

Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND GOVERNMENT REFORM

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August 4, 2026

The Honorable Pete Hegseth
Secretary
U.S. Department of Defense
1400 Defense Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301

Dear Secretary Hegseth:

We write regarding alarming reports that the Department of Defense (DOD) has attempted to cover up the human cost of President Trump's war with Iran. On July 22, 2026, you stood at Dover Air Force Base as the remains of four soldiers returned home. DOD tied those deaths to Iranian aggression, and they were reportedly accurately recorded in the Defense Casualty Analysis System (DCAS) to bring the death toll from the Iran war to 18, before being removed from this count the following day. DOD blamed the change on a "temporary data disruption" and said the problem was being fixed, but other sources said the change was made because the deaths occurred after President Trump announced a cease-fire.¹ Days later, the four deaths reappeared under a new category called "Overseas Operations," which begins on July 7—the same date the Administration claims opened a new 60-day period under the War Powers Resolution.² This timing raises the grave possibility that DOD created the new category to support an illegal attempt to defy the War Powers Act to continue a war.³ Oversight Democrats are investigating this attempt to mislead the American people and to dishonor fallen servicemembers in service of a reckless and illegal war.

This distortion did not occur in isolation. Before the deadly July 17, 2026, attack in Jordan, three other Iranian strikes reportedly wounded dozens of servicemembers and damaged

¹ *Pentagon List of Service Members Killed in Iran War Removes Most Recent Four*, The Guardian (July 24, 2026) (online at www.theguardian.com/us-news/2026/jul/23/pentagon-service-members-killed-iran); *Live Updates: Iran Targets U.S. Bases in Jordan and Iraq as Raging War Depletes U.S. Interceptor Stockpiles*, CBS News (July 24, 2026) (online at www.cbsnews.com/live-updates/iran-war-us-trump-strait-hormuz-middle-east/).

² *Pentagon Lists 4 Killed in Iran War Under "Overseas Operations Casualties" on Website*, CBS News (July 26, 2026) (online at www.cbsnews.com/news/pentagon-4-killed-iran-war-overseas-operations-casualties/).

³ *Ceasefire "Stops" War Powers Clock on Iran, Hegseth Claims*, Military Times (Apr. 30, 2026) (online at www.militarytimes.com/news/pentagon-congress/2026/04/30/ceasefire-stops-war-powers-clock-on-iran-hegseth-claims/); *Trump Sends Congress Formal Notice That Iran Conflict Has Resumed*, Reuters (July 13, 2026) (online at www.reuters.com/world/us/trump-sends-congress-formal-notice-that-iran-conflict-has-resumed-2026-07-13/); *Trump Administration's Revision of Iran War Casualties "Huge Disrespect," Say Veterans*, The Guardian (July 27, 2026) (online at www.theguardian.com/us-news/2026/jul/27/trump-administration-iran-war-casualties-veterans).

several military aircraft, yet DOD did not disclose those attacks, injuries, or damage when they occurred.⁴ Now, the “Operation Epic Fury” and “Overseas Operations” labels in the DCAS list a combined 18 deaths and 624 wounded personnel, but DOD has not said whether every casualty under the new label arose from the Iran war, nor has DOD explained why it split casualties from the same war between two categories.⁵

President Trump launched hostilities against Iran on February 28, 2026, without authorization from Congress, making May 1 the deadline to end the war under the War Powers Resolution.⁶ On the eve of that deadline, you offered the absurd claim that the April 7 ceasefire had “paused, or stopped” the 60-day clock.⁷ That is not a serious, sensible, or logical reading of the law, which contains no ceasefire loophole. Congress then made its position unmistakably clear with the House and Senate both voting in June to direct the withdrawal of U.S. forces.⁸ In an apparent overreach of authority you resumed attacks on July 7, declaring yourself entitled to a fresh 60 days—as though resetting an imaginary stopwatch could trick the American people into forgetting that the war in Iran was never authorized.⁹ This paper-thin legal fiction, coupled with DOD’s decision to move post-July 7 casualties into a vague new category raises the prospect that the Pentagon manipulated the record in an attempt to support this fiction.¹⁰

