

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20510

October 28, 2026

The Honorable Pete Hegseth
Secretary of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301

Dear Secretary Hegseth:

We write today to request an immediate, comprehensive accounting of US military casualties associated with the ongoing conflict with Iran and greater transparency with the American public going forward. Recent changes to the Department of Defense (DoD) public casualty reporting, delayed disclosure of casualties, and discrepancies between the Defense Casualty Analysis System (DCAS) and information provided by US officials have made it increasingly difficult for Congress and the American people to determine the true human cost of this war.

Earlier this summer, DCAS reported 18 US service member deaths under Operation Epic Fury. That figure was subsequently reduced to 14, with four deaths instead reported under a newly created “Overseas Operations” category.¹ The DoD has since added a fifth death to the Overseas Operations category, bringing the publicly reported total across the two categories to 19.² Separating casualties associated with the same broader conflict into different categories without a clear public explanation has created unnecessary confusion about the number of Americans who have died while serving in the region.

Recent reporting regarding wounded service members raises similar concerns. On September 28, it was reported that eight Marines—seven enlisted service members and one officer—were injured when an Iranian anti-ship cruise missile struck a vessel they were operating aboard in the Strait of Hormuz on September 14.³ Although these casualties are reflected in DCAS, the DoD did not publicly disclose the attack or the injuries when they occurred. Instead, the American public learned two weeks later through news reports citing unnamed US officials. A hostile attack that wounds American service members should be clearly communicated to the public in line with standard practice. Learning weeks afterwards through the media deeply undermines public and Congressional confidence in the Department of Defense.

¹ Eleanor Watson, “Pentagon lists 4 killed in Iran war under ‘Overseas Operations Casualties’ on website,” CBS News, July 26, 2026.

² Alex Horton, “Pentagon quietly adds dozens to tally of troops wounded amid Iran war,” *The Washington Post*, September 25, 2026.

³ Nicholas Slayton, “More than three dozen sailors and Marines wounded this month in support of the Iran war,” *Task & Purpose*, September 28, 2026.

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Most troubling, the DoD's public database currently accounts for 21 US military deaths associated with Operation Epic Fury and Overseas Operations, while reporting citing multiple US officials has indicated that the actual number of service member deaths in the Middle East since the war began is at least 22, with another official placing the number at 23.⁴ The DoD has disputed that reporting but has not publicly reconciled the difference between those figures and the official casualty database. This pattern of obfuscation is why the public sees headlines such as "Pentagon Withheld Dozens of US Military Injuries in Iran War," creating an unacceptable erosion of public trust.⁵

Congress, the American people, and most importantly, the families of our service members deserve a clear and accurate accounting of the sacrifices being made by those serving our country. Casualty reporting should not depend on members of the press identifying changes to a government database or obtaining information from officials speaking anonymously.

This pattern of delayed and obscured reporting on casualties creates a dangerous perception that the Administration is seeking to hide the consequences of the Iran War from the American people. The public deserves to know the true cost of this war—not only the more than \$43 Billion in operational costs and the projected \$1,342 in higher fuel expenses per household—but what our nation has paid in the blood of our sons and daughters serving in harm's way.⁶

We respectfully request that within 60 days of receipt of this letter, the Department of Defense:

1. Provide a complete accounting of all US service members killed or wounded in the Middle East since February 28, 2026, including whether each casualty is associated with Operation Epic Fury, Overseas Operations, or another operation;
2. Explain the criteria used to determine whether a casualty is categorized under Operation Epic Fury or Overseas Operations and why four deaths originally reported under Operation Epic Fury were subsequently moved to the Overseas Operations category;
3. Reconcile the 19 deaths currently reflected in DCAS with reports from US officials that 22 or 23 service members have died in the region since the conflict began; and
4. Establish a consistent process for promptly and publicly reporting casualties resulting from hostile action, including the date, general location, service component, and nature of the incident, consistent with operational security requirements.

⁴ Noah Robertson, Tara Copp, Warren P. Strobel, and Alex Horton, "More US troops have died amid Iran war than Pentagon has disclosed publicly," *The Washington Post*, September 18, 2026.

⁵ Eric Schmitt, "Pentagon Withheld Dozens of U.S. Military Injuries in Iran War," *The New York Times*, July 20, 2026.

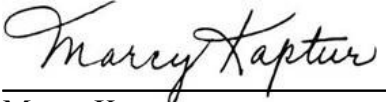
⁶ Ben Finley, "Iran war's cost grows to \$43.6 billion in new US military estimate," *Associated Press*, September 18, 2026; Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy "What Higher Fuel Prices are Really Costing You," ITEP, September 28, 2026.

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Our service members and their families deserve a casualty reporting system that is transparent, consistent, and complete. We urge the DoD to provide Congress and the American public with a full accounting of American casualties associated with this conflict.

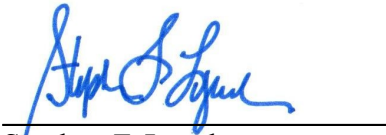
Sincerely,



Marcy Kaptur
Member of Congress



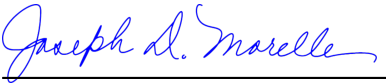
Susie Lee
Member of Congress



Stephen F. Lynch
Member of Congress



Raja Krishnamoorthi
Member of Congress



Joseph D. Morelle
Member of Congress