

# The right question to ask about effectiveness of US strike on Fordo

By Lev Tsitrin

The [Pentagon briefing](#) on Iran's Fordo strike, arranged in response to the leaked preliminary damage assessment is presented by some as essentially a PR stunt that offered no additional information on damage. Here for instance is the [New York Times' headline](#) "*Hegseth and Caine Delve Into Details but Not Results of Iranian Strikes*". Neither man gave new assessments of the state of Iran's nuclear program or the damage to its sites."



(COMBO) This combination of pictures created on June 22, 2025 using handout satellite images released by Maxar Technologies shows Iran's Fordo Fuel Enrichment Plant (FFEP), northeast of the city of Qom on on June 19, 2025 (top), and Iran's Fordo Fuel Enrichment Plant (FFEP), northeast of the city of Qom, after US strikes on the site June 22, 2025 (bottom). (Satellite image ©2025 Maxar Technologies / AFP)

While factually true, its implication is false – at least insofar as I am concerned. While I tried to follow the events

closely, in listening to the briefing I discovered that I had a completely wrong understanding of the strike. The schematics of what I heard earlier were cartoonishly simple: the weapon was so massive that it could burrow deep under the surface, and explode. If one bomb did not get deep enough, the next one dropped into the burrowed tunnel would.

That allowed for plenty of things to go wrong. What if the bomb overshot the target, going through it and exploding so far underneath as to cause no damage? What if it exploded too high above? Went too far to the side?

This picture of how the weapon worked – you drop it and hope it hits reasonably near the target – made a negative outcome highly likely (and the pessimistic damage assessment unsurprising even if disappointing), turning President Trump's announcement of Iran's nuclear program's obliteration into propagandistic bluster unsupported by facts.

So I listened to General Caine's presentation expecting the continuation of the "he said, she said" political theater unfolding in the mainstream media, Defense Secretary, taking umbrage at disbelieving press, citing CIA director's report, and the assessment of Israeli atomic agency, to support President Trump's announcement while journalists demand to see facts – facts that are inaccessible, lying deep under Fordo mountain.

But to my surprise, this was not what the briefing provided. The information General Caine gave completely changed my understanding of the weapon, and thus of the chance that the target was actually hit. The bomb, it turns out, is highly controllable not just on where it hits the ground, but at which depth it detonates, too. My assumption that it burrows to the maximum possible depth and explodes when there is no further way to go was wrong – the bomb is designed to explode at pre-programmed depth. It will not miss its target – and General Caine offered full guarantee that explosions

indeed happened where they were intended to happen.

This being the case, only one thing could go wrong: the understanding of the target itself. If American knowledge of the design of Fordo facility is adequate, that facility was destroyed. If not, it escaped destruction – at least, it escaped full destruction.

Which means that in reality only one question matters (and I have not heard any journalist ask it during Q&A): how confident are we that the intelligence on Fordo design is adequate?

I think the answer is a “yes,” given that Fordo’s existence is known for some fifteen years, and IAEA inspectors visited it more than once – not to mention some countries’ intelligence agents who do not announce their visits in advance.

Bottom line – the Pentagon briefing which I expected to be a mere PR exercise fully convinced me that Fordo is a wreck. Even though, to quote the *New York Times*, “Mr. Hegseth and General Caine gave no new assessments of the state of Iran’s nuclear program or the damage to the sites.”

*Photograph from The [Times of Israel](#)*