



**WAR JARGON – THE JARGON,
THE LAW, THE LIMITS**

By Gary L. Wolfstone

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Midnight Hammer (Iran)

June 22, 2025

Operation Epic Fury (Iran)

Feb 28, 2026



Language in combat is frequently a short burst of words or word fragments, and the words used are rarely polysyllabic! This list contains repetition for reinforcement!

Iran War Timeline

1. Trump (March 9, 2026 Newsconference): “Complete”
“Very complete”
2. Trump (same Newsconference):
“Very soon” / “when I feel it in my bones”
3. Trump: “four to six weeks”
4. Trump: “We have already won”
5. We (the Trump Cabinet) are negotiating
6. April 1, 2026 – “Two or three weeks more”

Just Take the Oil – Trump, April

1, 2026 Televised Address:

(1) Expropriation? (2)

Nationalization? (3) Seizure? (4)

Reparations?

Potable Water – Desalination (%)

Kuwait and Oman (90%), Bahrain (85%), Saudi Arabia (70%)

FUBAR from the film with Tom Hanks (“Fucked up beyond all recognition”) In *Saving Private Ryan* (1998), Tom Hanks’ character, Captain Miller, uses the acronym

Pete Hegseth, Secretary of War,
“Death and destruction from the sky all day long ... This was never meant to be a fair fight, and it is not a fair

fight. We are punching them while they're down, which is exactly how it should be."

Attribution—"A very dangerous person—alarm as Pete Hegseth revels in carnage of Iran war" David Smith, The Guardian

Derogatory Names for the Enemy

Ronald Reagan—"those barbarians"

Geo W. Bush—"the evil doers"

Trump—"deranged; lunatics; scum;

Crazy bastards; bullshit artists."

Declaration of War

Article One, Section Eight of the Constitution says "**Congress shall have power to ... declare War.**" However, that passage provides no specific format for what form legislation must have in order to be considered a "declaration of war" nor does the Constitution.

Fog of war

Carl von Clausewitz in *On War* (1832). He used *Nebel des Krieges* ("fog of war") to describe the uncertainty, confusion, and imperfect information inherent in battle.

Clausewitz is most famous for his seminal work *On War* and the insight that "War is nothing but a continuation of politics by other means"

DEFCON 1

DEFCON (Defense Readiness Condition) is a five-level alert system used by the U.S. Armed Forces to indicate nuclear defense readiness, ranging from DEFCON 5 (normal peace time) to DEFCON 1 (maximum readiness/imminent nuclear war). It indicates threat severity, with levels 2

and 3 representing significant, heightened readiness.

- Current Status: While specific levels are classified, reports in late 2025 suggested a heightened state, with some analysis indicating a DEFCON 3 status.

How many divisions does the Pope have?

Joseph Stalin famously asked, "The Pope? How many divisions does he have?" during a discussion about the Vatican's influence, at the 1945 Potsdam Conference

The Dead Only Know One Thing –
It is Better to be Alive
Full Metal Jacket, (1987) film.

(“I apologize for all of my shortcomings.”)(Responding to Charles Hamilton’s insult) Mr. Hamilton: Are you hinting that the yankees can lick us? Mr. Butler: No, I’m not hinting. I’m saying very plainly the yankees are better equipped than us. They have factories, coal mines, a fleet that can bottle up our harbors and starve us to death. All we got is cotton, slaves, and arrogance. Mr. Hamilton: I refuse to listen to any of this renegade talk! Mr. Butler: I’m sorry if the truth offends you.

Rhett Butler at Tara.

Prince (Klemens von) Metternich
(1773–1859) was an Austrian
architect of **Congress of Vienna**

Gary L. Wolfstone is a forward scout in the wilderness of the legal profession



The Houthis (Yemen) have entered the war as of March 28, 2026. Here is their range:



Friendly fire
Locked and loaded
Fox hole (no atheists)
War crimes (Nuremberg)
Embedded reporter
Mixed messages
The day after (plan)

Illegal orders (Nuremberg)
Escalation
The Point of No Return
Escalation dominance
Psych-warfare
A timeline
Tipping point
The tail that wagged the dog
A War of Aggression (Nuremberg)
No Duty to follow Illegal
(Nuremberg)
Force Majeure (free from liability)

The Unknowns
Donald Rumsfeld

The unknowns (ones known, ones not known) Donald Rumsfeld, the former U.S. Secretary of Defense, famously stated "the known unknowns" and "the unknown unknowns" during a Department of Defense news briefing on February 12, 2002.

