational accomplishments and the claims of [American officials](#), many of these [conditions](#) have not been met. This highlights the need to redouble focus on the regime's most urgent and threatening capabilities. Short of the unlikely scenario in which Tehran agrees to strict, verifiable, immediate, and permanent concessions that conform to these benchmarks and allow America and Israel to retain their freedom of military action, the United States must be prepared to carry out its warnings of resumed [combat operations](#) and maximally diminish or eliminate Iran's nuclear weapons program, missile and drone capabilities, and threats to freedom of navigation in the Strait of Hormuz and the Gulf.

Either way, the United States must [avoid anything](#) that strengthens or legitimizes a regime that has [not remotely](#) become more moderate, and which does not have time or history on its side. Instead, the United States must expand efforts to promote the Islamic Republic's [ultimate collapse](#) and support the Iranian people's self-determination.

## The Nuclear Weapons Program

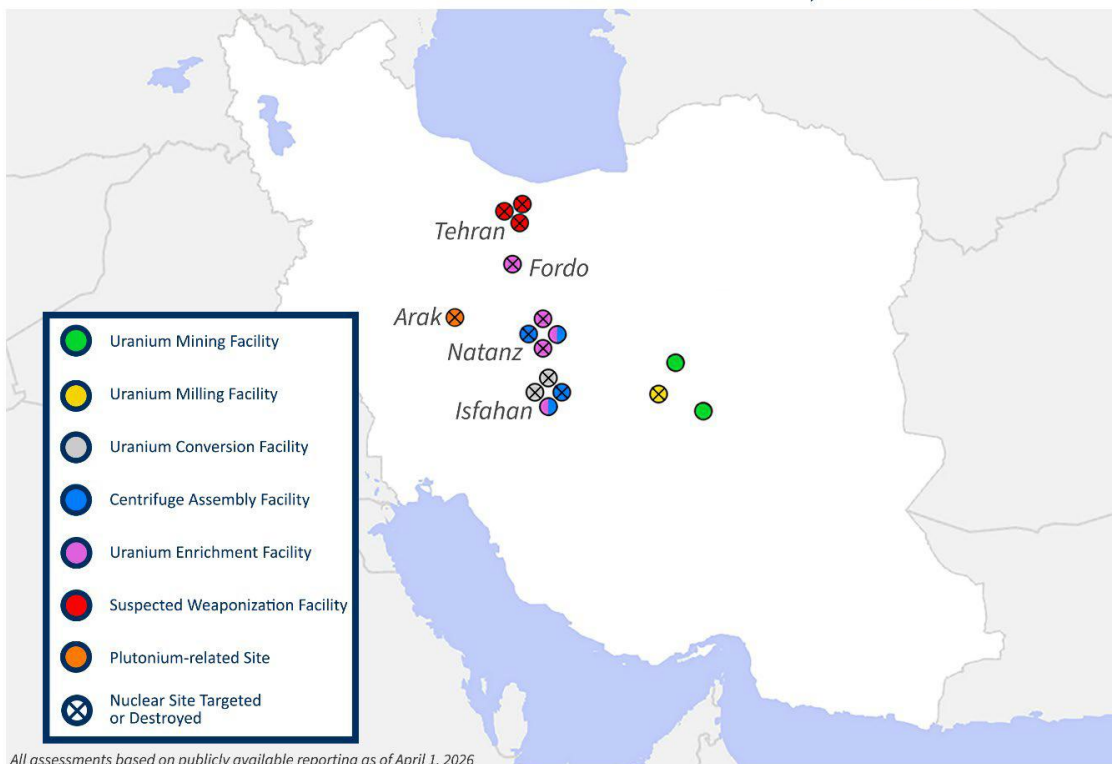
Ending Iran's nuclear weapons program was one of President Trump's [primary reasons](#) for launching Epic Fury, and U.S.-Israeli operations struck any number of relevant sites. Yet this was [omitted](#) from Chairman of the Joint Chiefs General Dan Caine's comments after the ceasefire took effect, in which he asserted that Epic Fury achieved its objectives.

JINSA's pre-ceasefire benchmarks for operational success:

- HEU stockpile: full accounting and neutralization of Iran’s stockpile of over 400 kilograms (kg) of 60 percent highly enriched uranium (HEU).
  - *Assessment*: **INCOMPLETE**.
  - This stockpile is believed to [remain trapped](#) in subterranean facilities—primarily at Isfahan but possibly also Fordow, Natanz, and/or elsewhere in Iran—though neither Tehran nor Washington has offered a complete public accounting.
  - On April 8, [President Trump](#) suggested Iran’s HEU “is now, and has been, under very exacting Satellite Surveillance.... Nothing has been touched from the date of attack.”
  - Defense Secretary [Pete Hegseth](#) reinforced that the United States knows the location(s) of Iran’s HEU and can detect efforts to access it: “right now it’s buried and we’re watching it. We know exactly what they have, and they know that.”
  - Going forward, if Iran’s HEU is not exfiltrated from the country militarily or via a diplomatic agreement, the United States must ensure rigorous and continuous intelligence-gathering and monitoring that can provide ample strategic warning for military action to defeat any HEU excavation or recovery attempt by Iran.
- Undeclared facilities: render covert deeply-buried facilities at Pickaxe Mountain and Isfahan, as well as all known or suspected weaponization-related facilities, inoperable and inaccessible to Iran. In the case of Pickaxe, which is potentially too fortified to be neutralized by bunker busters, achieve a high-confidence intelligence assessment that the facility is not close to being operational and that the United States and/or Israel will have sufficient strategic warning to act, should Iran attempt to go operational.
  - *Assessment*: **INCOMPLETE**.
  - On March 9, President Trump presumably included Pickaxe among his justifications for [military action](#) when he noted Iran “started work on ... a different kind of a site, that was protected by granite,” but there have been no reported efforts to neutralize the site and no comments from American officials on its status since.
  - U.S.-Israeli airstrikes hit several suspected [weaponization sites](#) in the past month, reflected in Gen. Caine’s April 8 [statement](#) that “nearly 80 percent of Iran’s nuclear industrial base was hit,” but there are no reports of targeting the new Isfahan site—separate from the tunnels storing HEU—nor public mentions of the site.
  - Going forward, if these remaining sites are not neutralized militarily or otherwise confirmed to be inoperable, the United States and Israel will need rigorous and continuous intelligence-gathering and monitoring, sufficient to ensure Iran cannot utilize these facilities to reconstitute its nuclear weapons program.

- Other nuclear sites: render inoperable or inaccessible any remaining known or suspected Iranian enrichment- and reprocessing-related sites.
  - *Assessment*: **COMPLETE**.
  - Other than uranium ore mines and safeguarded civilian nuclear reactors, all of Iran's known facilities pertaining to an indigenous nuclear fuel cycle were targeted extensively during the [12-Day War](#) and/or the current conflict (see map).
  - Going forward, the United States and Israel still need reliable monitoring to prevent reconstitution at these sites and any resupplies of critical materials from abroad.

## Assessed Status of Iran's Nuclear Sites



## Missiles and Drones

Eliminating Iran's missile programs as a serious threat to the region and the American homeland was a key motivation for Epic Fury. Since the ceasefire, defense officials have emphasized U.S. operational success on this score. Yet their assessments [focus narrowly](#) on U.S.-Israeli strikes against missile- and drone-related infrastructure, while eliding Iran's residual capabilities and reconstitution capacity.

- JINSA's pre-ceasefire benchmark for operational success: dramatically diminish or eliminate known missile and drone stockpiles, launchers, production lines, and storage facilities.
  - *Assessment*: **INCOMPLETE**.
  - On April 8, Gen. Caine [provided](#) detailed statistics for the number of relevant sites struck by U.S. forces, but without comparing these figures against a baseline of Iran's estimated prewar capabilities and infrastructure.
  - As late as April 2, U.S. and Israeli intelligence reportedly assessed that Iran [re-tained](#) roughly half its prewar missile launchers and drones, and senior American officials have noted the [challenges](#) of precisely estimating Iran's overall stocks and, with it, giving an accurate accounting of the extent of their wartime degradation.
  - Iranian crews reportedly [restored](#) certain missile infrastructure quickly after being hit by recent U.S.-Israeli airstrikes, and the regime reconstituted these arsenals [surprisingly swiftly](#) in the wake of prior strikes in October 2024 and June 2025.
  - Going forward, the United States must retain the ability and readiness to conduct further operations against these capabilities and, along with partners, must gather and share intelligence on Iranian reconstitution efforts and enforce UN Security Council sanctions prohibiting Iranian missile and drone development, testing, and technology transfers.

## Strait of Hormuz

Upholding freedom of navigation in the Middle East was not an initial objective of Epic Fury. While President Trump says Iran agreed to [reopen](#) the Strait as part of the ceasefire, Tehran still insists on its [self-proclaimed](#) "right" to control passage through the waterway.

JINSA's pre-ceasefire benchmarks for operational success:

- Free navigation: restore freedom of international shipping through the Strait of Hormuz.
  - *Assessment*: **INCOMPLETE**.
  - On April 8, Secretary Hegseth and Gen. Caine each said Epic Fury [accomplished](#) the stated objective of destroying Iran's naval power, including more than 90 percent of its major surface combatants, half of its small attack boat fleet, more than 95 percent of its naval mines, and more than 20 naval production-related facilities.
  - Yet only minimal numbers of commercial vessels have begun transiting the Strait as Iran [demands tolls](#) for safe passage and sustains a [de facto blockade](#), underpinned by the perception of prohibitive risk to shippers from its residual small attack boat, naval mine, and anti-ship missile and drone capabilities.

- Military dominance: reestablish U.S. presence in the Gulf via naval and air operations.
  - Assessment: **INCOMPLETE.**
  - There are no reports of U.S. Navy surface warships operating near Hormuz or in the Gulf, lending unofficial credence to Iran's claims that it controls passage through the waterway, and since the ceasefire President Trump has reiterated his demands for other countries, including NATO allies, to reopen the Strait.
- Going forward, the United States must ensure Iran does not become the arbiter, either *de facto* or *de jure*, of shipping in one of the world's most important waterways. The United States must be prepared, possibly as part of an international maritime security coalition, to reopen the Strait militarily and to escort commercial vessels as needed.