Recently, you came before Congress asking for more than \$67 billion to prolong President Trump’s war of choice, yet the American people have reason to doubt official reports

⁴ *Iran War Shows Vulnerability of US Forward Bases*, CATO Institute (Apr. 21, 2026) (online at www.cato.org/blog/iran-war-shows-vulnerability-us-forward-bases); *Estimating Wartime Damage to US Military Bases in the Middle East as Part of Operation Epic Fury*, American Enterprise Institute (Apr. 28, 2026) (online at www.aei.org/foreign-and-defense-policy/estimating-wartime-damage-to-us-military-bases-in-the-middle-east-as-part-of-operation-epic-fury/); *Iran War Reveals Vulnerabilities of U.S. Middle East Bases*, Stars and Stripes (Apr. 29, 2026) (online at www.stripes.com/theaters/middle_east/2026-04-29/iran-war-us-bases-bahrain-navy-21523332.html); *U.S. Official: Iran Attacks Injured “Far More” Troops Than Pentagon Admits*, The Intercept (July 20, 2026) (online at <https://theintercept.com/2026/07/20/united-states-iran-war-casualties-cover-up-pentagon/>); *Pentagon Withheld Dozens of U.S. Military Injuries in Iran War*, New York Times (July 20, 2026) (online at www.nytimes.com/2026/07/20/us/politics/troops-injured-jordan-iran-war.html).

⁵ *Pentagon Reports More Than 600 Iran War Casualties in Quiet Database Update*, The Guardian (July 26, 2026) (online at www.theguardian.com/us-news/2026/jul/26/pentagon-iran-war-troop-deaths-casualty-report).

⁶ *Trump Sends Congress Formal Notice That Iran Conflict Has Resumed*, Reuters (July 13, 2026) (online at www.reuters.com/world/us/trump-sends-congress-formal-notice-that-iran-conflict-has-resumed-2026-07-13/); 50 U.S.C. § 1544(b).

⁷ *Ceasefire “Stops” War Powers Clock on Iran, Hegseth Claims*, Military Times (Apr. 30, 2026) (online at www.militarytimes.com/news/pentagon-congress/2026/04/30/ceasefire-stops-war-powers-clock-on-iran-hegseth-claims/).

⁸ *U.S. House Votes for Measure That Would End Iran War, in Blow to Trump*, Reuters (June 3, 2026) (online at www.reuters.com/world/us/us-house-backs-resolution-curbing-trump-iran-war-powers-2026-06-03/); *U.S. Senate Joins House in Voting to Halt Iran War, Rebuking Trump*, Reuters (June 23, 2026) (online at www.reuters.com/world/us/us-senate-joins-house-voting-halt-iran-war-rebuking-trump-2026-06-23/).

⁹ *Trump Sends Congress Formal Notice That Iran Conflict Has Resumed*, Reuters (July 13, 2026) (online at www.reuters.com/world/us/trump-sends-congress-formal-notice-that-iran-conflict-has-resumed-2026-07-13/).

¹⁰ *Trump Administration’s Revision of Iran War Casualties “Huge Disrespect,” Say Veterans*, The Guardian (July 27, 2026) (online at www.theguardian.com/us-news/2026/jul/27/trump-administration-iran-war-casualties-veterans).

on how many of their sons, daughters, friends, and neighbors this conflict has already claimed.¹¹ Not only have you chosen to obscure public disclosure of casualty data, but DOD now wants Congress to rubber stamp an extremely broad legal basis for withholding information from Freedom of Information Act requests from the public, gutting a key transparency safeguard.¹² A Pentagon that asks Americans for more money and more secrecy while it obscures how it counts the dead and wounded has forfeited the benefit of the doubt.