Sabotage

Bunker

Refugee

Air superiority

Deconfliction

Pay Back – You can talk the talk,
but can you walk the walk? Attribution
– Animal, Full Metal Jacket

A War of Attrition

The Iranian Regime is Toast (Pete
Hegseth)

Survival mode

The Reality on the Ground

War Coverage Insurance

War Games

Stealth (Stealth aircraft)

Skunk Works - Stealth Aircraft
(Lockheed)

Shock and Awe

Rogue Regime

Battlefield Damage Assessment
Shahed Drone (“martyr”)
Hellfire missiles
Cruise missiles

Politics and war

Ai autonomous systems
Air campaign
Genocide
Sleeper cells
Patriot Missiles
Iron Beam (Israel)
Swarms of drones
That promotes inertia rather than
innovation
Majority rules and minority rights
Ad hominen attacks
An inside track on the job
Not only a source for investment but
also a destination for investments
Visionary leadership

Operational & Strategic Jargon

These terms describe how wars are planned, escalated, or executed.

Shock and awe – overwhelming force used to paralyze an opponent's will to fight.

Blitzkrieg – lightning-fast, concentrated attack meant to break defenses before they can react.

Preemptive strike – attacking before the enemy can act.

Surgical strike – a narrowly targeted attack intended to minimize collateral damage.

Rules of engagement – formal limits on when and how force may be used.

Force multiplier – something that increases effectiveness without increasing manpower.

Asymmetric warfare — conflict between unequal forces using different tactics (e.g., guerrilla vs. conventional army).

Hybrid warfare — blending military force with cyberattacks, propaganda, and economic pressure.

Decapitation strike — targeting leadership to collapse command structure.

Flanking maneuver — attacking from the side to exploit weak points.

War of attrition — wearing down the enemy through sustained losses.

Pyrrhic victory — a win so costly it's effectively a loss.

No-man's-land – dangerous, unoccupied territory between opposing forces.

Friendly fire – accidental attack on one's own side.

Collateral damage – unintended harm to civilians or non-military targets.

Theater of operations – a defined geographic area of conflict.

Boots on the ground – deploying actual troops rather than remote or air power.

Force projection – ability to deploy and sustain military power abroad.



Propaganda war — competing narratives to shape public opinion.

Hearts and minds — efforts to win civilian support.

Psy-ops (psychological operations) — tactics to influence enemy morale or behavior.

Disinformation campaign — deliberate spread of false information.

Fifth column — internal supporters of an external enemy.

Destruction, Withdrawal & Endgame

Scorched earth – preventing enemy use.

Cut and run – rapid withdrawal to avoid further losses.

Last stand – final, desperate defense.

Armistice – temporary halt to fighting.

Exit Strategy – ending the war.

Surrender terms – negotiated conditions for ending resistance.

War Precedents

Battle lines are drawn – sides have taken clear positions.

Silver bullet – a single, decisive solution.

Take no prisoners – act ruthlessly to achieve a goal.

On the front lines – directly confronting a major challenge.

Collateral damage – unintended negative consequences.

Going nuclear – using the most extreme option available.

Opening salvo – the first aggressive move in a dispute.

Operational & Strategic Jargon

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Tactics, Maneuvers & Battlefield Language

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Psychological & Information Warfare

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Fifth column – internal supporters of an external enemy.

Red line – a boundary whose crossing triggers retaliation.

Political & Bureaucratic War Language

War footing – shifting into a high-alert, resource-mobilized posture.

Saber-rattling – threatening military action to intimidate.

Escalation ladder – stages of increasing conflict intensity.

Quagmire – a conflict that becomes impossible to exit cleanly.

Coalition of the willing – ad-hoc alliance formed for a specific conflict.

Peace dividend – economic benefit from reduced military spending.

Cut and run – rapid withdrawal to avoid further losses.

Last stand – final, desperate defense.

Armistice – temporary halt to fighting.

Demobilization – standing down forces after conflict.

Surrender terms – negotiated conditions

Unconditional Surrender

Exit Strategy – ending the war.

