

# House Armed Services Committee Hearing

## Rep. Adam Smith (D-WA) Questions CENTCOM Commander Admiral Brad Cooper on Iran Operations

**Source:** Forbes Breaking News — [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=972SSC9\\_2KE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=972SSC9_2KE)

**Date:** May 19, 2026

**Context:** Ranking Member Adam Smith questions Admiral Brad Cooper (Commander, US Central Command) about civilian harm in Iran, specifically the girls school strike and use of "no quarter" language.

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**CHAIR:** With that, I would yield to the ranking member for any questions he may have.

**REP. SMITH:** Thank you, Admiral Cooper. You mentioned in your opening remarks the commitment of your command to preventing civilian harm. So, just two questions about that.

One — it's been 80 days thereabouts since the initial bombing campaign that struck the girls school in Iran. Killed, I think, over 150 school girls. It's really pretty clear what happened there. But 80 days on, we have not taken responsibility for that attack. The endless stalling — "it's being investigated, it's being investigated, it's being investigated." In the past when we've had these types of mistakes, they have been quickly acknowledged even if a further investigation is necessary to figure out prevention methods.

So can you at this moment acknowledge that that mistake was made and that we were responsible for it? It's something we didn't want to do and don't want to repeat.

**ADM. COOPER:** Congressman, to reiterate — the United States does not deliberately target. Period. Full stop. And nor are the Iranian people our enemy. The IRGC is the adversary in this case.

**REP. SMITH:** I've heard that in your opening statement, Admiral. I asked you a very specific question and I'm curious what the answer is.

**ADM. COOPER:** So, the investigation is ongoing. As soon as it is complete, I'm happy to —

**REP. SMITH:** So that's a no. We will not take responsibility for something we very obviously did.

**ADM. COOPER:** It's a complex investigation. The school itself is located on an active IRGC cruise missile base. It's more complex than the average strike. As soon as we're complete, I'm

fully committed to transparency given your important oversight role and the other members here.

**REP. SMITH:** Just so you know — and I have an enormous amount of respect for you, an enormous amount of respect for the Pentagon — I do not trust that answer. What we've seen out of this Secretary of Defense and his callous disregard for any sort of rules of engagement or protecting civilian life may make us suspicious.

And that's the only second question I have for you. Do you think it's ever appropriate for anybody in a leadership position to use the words "no quarter" when describing how we are conducting our operations in Iran?

**ADM. COOPER:** Sir, I think it's appropriate as military leaders that we follow the law of armed conflict and our constitutional responsibilities, and that's what we've done.

**REP. SMITH:** And you would agree that "no quarter" is not following the law?

**ADM. COOPER:** I would agree it's our constitutional responsibility to follow the law.

**REP. SMITH:** Is "no quarter" following the law or not?

**ADM. COOPER:** I would agree that we follow the law, sir. The — [inaudible] — generic understanding of it —

**REP. SMITH:** — and they do whatever we want to do with no accountability.

Look, people make mistakes. It's a war. Things happen. I get that. Okay? And I'm not going to be as overly judgmental as some. But the arrogance of this Pentagon and their unwillingness to acknowledge any mistake is precisely the reason that we are in the hole that we're in with no way out of it. Somebody in that command needs to own up to the dumb things that are said and done to give us some confidence that they won't keep happening.

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*Transcript cleaned from auto-generated captions. Minor repairs to punctuation and obvious transcription errors; spoken words preserved as delivered.*