



Written by [R. Cort Kirkwood](#) on September 3, 2026

Op-ed: Ground Troops Needed to Defeat Iran. U.S. Army 1M Short. Recruitment Drive Should Include Total Debt Forgiveness

As expected, boosters for the war against Iran now admit what everyone knew when President Trump scrapped the Constitution and attacked the country on behalf of Israel. An air campaign will not bring Iran to heel.

That leaves one option: Ground troops — hundreds of thousands of soldiers and Marines on the ground, slugging it out in a country that Israel-First armchair warriors know nothing about.

The problem: U.S. armed forces, [avers an op-ed](#) in *The Jerusalem Post*, could be as many as 1 million men short of what it will take to conquer the country. The solution: Tell young American men that all debts will be forgiven in return for enlisting in the Army or Marines.



Author A.J. Jaff, former Canadian military, isn't the first to propose ground troops. The late Israel-First GOP Senator Lindsey Graham suggested that President Trump should dispatch the Marines. Neocon podcaster Ben Shapiro explained that Americans would happily accept tens of thousands of dead and wounded Americans if all that blood meant defeating Iran.

Opinion: The Iran war does not end when a ceasefire is signed. It ends when Iranian institutional coherence is broken. Six months of airstrikes did not do that. Three quiet moves in Washington might.

□ [@aj_geo_analysis](https://t.co/YCGxoJLyEq)

— The Jerusalem Post (@Jerusalem_Post) [August 30, 2026](#)

Ground War a Must

Jaff explained that “the Pentagon reportedly asked outside analysts this month for creative ideas on Iran. That request itself is worth paying attention to. Over 180 days into a war that produced the most intensive American air campaign since Iraq in 2003, the CIA has now confirmed what the strike data was already reflecting.”

Then [Jaff offered](#) the reasons why the war seems stalemated:

First, Iran's military capacity did not collapse. Second, air power resolved neither the institutional problem nor the negotiating problem. Third, the Pentagon still lacks the tools needed to end the war with the Islamic Republic.



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Three moves remain available and must be calculated within the Pentagon and the American administration.

One move is Congress' recognizing the independence of Iranian minorities: "Kurds in the western Kurdistan province of Iran and surrounding regions; Ahwazi Arabs in Khuzestan, sitting on top of Iran's oil; the Baluchis in the southeast; and the Azeris in the northwest. Together, these populations account for approximately 50% of Iran's over 90 million citizens."

The third move is guaranteeing Red China access to Iranian oil after the war in return for China's withdrawing material and diplomatic support for Iran now.

But the second move might be the most frightening: Sign up for war and you will be debt free.

"Recruitment numbers are running below what a ground invasion of Iran would require," the retired Canadian military man wrote:

Estimates for a successful ground campaign against Iran's 31 provincial commands and its Mosaic Defense Doctrine run between 750 thousand and 1.5 million American troops. The current active U.S. Army stands at roughly 452 thousand. The math does not work, obviously.

Indeed it doesn't. Jaff's ground-war scenario suggests that the effort is as many as 1 million troops short of what will be needed. Thus did the scribe suggest debt-forgiveness.

"The average American aged 18 to 34 carries more than \$40 thousand in non-mortgage debt across student loans, credit card balances, auto loans, and personal loans, with some estimates [going] as high as \$100 thousand," [he wrote](#):

This is the cohort the Pentagon needs. A federally administered debt-forgiveness enlistment program that fully discharges student loan, credit card, and loan balances after 24 or 36 months of service, and extends the GI Bill, would produce voluntary enlistment at scale.

Graham: Attack Kharg

Whatever the accuracy of Jaff's numbers, he isn't the first to pound the drums for ground troops to die in the charnel house that a ground war in Iran would become.

Graham, [whose last thoughts](#) were about war and killing when [he shuffled](#) off this mortal coil, said Trump should send in the Marines to take Kharg Island because the [Marines took Iwo Jima](#) 81 years ago.

"Here's what I told President Trump," he told Fox News hostess Shannon Bream in March, weeks after the war began. "Keep it up for a few more weeks, take Kharg Island, where all of the resources they have to produce oil [are], control that island, let this regime die on the vine."

Bream asked whether U.S. troops would be "on the ground," and cited a piece in the far-left *Atlantic*, [which reported](#) that taking Kharg Island wouldn't be all that easy. It would be a "grinding war of attrition," the article said. As well, said the magazine, "Iran has given every indication that it would likely escalate by striking oil-and-gas facilities in the region, just as it did to Qatar and Saudi Arabia after the [Pars South](#) gas field was struck."



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"I'm sorta tired of all his armchair quarterbacking," armchair quarterback Graham told Bream.

"This has been an amazing military operation.... I trust the Marines, not [the *Atlantic* author]," Graham said:

I trust [the Department of Defense]. We've got two Marine Expeditionary Units sailing to this island. We did Iwo Jima. We can do this. My money is always on the Marines.

Graham didn't bother explaining that Iwo Jima cost 6,821 American lives and more than 21,865 casualties, including 2,648 with combat fatigue that often leads to post-traumatic stress disorder.

Lindsey Graham on Kharg Island: "We did Iwo Jima. We can do this."
pic.twitter.com/JQJ5lZdvJ8

— Aaron Rupar (@atrupar) [March 22, 2026](#)

Shapiro: Casualties Are No Problem

Speaking last year *before the war began*, Shapiro unbosomed himself of the considered opinion that American dead and wounded would be much ado about nothing.

"There's this bizarre notion in foreign policy that the American people are deeply worried about the immediate cost of war to the enemy, that the American people, we can't handle the ugliness of war for even a day, that every conflict has to be totally antiseptic," [Shapiro said](#):

And here I'm not even talking about the American willingness to undergo casualties. No one in America wants American casualties, it's a tragedy and a horror. We do understand that war does come along with casualties, and we are willing to undergo those casualties in pursuit of an end and a victory for America. But as far as the idea that, for example, America, we can't hit Kharg Island because the Iranian people would then be deprived of oil resources, the American people are, I should say, not particularly concerned about that.

We are far more concerned with why we're there, not winning. I think what we actually ought to do is say an eye for everything. Like, you touch a ship in the Strait of Hormuz, and we kill the head of the IRGC ... we kill your entire leadership class. Again, we destroy [South Pars](#) and we strike hard. One drone, and that's what happens. That is the way you win in the Middle [East], by the way, the way you win generally.

Unclear is to whom Shapiro was referring when he claimed that "we are willing to undergo those casualties in pursuit of an end and a victory for America."

Shapiro, 42, has not yet enlisted in the U.S. Army — [which recently raised](#) its recruitment age to 42 — to ensure that he's in the fight if President Trump commits ground troops.

But he still has time to prove his commitment to America. He won't turn 43 until January 15.

Two other possible recruits are Trump's sons, Eric and Barron. Eric is 42, and won't turn 43 until January 6. Barron, 20, is in the same age cohort as those whom Jaff would give debt forgiveness for enlisting.



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