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**Withdrawal & Endgame –
Scorched earth deplete resources
to prevent enemy use**

**Cut and run – rapid withdrawal
to avoid further losses.**

**Last stand – final, desperate
defense.**

**Armistice – temporary halt to
fighting.**

**Demobilization – standing down
forces after conflict.**

Deconfliction

**Surrender terms – negotiated
conditions for ending resistance.**



Carl von Clausewitz in On War (1832). He used *Nebel des Krieges* (“fog of war”) to describe the uncertainty, confusion, and imperfect information inherent in battle.

Carl von Clausewitz, the Prussian military strategist, is most famous for the insight that "War is nothing but a continuation of politics by other means".

Real-world examples

Battle of Gettysburg (1863) – Union and Confederate commanders repeatedly made decisions based on incomplete or incorrect information about troop positions.

D-Day, Normandy (1944) – Allied commanders struggled with weather, misdrops of airborne

units, and disrupted communications.

Gulf War (1991) – Rapid maneuver warfare and electronic interference created major situational-awareness gaps for both sides.

It became a metaphor for any situation where leaders must act without full information – politics, business, crisis management.

Mission creep

First widely used by journalists and analysts during the U.S. intervention in Somalia (1992–1993). The original humanitarian mission expanded into peace

enforcement and then into combat operations.

Real-world examples

Vietnam War – Advisors → combat troops → full-scale war.

Afghanistan (2001–2021) – Counterterrorism → nation-building → counterinsurgency.

Libya (2011) – No-fly zone → regime change.

Ancient tactic: destroy crops, infrastructure, and supplies to deny them to the enemy. The term itself became common in the 19th century.

Real-world examples

Russia vs. Napoleon (1812) –

Russian forces burned villages and food stores as they retreated, contributing to Napoleon's disastrous winter.

Sherman's March to the Sea (1864)

– Union forces destroyed Confederate infrastructure across Georgia.

World War II (Eastern Front) –

Both German and Soviet forces used scorched-earth tactics during retreats.

Why it spread

It became shorthand for any strategy that sacrifices assets to prevent an opponent from gaining advantage – politics, business, litigation.

Developed in the 1996 U.S. military doctrine Rapid Dominance by Harlan Ullman and James Wade. It refers to overwhelming force and spectacle to paralyze an enemy's will to resist.

Real-world examples

Iraq War (2003) – The opening air campaign was explicitly branded “Shock and Awe,” using massive precision strikes to collapse Iraqi command structures.

Blitzkrieg

German for “lightning war.” Not an official doctrine at first, but a

journalistic term describing German operations in Poland (1939) and France (1940): fast armored thrusts, close air support, and rapid encirclement.

Real-world examples

Fall of France (1940) – German Panzer divisions bypassed the Maginot Line and collapsed French defenses in weeks.

Operation Barbarossa (1941) – Early phases used blitzkrieg principles before bogging down.

Surgical strike

Cold War era, especially with the rise of precision-guided munitions in the 1970s–1980s. The term implies accuracy and minimal collateral damage.

Real-world examples

Operation Opera (1981) – Israeli airstrike on Iraq's Osirak nuclear reactor.

U.S. strikes on Libya (1986) – Targeted retaliation for terrorism.

Kosovo War (1999) – NATO emphasized precision bombing.

No-man's-land

Medieval English property law used the term, but it became globally known during World War I to describe the deadly ground between opposing trenches.

Real-world examples

Western Front (1914–1918) – Areas between trenches were exposed to machine-gun fire and

artillery, making movement extremely dangerous.

It now describes any unclaimed, dangerous, or ambiguous space—literal or metaphorical.

War of Attrition: the phrase became prominent during World War I, when industrialized armies tried to wear each other down through sustained losses.

Real-world examples

Verdun (1916) — German strategy explicitly aimed to “bleed France white.”

Yom Kippur War aftermath (1973–1974) — Egypt and Israel engaged in a prolonged War of Attrition along the Suez Canal.

Iran–Iraq War (1980–1988) – Both sides fought grinding battles with little territorial change.

Fifth Column – Popularized during the Malayan Emergency (1948–1960), where British counterinsurgency emphasized winning civilian support.

Real-world examples

Vietnam War – U.S. commanders used the phrase to describe pacification programs.

Iraq (post-2003) –

Counterinsurgency doctrine again emphasized civilian engagement.

Coined during the **Spanish Civil War (1936–1939)**. Nationalist General Emilio Mola claimed he had four columns attacking

Madrid and a “fifth column” of supporters inside the city.

Real-world examples

World War II – Used to describe suspected internal sympathizers of Axis powers.

Cold War – Applied to alleged communist infiltrators in Western countries.



