

# GOP senators warn confidence in Hegseth eroding as Iran war drags on

by [Alexander Bolton](#) - 07/27/26

Republican senators say that confidence is waning in Defense Secretary [Pete Hegseth's](#) leadership of the U.S. armed forces as the war with Iran drags on without an end in sight.

They are also warning that the success of a possible “[massive attack](#)” against Iran could be critical to shoring up support for the unpopular conflict.

Some GOP lawmakers are questioning the administration's failure to anticipate the prolonged closure of the Strait of Hormuz — which has caused oil and gas prices to rise dramatically since February — or failure to anticipate Iran's willingness to strike neighboring allies, such as Jordan, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia.

The expansion of the conflict in recent days to the Red Sea, where Iranian-backed Houthi militants targeted Saudi oil shipments, is another troubling development that some Republicans think caught the Pentagon off-guard.

“I don't have any confidence in him anymore. I think he's all over the place — he's accelerating the retirement or forcing out some of the most distinguished leaders in the DOD that we have,” Sen. [Thom Tillis](#) (R-N.C.) told The Hill, referring to the Department of Defense (DOD).

“I think he's got a massive insecurity complex, he has a lack of experience in large organizations, he micromanages too much. He's lost my confidence,” added Tillis, who recently has been more critical of [President Trump](#) and some of his lieutenants since announcing last year that he would not be running for reelection.

Tillis's vote will be critical to advancing any budget resolution before the August recess to set the stage for advancing a \$95 billion reconciliation package that includes \$73 billion in funding for the Pentagon and U.S. intelligence agencies.

Tillis says there's a growing crisis of confidence in Hegseth's leadership within the Senate GOP conference as costs mount and Iran appears no closer to agreeing to a lasting peace deal.

“I think there are other people that are probably one decision or another” away from speaking out critically about the leadership of the Pentagon, he said.

One Republican senator close to Defense policymakers on Capitol Hill said that Hegseth is losing support within senior military ranks and that is fueling concerns among GOP colleagues.

“I have heard out of the Pentagon that there’s a loss of confidence — within the Pentagon. And of course then everyone here on the Hill hears those same concerns,” the GOP lawmaker said, requesting anonymity to discuss private conversations about Hegseth.

The Hill reached out to the Department of Defense to respond to the criticisms from Tillis and other Senate Republicans.

Some GOP senators were particularly concerned over the recent forced retirement earlier this month of Chris Donahue, the top U.S. Army Commander in Europe.

Senate Appropriations Committee Chair Susan Collins (R-Maine) on Tuesday criticized the departure of senior military officials when Hegseth testified before her panel Tuesday.

“I find this deeply troubling,” Collins said at the hearing, which was held to discuss the administration’s request for emergency Defense funding. “These are men and women who volunteered to serve our country and swore an oath to support and defend our Constitution.”

Collins said after the hearing that she wanted “more information” from the administration on “the strategy and endgame for the war.”

“I thought the hearing yesterday was somewhat helpful, but questions remain,” she explained.

A second Republican senator who requested anonymity to discuss Hegseth’s job security as secretary of Defense said there are “rumblings” about failures to anticipate the prolonged closure of the Strait of Hormuz and Iran’s ability to threaten allies in the region.

“I think there’s a sense it’s taken longer than what we thought and that maybe our strategy didn’t factor in the Strait of Hormuz or [Iran’s] ability to be willing to hit their neighbors. I think there was some miscalculations maybe,” the senator said.

Nevertheless, some defense hawks within the Senate GOP conference think that Trump and Hegseth can still achieve a decisive victory to reopen the Strait of Hormuz and force Iran to make significant concessions in its nuclear enrichment program by launching a massive attack on the region in the near future.

Senate Armed Services Committee Chair Roger Wicker (R-Miss.) is urging Trump to “finish the job” by stepping up the intensity of strikes.

Sen. John Cornyn (R-Texas), another hawk, argued that the United States has enough military strength to force Iran to reopen the strait without making major concessions.

“I think we just need to demonstrate our decisive military edge and reopen the Strait of Hormuz because we can’t depend on the Iranian regime,” Cornyn said. “If anybody can do it, the United States can.”

“The problem of endless wars, in my view, is gradual escalation. Until then, you are stuck and there is no way out other than just sort of capitulation,” he added. “So I think a decisive outcome by opening the Strait of Hormuz should be the goal.”

But there’s a general sense of frustration the conflict has dragged out for nearly five months, despite Trump’s projection in early March that it would last only four or five weeks.

“I do think that the American public’s growing weary,” Sen. Shelley Moore Capito (R-W.Va.) told NewsNation, The Hill’s sister network, in an interview.

Some Republican senators think the administration didn’t fully prepare them for the cost of the conflict, which Hegseth said last week had reached \$37.5 billion even though independent analysts such as Moody Analytics project it has cost at least \$132 billion.

“Collectively those of us in Congress are worried about the costs associated with the Department of War and the transparency,” said Sen. Joni Ernst (R-Iowa), a member of the Senate Armed Services Committee.

“I think ... why they’ve asked him to come to the Hill and present the numbers, and I still don’t know that there’s a lot of clarity on that. I think that’s what a lot of people are concerned about,” she said of Hegseth’s testimony before the Appropriations Committee.

Republican senators are warning that right now there’s not enough GOP support to pass a new tranche of military spending through the budget reconciliation process as Trump has demanded. The funding would need to move on a special budgetary track to get around a Democratic filibuster.

The prospect of passing an additional \$73 billion in military funding to help cover the war costs — something the House approved in a budgetary framework last week — is complicated by the absence of Sen. Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.), who hasn’t voted since June 11 because of a health issue.

Tillis called out the administration for failing to anticipate that Iran would expand the conflict to other strategic chokepoints, such as the Bab el-Mandeb Strait, which provides access to the Red Sea, if the United States failed to quickly win the conflict.

The North Carolina senator questioned whether the turnover in senior military leadership under Hegseth has negatively impacted strategic planning.

“Everybody knows about some of the Game of Thrones stuff going on with some of the other service secretaries and Hegseth. It seems like he wants to run the whole place,” Tillis said.

“When you’re a leader, you better damn sure have people smarter than you in the room. You’re supposed to be air traffic control for all these brilliant people and he’s undermining the DOD’s success by undermining these brilliant people who spent their career in uniform,” he said of senior commanders who have been pushed out during Hegseth’s tenure.

He said that senior generals that left might have alerted the president about Iran's ability to stymie ship traffic in the Strait of Hormuz for months or to mobilize allied Houthi militias to threaten shipping lanes through the Red Sea.