

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

April 26, 2026

The Honorable Pete Hegseth
Secretary of Defense
U.S. Department of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301-1000

Dear Secretary Hegseth,

We write with concerns about the failure of the Department of Defense (DoD) to take even basic precautions to protect the lives of U.S. service members after President Trump initiated his reckless war against Iran. To date, at least 13 U.S. service members have been killed, and more than 300 have been injured – “many by aerial drones that have caused brain trauma... that [can] lead to debilitating and persistent health consequences” – since the start of the war.¹ Now, new reports raise disturbing allegations that DoD neglected to take basic steps to prevent the deaths of six of those service members and has been misleading the American public about what really happened during the fatal attack.

On March 1, an Iranian drone hit the center of a U.S. military post at Shuaiba port in Kuwait. The attack reportedly came with “no warning or sirens to alert troops to evacuate or get into a bunker.”² After the attack, reports indicate that service members “triaged themselves with makeshift bandages, braces and tourniquets” and “commandeered civilian vehicles to drive the wounded to two local Kuwaiti hospitals.”³ Six service members ultimately died in the attack, and at least 20 more were injured.⁴

After the fatal attack, you described the Iranian drone that hit the post as “powerful” and a “squinter” that was able to get through “fortified” U.S. defenses.⁵ But survivors of the attack described your account as a “falsehood,” indicating that the unit “was unprepared to provide any defense for itself” despite making requests “for more capabilities to defeat incoming drones.”⁶

¹ PBS, “Iranian attack on Saudi base injures U.S. troops as more American forces arrive in the Middle East,” Aamer Madhani, Samy Magdy, and Ben Finley, March 28, 2026, <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/nation/iranian-attack-on-saudi-base-injures-u-s-troops-as-more-american-forces-arrive-in-the-middle-east>; Stars and Stripes, “As drone warfare unfolds in Iran conflict, brain injuries take center stage,” Dr. Jim Kelly, April 7, 2026, <https://www.stripes.com/opinion/2026-04-07/drones.-traumatic-brain-injuries.-diagnosis-21306076.html>.

² CNN, “No warning, no siren: Six US service members killed in Iranian strike that hit makeshift operations center in Kuwait,” Haley Britzky, March 3, 2026, <https://www.cnn.com/2026/03/02/politics/six-soldiers-killed-in-iranian-strike-kuwait>.

³ CBS News, “Army survivors of deadly attack in Kuwait dispute Pentagon’s account, say unit ‘was unprepared’ to defend itself,” Jonah Kaplan and Michael Kaplan, April 9, 2026, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/iran-war-kuwait-drone-attack-survivors-us-army>.

⁴ *Id.*

⁵ *Id.*

⁶ *Id.*; CBS News, “Military questioned use of makeshift office space in Kuwait where U.S. troops were killed,” James LaPorta, March 3, 2026, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/iran-strike-kuwait-officials-question-fortifications>.

While the post did have steel-reinforced concrete barriers to protect against the blast of a mortar, rocket, or car bomb, there were no “American counter-rocket, artillery and mortar system at Shuaiba port that could be used to bring down incoming drones or other deadly munitions.”⁷ Iran was estimated to have thousands to tens of thousands of drones ready to use in retaliation at the time the war was started.⁸ A survivor stated that the degree of fortification that the post had for drone attacks would fall under a “none category,” leaving it highly exposed to an attack by Iran.⁹

Accounts from survivors and other officials with knowledge of the situation make clear that the risks to service members in the region were known, but leadership at DoD failed to take steps to prevent harm that could come from Iran’s retaliation. One service member recounted that “they saw intelligence showing the post [they were relocated to] was on a list of potential Iranian targets.”¹⁰ Three other officials said, “there were discussions on the ground about whether the tactical operations center in question should not have been used, as it concentrated too many U.S. troops in a location that wasn’t defensible.”¹¹

We are concerned that this is part of a larger pattern in which this administration has failed to protect Americans in the region from Iranian retaliation. For example, the Pentagon reportedly failed to provide warnings of an imminent attack to American-flagged vessels in the Persian Gulf, including vessels that work closely with the U.S. military and vessels with midshipmen from the United States Merchant Marine Academy stationed aboard.¹² If the ships had been prepared, “the Strategic Sealift Officer Force could have deployed Navy Reserve officers to support the ships and crew in dicey environments that would have secure lines to the DOD.”¹³ Not providing a warning to U.S.-flagged ships was “breaking from past precedent” and left midshipmen stranded for about a month, with “no clear way to evacuate.”¹⁴ Describing the DoD leadership, one source said, “[t]hey literally do not think about the second-, third- or fourth-order implications” of these major operations.¹⁵

⁷ CBS News, “Military questioned use of makeshift office space in Kuwait where U.S. troops were killed,” James LaPorta, March 3, 2026, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/iran-strike-kuwait-officials-question-fortifications>.