Opening salvo

Originally a naval gunnery term:
the first coordinated volley of
cannon fire.

Real-world examples

Battle of Tsushima (1905) –
Japanese opening salvos crippled
the Russian fleet

World War II naval battles –
Opening salvos often determined
early advantage.

It now describes the first
aggressive move in any conflict –
legal, political, rhetorical.



Last stand

Ancient military concept; the phrase became common in English during the 18th–19th centuries.

Real-world examples

Thermopylae (480 BCE) – Spartan and allied forces held out against Persia.

Battle of the Alamo (1836) – Texian defenders made a final stand against Mexican forces.

Rorke's Drift (1879) – British garrison held out against Zulu attacks.

D-Day

VE-Day

Vietnamese New Year (TET)

The Battle at midway
The Battle of Britain
1938 Kristallnacht

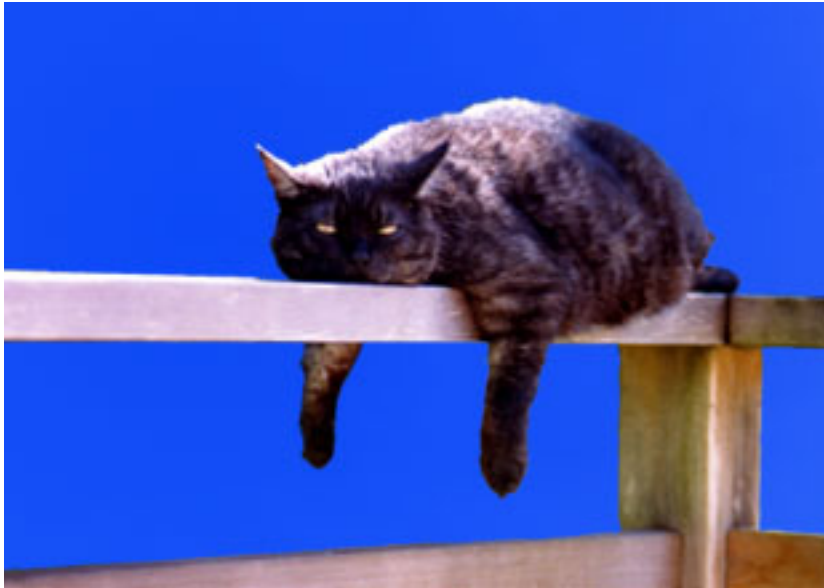
Midnight Hammer
Operation Epic Fury

CALL SIGNS

Hotel 6
Roger that
Dolly Test
Fighter Ops
Jump Street

**Command to commence/cease
firing**

Free fire zone
Fire at will
Fire when ready
Shoot to kill
Launch on warning



Commence firing
Cease firing
Elusive goals
Galvanize the popular uprising
An Opportunity Cost
Opposing forces are brittle
That's a lot of trigger pulling
No Black Hawks Down
No Mogadishu moments

The Decision To Start a War in Retrospect PTSD, Injury, Lethality – the troops

Cost Benefit Analysis

Leadership or Paranoid

Schizophrenia

War Crimes

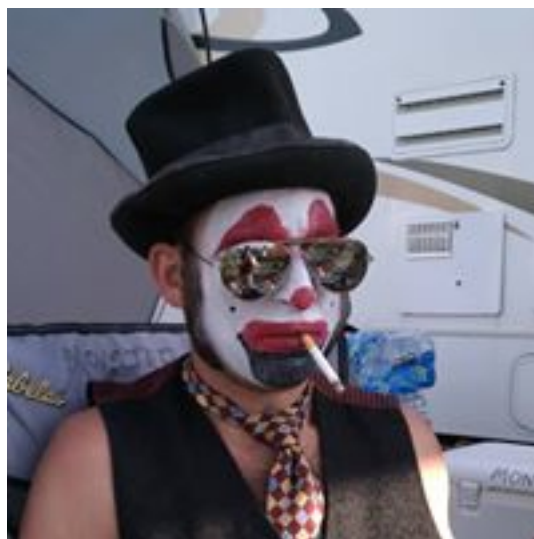
Future Risk Analysis

The economic consequences of war

A Forever War

Post Traumatic Stress Disorder

Fraudulent Claimant – Beware!



Gary Wolfstone
Harvard Law School
A forward scout in the
wilderness of the legal profession.



Veni, Vidi, Vici
I came, I saw, I conquered

