



Have War Hawks Taken Control of the Trump Administration?

Many Americans are shocked at how quickly the Trump administration seems to have regressed from one that prioritized diplomacy to one that's itching to drop bombs on a foreign country half a world away.

In many ways, Donald Trump is unlike any president in recent memory. During his first term, he presided over one of the most peaceful four years in a long time — relatively speaking, of course. The most glaring accomplishment, if non-actions can be categorized as such, was that he did not catapult the United States into a new, drawn-out war. This is a low bar, but it speaks to the tragedy that is America's interventionist foreign policy.



AP Images

U.S. Central Command chief Michael Erik Kurilla

But over the last week, the American people have watched “the president of peace” launch volley after volley of threats to let loose the lethal might of the U.S. military at a country that even his U.S. intelligence agencies don't believe is building nuclear bombs. And, for those who view anything the corrupt and unethical intel institution says with deserved disbelief, consider the recent admission of Rafael Grossi, the director-general of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). Grossi told CNN's Christiane Amanpour that, regarding Iran, “we did not have proof of a systematic effort to move into a nuclear weapon.” Grossi, however, does point out that the lack of proof doesn't mean Iran wasn't secretly building nuclear weapons.

“We did not have any proof of a systematic effort to move into a nuclear weapon.” [@iaeaorg](#)
Director General affirms his agency's findings about Iran's nuclear program.
pic.twitter.com/TmHx7rtfjJ

— Christiane Amanpour (@amanpour) [June 17, 2025](#)

Flipping the Switch

For those on the outside, the switch — the moment Trump began floating the idea of waging war against Iran — was flipped after Israel's surprise attack on Iran, launched June 12. Trump's rhetoric immediately changed. In the following days, the president lobbed one bellicose statement after another. However, reports suggest the administration has incrementally come under the spell of war hawks who've crept ever closer to the president's ear over the last few months.



Influencing the President

A recent report from *Politico* suggests that a certain “pugnacious” general known as “The Gorilla,” who is an Iran hawk, has corralled for himself enormous influence with Trump. “U.S. Central Command chief Gen. Erik Kurilla,” *Politico* reports, is “pushing for a strong military response against” Iran. The report says that nearly every one of his requests have been greenlit, “from more aircraft carriers to fighter planes in the region.” He is, reportedly, “overruling other top Pentagon officials and playing a quiet but decisive role in the country’s next steps on Iran.”

Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth has given Kurilla an unusually high degree of authority. He’s been very good at getting what he wants. Sources [told](#) *Politico*:

[Kurilla] has had more face time with the president than most other generals, according to one of [four] people, who, like others, was granted anonymity to discuss internal conversations. Kurilla is also at the end of his tenure leading U.S. Central Command, meaning he may be less fearful about pushing the president.

Kurilla’s arguments to send more U.S. weapons to the region, including air defenses, have gone against Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen. Dan Caine and Pentagon policy chief Elbridge Colby, who have urged caution in overcommitting to the Middle East, according to the four people.

One of *Politico*’s sources said that Kurilla wants to take “every” military asset from other theaters and bring it to the Middle East, which is likely an exaggeration due to the irrationality of such a suggestion. Nevertheless, a great deal of matériel has indeed [been sent](#) to the Middle East as of late. Early this week, the USS *Nimitz* carrier strike group was deployed to the Middle East. That happened after the USS *Thomas Hudner* destroyer was sent to the region as well. And that’s not counting the intelligence assets that are unofficially on the ground and other weaponry being sent there. The article also mentions the addition of new deployments of F-22, F-35, and F-16 fighter planes.

Hegseth gave the following [statement](#) regarding Kurilla to Fox News Thursday:

General Kurilla is a bold, dynamic, and inspiring leader who strikes fear into the hearts of America’s enemies. He’s a warrior through and through who always puts his country, mission, and troops first. It has been an honor to serve alongside him in defense of our great nation.