⁸ CBS News, “Army survivors of deadly attack in Kuwait dispute Pentagon’s account, say unit ‘was unprepared’ to defend itself,” Jonah Kaplan and Michael Kaplan, April 9, 2026, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/iran-war-kuwait-drone-attack-survivors-us-army>; CNN, “No warning, no siren: Six US service members killed in Iranian strike that hit makeshift operations center in Kuwait,” Haley Britzky, March 3, 2026, <https://www.cnn.com/2026/03/02/politics/six-soldiers-killed-in-iranian-strike-kuwait>; New York Times, “In Iran War, Cheap Drones Remain Wild Card,” Nicholas Kulish, March 25, 2026, <https://www.nytimes.com/2026/03/25/world/middleeast/iran-war-cheap-drones.html>.

⁹ CBS News, “Army survivors of deadly attack in Kuwait dispute Pentagon’s account, say unit ‘was unprepared’ to defend itself,” Jonah Kaplan and Michael Kaplan, April 9, 2026, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/iran-war-kuwait-drone-attack-survivors-us-army>.

¹⁰ *Id.*

¹¹ CBS News, “Military questioned use of makeshift office space in Kuwait where U.S. troops were killed,” James LaPorta, March 3, 2026, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/iran-strike-kuwait-officials-question-fortifications>.

¹² NOTUS, “U.S. Cadets Were Stuck in the Persian Gulf After Trump Bombed Iran,” Anna Kramer, Jasmine Wright, and Joe Gould, April 9, 2026, <https://www.notus.org/defense/us-cadets-vessels-stuck-persian-gulf-trump-bombing-iran-war>.

¹³ *Id.*


¹⁴ *Id.*


¹⁵ *Id.*


The safety and well-being of our service members should be a top priority for DoD leadership. That requires careful consideration of major operations like Epic Fury and plans to prevent possible harm from foreseeable attacks, like retaliation with drone strikes. To ensure our service members are being provided the best protection they can and to understand DoD's process that has led to differing accounts surrounding the fatal attack in Kuwait, we request answers to the following questions by May 11, 2026:

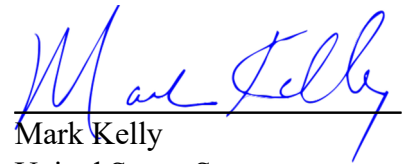
1. Why did the Army's 103rd Sustainment Command need to be relocated to Shuaiba port in Kuwait?
2. How many requests were made for more capabilities to defeat incoming drones that could attack the post in Shuaiba port?
 - a. Why were those requests not granted?
3. Which individuals were responsible for assessing the risk to the post in Kuwait and determining which measures were necessary to counter those risks?
 - a. Did those individuals make any requests for measures to counter risks that were denied?
4. What risks to the post in Kuwait was DoD aware of prior to the Iran attack on March 1?
 - a. To whom were those risks communicated? And how were those risks communicated?
5. Did DoD leadership believe the 6-foot walls around the post were sufficient to guard against Iran's retaliation to Epic Fury?
6. What other defenses were in place to protect the post in Kuwait?
7. Were there known problems with the drone and missile warning system for the post in Kuwait?
 - a. If so, have those deficiencies been fixed?
 - i. If those deficiencies have not been fixed, when does DoD plan to fix them?
8. What criteria did DoD use to decide who in the U.S. government needed a warning before the launch of Epic Fury to allow for the evacuation of non-military personnel from the region?
9. How is DoD ensuring the well-being of service members involved in Operation Epic Fury?

Sincerely,


Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator


Kirsten Gillibrand
United States Senator


Richard Blumenthal
United States Senator


Mark Kelly
United States Senator