



Written by [R. Cort Kirkwood](#) on April 10, 2026

NYT: Netanyahu Lied to Trump to Provoke Iran Attack

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu hornswoggled President Trump into attacking Iran with a “farcical” presentation that suggested toppling the regime would be easy, or as the a top neoconservative said in 2002 about invading and subduing Iraq, a “cakewalk.”

The stunning report that Netanyahu lied Trump into the war [appeared in](#) *The New York Times*, and is based on reporting in a new book by scribes Jonathan Swan and Maggie Haberman, [Regime Change: Inside the Imperial Presidency of Donald Trump](#).

One of Netanyahu’s more ridiculous claims during the briefing in the Situation Room at the White House was that Iran couldn’t close the Strait of Hormuz, which carries some 20 million barrels of oil per day. Iran easily closed the strait, then permitted some traffic to sail through, [then reclosed](#) the strait after Israel attacked Lebanon this week. The Israeli prime minister also claimed that street protesters would topple the Islamic regime and enable the installment of a secular leader.

Trump ignored the reservations of his top advisors, including Vice President J.D. Vance, and plunged the United States into war.



AP Images
Donald Trump and Benjamin Netanyahu

HOW TRUMP TOOK THE US TO WAR WITH IRAN: [@jonathanvswan](#) and report for our forthcoming book, out June 23 with excerpt here <https://t.co/BfsdoMJWSS>

— Maggie Haberman (@maggieNYT) [April 7, 2026](#)

“Sounds Good to Me”

The president’s top advisors who listened to Netanyahu’s sales pitch on February 11 included Vance, Chief of Staff Susie Wiles, CIA Chief John Ratcliffe, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Dan Caine, and Secretaries of State and Defense Marco Rubio and Pete Hegseth.

All of them, Vance excepted, the *Times* reported, caved to Trump’s “abundant confidence” that the war would be a cinch.

“In the Situation Room on Feb. 11, Mr. Netanyahu made a hard sell, suggesting that Iran was ripe for regime change and expressing the belief that a joint U.S.-Israeli mission could finally bring an end to



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the Islamic Republic,” the [Times reported](#):

At one point, the Israelis played for Mr. Trump a brief video that included a montage of potential new leaders who could take over the country if the hard-line government fell. Among those featured was Reza Pahlavi, the exiled son of Iran’s last shah, now a Washington-based dissident who had tried to position himself as a secular leader who could shepherd Iran toward a post-theocratic government.

Mr. Netanyahu and his team outlined conditions they portrayed as pointing to near-certain victory: Iran’s ballistic missile program could be destroyed in a few weeks. The regime would be so weakened that it could not choke off the Strait of Hormuz, and the likelihood that Iran would land blows against U.S. interests in neighboring countries was assessed as minimal.

Besides, Mossad’s intelligence indicated that street protests inside Iran would begin again and — with the impetus of the Israeli spy agency helping to foment riots and rebellion — an intense bombing campaign could foster the conditions for the Iranian opposition to overthrow the regime.

Frighteningly, Trump simply said “sounds good to me.” Netanyahu obviously thought a U.S.-Israeli strike was ahead. Indeed, Netanyahu knew he had sold the war to Trump, and so did Trump’s advisors, the *Times* continued. They “could see that he had been deeply impressed by the promise of what Mr. Netanyahu’s military and intelligence services could do, just as he had been when the two men spoke before the 12-day war with Iran in June.”

Still, U.S. intelligence agencies had to evaluate Netanyahu’s claims.

“Detached From Reality, Farcical ... Bullsh*t”

The analysis of Netanyahu’s presentation didn’t take long. Broken into four parts, it was ready the next day. The intelligence analysts brief some senior officials before Trump joined them in the Situation Room.

“First was decapitation — killing the ayatollah,” the [Times reported](#):

Second was crippling Iran’s capacity to project power and threaten its neighbors. Third was a popular uprising inside Iran. And fourth was regime change, with a secular leader installed to govern the country.

The U.S. officials assessed that the first two objectives were achievable with American intelligence and military power. They assessed that the third and fourth parts of Mr. Netanyahu’s pitch, which included the possibility of the Kurds mounting a ground invasion of Iran, were detached from reality.

When Mr. Trump joined the meeting, Mr. Ratcliffe briefed him on the assessment. The C.I.A. director used one word to describe the Israeli prime minister’s regime change scenarios: “farcical.”

At that point, Mr. Rubio cut in. “In other words, it’s bullsh*t,” he said.