The American people deserve to know the truth about the lives and safety of American servicemembers. We are concerned that your inexperience and lack of preparedness for this role have led you to believe the safety of a servicemember is a communications problem. When four deaths can disappear from the record, Congress must ask what else is missing.¹³ DOD owes the fallen, their families, Congress, and the American people a full accounting.

Please provide written answers, materials, and identification of officials in response to the following questions no later than August 18, 2026:

1. Provide a complete record of every change to the DCAS death and injury totals for Operation Epic Fury, “Overseas Operations,” or any other category used for casualties connected to hostilities with Iran from February 28, 2026, to the present. Include in this record all associated rationales for such changes.
2. Provide all rules used to decide whether a death or injury is counted under Operation Epic Fury or another operation. State whether DOD used or considered any ceasefire date, cutoff, or other rule to exclude any of the four recent deaths from the Operation Epic Fury total.
3. Provide all documents, including legal analysis, related to development and finalization of the proposal entitled “Treatment of Freedom of Information Act of Certain Department of Defense National Security Information Properly

¹¹ *Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth Defends Iran War Funding Request at Fiery Hearing*, NPR (July 22, 2026) (online at www.npr.org/2026/07/22/nx-s1-5901981/defense-secretary-pete-hegseth-defends-iran-war-funding-request-at-fiery-hearing).

¹² Department of Defense, *Treatment Under Freedom of Information Act of Certain Department of Defense National Security Information Properly Designated as Controlled Unclassified Information*, at 22–24 (June 25, 2026) (online at <https://ogc.osd.mil/Portals/99/OLC%20Proposals/FY%202027/25Jun2026Proposals.pdf>); *Pentagon Proposes New Secrecy Power to Withhold Unclassified Records from Public-Access Laws*, CBS News (July 15, 2026) (online at www.cbsnews.com/news/pentagon-secrecy-power-unclassified-records-foia/).

¹³ *Navy Withholding Sailors' Service History, in Another Curb on Pentagon Press Access*, CBS News (July 23, 2026) (online at www.cbsnews.com/news/navy-withholding-sailors-service-history-pentagon-press-access-another-curb/); *Pentagon Bars Journalists from Its Press Office, Saying It Has Become a “Classified Space”*, AP News (June 1, 2026) (online at <https://apnews.com/article/pentagon-media-restrictions-trump-hegseth-91bae8b82d16b96091f31518cc4d4c72>); *Pentagon Withheld Dozens of U.S. Military Injuries in Iran War*, New York Times (July 20, 2026) (online at www.nytimes.com/2026/07/20/us/politics/troops-injured-jordan-iran-war.html); *U.S. Official: Iran Attacks Injured “Far More” Troops Than Pentagon Admits*, The Intercept (July 20, 2026) (online at <https://theintercept.com/2026/07/20/united-states-iran-war-casualties-cover-up-pentagon/>).

Designated as Controlled Unclassified Information.”¹⁴ Explain why existing FOIA exemptions are insufficient and whether such an expansion of controlled information could apply to casualty reports, congressional notifications, incident reports, after-action reviews, or equipment-loss information.

The Committee on Oversight and Government Reform is the principal oversight committee of the House of Representatives and has broad authority to investigate “any matter” at “any time” under House Rule X. If you have any questions about this request, please contact Committee Democratic staff at (202) 225-5051. Thank you for your prompt attention to this request.

Sincerely,



Robert Garcia
Ranking Member



Suhas Subramanyam
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Military and
Foreign Affairs

cc: The Honorable James Comer, Chairman

The Honorable William Timmons, Chairman
Subcommittee on Military and Foreign Affairs

¹⁴ Department of Defense, *Treatment Under Freedom of Information Act of Certain Department of Defense National Security Information Properly Designated as Controlled Unclassified Information*, at 22–24 (June 25, 2026) (online at <https://ogc.osd.mil/Portals/99/OLC%20Proposals/FY%202027/25Jun2026Proposals.pdf>).