Kurilla “The Gorilla”

There’s no doubt the president has a special affinity for tough guys. Over the years, he’s made many comments indicating his admiration for American military heroes. And Kurilla sounds to be every bit that guy. He’s battle tested and possesses a hardnosed confidence not uncommon among military leaders. As *Politico* noted, “he won a Bronze Star for leading U.S. troops in a firefight in 2005 at the height of the Iraq War despite having been shot three times.”

Kurilla’s military [biography](#) makes Rambo look like a kitten. He served in the invasion of Panama and the Gulf War, as well as operations in Haiti, Kosovo, and Bosnia. He deployed to Iraq, Afghanistan, and Syria. After that he served as the assistant commanding general of Joint Special Operations Command.



Written by [Paul Dragu](#) on June 20, 2025

Then he commanded the 82nd Airborne Division, followed by a command of the XVIII Airborne Corps. He took over the United States Central Command in April 2022.

Kurilla's name has popped up in other reports corroborating the image of a general who wants to go into Iran with guns blazing. On April 16, *The New York Times* published one of the first pieces hinting at disagreement among Trump officials on what to do about Iran. The [article](#) centers on Israeli plans to attack Iranian nuclear sites in May. Everything the Israelis had drawn up required U.S. participation. But many high-ranking members of Trump's Cabinet didn't believe diplomacy was even close to being exhausted and wanted the president to turn down attack plans. The nonintervention faction included Vice President J.D. Vance, Director of National Intelligence Tulsi Gabbard, White House Chief of Staff Susie Wiles, and even Hegseth, the defense secretary. They weren't convinced that an attack would completely derail Iran's nuclear plans and were concerned it would evolve into a larger war.

Supporting Israel Against Iran

Kurilla, however, was partial to the Israelis' plan, as was then-National Security Advisor Michael Waltz, whom he was close to. A report published Wednesday by *The New York Times* says that Kurilla had even drafted three options for U.S. military intervention in Iran going all the way back to February. [According](#) to the *Times*:

In coordination with the Israelis, Gen. Michael Erik Kurilla, the head of Central Command, had developed three main options. The first and most minimal was U.S. refueling and intelligence support for an Israeli mission. The second was Israeli and American joint strikes. The third was a U.S.-led mission with Israel in a supporting role. It would have involved American B-1 and B-2 bombers, carrier aircraft and cruise missiles launched from submarines.

Trump, according to the report, ultimately rejected Israel's plan in favor of further diplomacy. But immediately afterward, there was a massive shake-up among Hegseth's staff. Three people were fired, including Dan Caldwell, a senior advisor, who was fired over allegations of leaking classified information. He has maintained that the allegations were fabrications to cover up the real reason: his anti-interventionist posture and the influence he had on the defense secretary.

Mark Levin

Another war hawk who has reportedly gained the ear of the president is Fox News' resident loud, angry pundit, Mark Levin. On June 4, the day Ayatollah Ali Khamenei rejected a nuclear proposal presented by U.S. Special Envoy to the Middle East Steve Witkoff, Levin met with Trump and many of his advisors in the Oval Office. The *Times* [reported](#), "He had been an influential force in presenting an anti-Iran view to the president. The conversation with Mr. Levin appeared to have made an impression on the president, advisers said."

Levin has been very bullish on U.S. intervention in Iran. He has even gone after one of the most vocal representatives of the noninterventionists, Tucker Carlson. The two have been trading insults over the internet and vying for influence over Trump. The president is very aware of Carlson's dissatisfaction, and has been forced to address it when reporters brought it up.

The possibility of getting mired in another Middle East quagmire has triggered the ire of millions of



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Trump voters who thought they voted for one of the few people who actually wanted to stop the forever wars. A good sign for those people is that Trump has dialed back his threats over the last two days. He recently told reporters he'll decide what to do with Iran sometime within the next two weeks.

If the American government operated in accordance with the supreme law of the land, the U.S. Constitution, people wouldn't have to wait on pins and needles to see if the president decides to send the country to war. But until the American people wake up and insist that their representative government operates that way, they'll have to hope their preferred media proxy prevails to persuade the president of the United States.



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