Mr. Ratcliffe added that given the unpredictability of events in any conflict, regime change



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could happen, but it should not be considered an achievable objective.

Several others jumped in, including Mr. Vance, just back from Azerbaijan, who also expressed strong skepticism about the prospect of regime change.

Trump asked for Caine's advice.

Replied Caine:

Sir, this is, in my experience, standard operating procedure for the Israelis. They oversell, and their plans are not always well-developed. They know they need us, and that's why they're hard-selling.

"Trump quickly weighed the assessment," the [Times reported](#). He was unconcerned about parts 1 and 2 of the analysis, and instead focused on parts 3 and 4: "killing the ayatollah and Iran's top leaders and dismantling the Iranian military."

Caine gave Trump and the others an "alarming military assessment that a major campaign against Iran would drastically deplete stockpiles of American weaponry, including missile interceptors, whose supply had been strained after years of support for Ukraine and Israel," the *Times* continued. Caine "saw no clear path to quickly replenishing these stockpiles." After the imprudence of sending military aid to Ukraine, war with Iran on Israel's behalf would strip the United States of its military muscle.

Caine also "flagged the enormous difficulty of securing the Strait of Hormuz and the risks of Iran blocking it. Mr. Trump had dismissed that possibility on the assumption that the regime would capitulate before it came to that," the [Times divulged](#):

The president appeared to think it would be a very quick war — an impression that had been reinforced by the tepid response to the U.S. bombing of Iran's nuclear facilities in June....

Trump had a habit of confusing tactical advice from General Caine with strategic counsel. In practice, that meant the general might warn in one breath about the difficulties of one aspect of the operation, then in the next note that the United States had an essentially unlimited supply of cheap, precision-guided bombs and could strike Iran for weeks once it achieved air superiority.

To the chairman, these were separate observations. But Mr. Trump appeared to think that the second most likely canceled out the first.

At no point during the deliberations did the chairman directly tell the president that war with Iran was a terrible idea — though some of General Caine's colleagues believed that was exactly what he thought.

As for what others thought of attacking Iran, Wiles was concerned about a "new conflict overseas" but often didn't comment on military issues. One of Trump's press people said attacking Iran would violate his key campaign promise of no more foreign wars. Rubio was "ambivalent," but Hegseth was four-square behind hitting Iran now rather than later.



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Vance: Against War

But “nobody in Mr. Trump’s inner circle was more worried about the prospect of war with Iran, or did more to try to stop it, than the vice president,” the *Times* continued. He thought the war would be “massively expensive” and “a huge distraction of resources.” A war for regime change would be a “disaster.” The vice president — a former U.S. Marine — opposed attacking Iran.

“But knowing that Mr. Trump was likely to intervene in some fashion, he tried to steer toward more limited action. Later, when it seemed certain that the president was set on a large-scale campaign, Mr. Vance argued that he should do so with overwhelming force, in the hope of achieving his objectives quickly,” the [Times revealed](#):

In front of his colleagues, Mr. Vance warned Mr. Trump that a war against Iran could cause regional chaos and untold numbers of casualties. It could also break apart Mr. Trump’s political coalition and would be seen as a betrayal by many voters who had bought into the promise of no new wars.

Mr. Vance raised other concerns, too. As vice president, he was aware of the scope of America’s munitions problem. A war against a regime with enormous will for survival could leave the United States in a far worse position to fight conflicts for some years.

Trump ignored Vance and instead listened to Netanyahu. On February 26, he ordered the attack.

Former CIA agent [John Kiriakou recently told](#) podcaster Michael Franzese that a White House source said Netanyahu threatened to use a nuclear weapon against Iran if Trump didn’t go along.

As well, just after the war began, Secretary of State [Marco Rubio admitted](#) that Netanyahu left the U.S. no choice but to attack Iran.

Said Rubio:

We knew that there was going to be an Israeli action, we knew that that would precipitate an attack against American forces, and we knew that if we didn’t preemptively go after them before they launched those attacks, we would suffer higher casualties, and perhaps even higher [numbers] killed. And we would all be here answering questions about why we knew that and didn’t act.

.[@SecRubio](#): “The president made the very wise decision—we knew that there was going to be an Israeli action, we knew that that would precipitate an attack against American forces, and we knew that if we didn’t preemptively go after them before they launched those attacks, we... pic.twitter.com/Jp5rqpRH4T

— Rapid Response 47 (@RapidResponse47) [March 2, 2026](#)



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