

News

Trump says Iran is eager for a deal to end the war as he extends deadline to allow for diplomacy

(AP) — U.S. President Donald Trump said Monday the U.S. was talking with an Iranian leader and claimed the Islamic Republic was eager for a deal to end the war. He also extended a deadline for Iran to reopen the Strait of Hormuz or face attacks on its power plants, saying it has an additional five days.

Trump's turnaround, which held out the possibility of resolving the war now in its fourth week, served to drive down oil prices and jolt stocks. It offered a reprieve after the U.S. and Iran traded threats over the weekend that could have cut electricity to millions in Iran and around the Gulf, and knocked out desalination plants providing many desert nations with drinking water.

Trump told reporters Iran wants "to make a deal," and he claimed U.S. envoy Steve Witkoff and Trump's son-in-law Jared Kushner had held talks Sunday with an Iranian leader. He did not say who that was, but said the U.S. has not talked to Supreme Leader Ayatollah Mojtaba Khamenei.

Iran denied talks had been held. "No negotiations have been held with the US," Iranian parliament Speaker Mohammad Bagher Qalibaf posted on X, adding that "fakenews is used to manipulate the financial and oil markets."

Trump says Iran would give up its enriched uranium

Trump said if a deal is reached, the U.S. would move to take Iran's enriched uranium, which is critical to its disputed nuclear program. Iran has adamantly refused such demands in the past, insisting it has the right to enrich uranium for peaceful purposes.

Iran has already performed 99% of the centrifuge work required to produce weapons-grade uranium for nine nuclear weapons, said Robert Goldston, a Princeton University professor who researches arms control and fusion energy. As of June 2025, the International Atomic Energy Agency estimated that Iran had 440.9 kilograms (972 pounds) of highly enriched ura-

nium.

Turkey and Egypt, meanwhile, said they had spoken to the warring parties, the first sign of coordinated mediation from regional heavyweights.

The war launched by the United States and Israel has killed more than 2,000 people, shaken the global economy, sent oil prices surging and endangered some of the world's busiest air corridors.

Trump threatened over the weekend to "obliterate" Iran's power plants unless the country releases its stranglehold on the Strait of Hormuz, through which a fifth of all traded oil passed before the war, within 48 hours. That deadline would have expired late Monday Washington time.

The five-day extension was "subject to the success of the ongoing meetings and discussions," Trump said.

Speaking later in Tennessee, Trump said his administration has been negotiating "for a long time" with Iran.

"They want peace," Trump said. "They've agreed they will not have a nuclear weapon, you know, etc., etc. but we'll see." He said there's a "very good chance" a deal will be reached this week, crediting his threat to blow up Iranian power plants.

British Prime Minister Keir Starmer indicated he was aware of talks between Iran and the U.S.

"We, the U.K., were aware that was happening," he said Monday, without giving details.

Possible international mediation

Earlier, Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi said he spoke by phone with his Turkish counterpart, Hakan Fidan. Turkey has been an intermediary in past talks between Tehran and Washington.

The Turkish Foreign Ministry declined to comment Monday on whether the country had relayed messages between Iran and the U.S. On Sunday, Turkish officials said Fidan had also spoken to his counterparts from Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, Egypt and the European Union,



Iranian Red Crescent emergency workers use a bulldozer to clear rubble from a residential building that was hit in an earlier U.S.-Israeli strike in Tehran, Iran, Monday, March 23, 2026. AP PHOTO/VAHID SALEMI

as well as with U.S. officials as part of efforts to end the war.

Egyptian President Abdel-Fattah el-Sissi said Cairo has delivered "clear messages" to Iran focusing on de-escalating the conflict, according to his office. The Egyptian Foreign Ministry said it was making "constant efforts and communications" with all parties.

An Egyptian official said the U.S. and Iran exchanged messages through Egypt, Turkey and Pakistan over the weekend aimed at averting strikes on energy infrastructure. The official was not authorized to speak to the media and so spoke on condition of anonymity.

A Gulf diplomat also said that Egypt and Turkey were leading the de-escalation efforts.

"For now, it appears they managed to avert an energy catastrophe" that would result if Trump attacked Iran's energy facilities and Iran responded, said the diplomat, who was not authorized to speak with journalists and also spoke on condition of anonymity.

Iran says Trump backed down

In the wake of Trump's turnaround, Iran's semiofficial Fars and Tasnim news agencies portrayed the American president as backing down.

"Since the start of the war, messages have been sent to Tehran by some mediators, but Iran's clear response has been that it will continue its defense until the required level of deterrence is achieved," Tasnim said. "With this kind of psychological warfare, neither the Strait of Hormuz will return to prewar

conditions nor will calm return to energy markets."

Iran's paramilitary Revolutionary Guard had promised retaliation if Trump carried out his threat, saying Iran would hit power plants supplying electricity to American bases, "as well as the economic, industrial and energy infrastructures in which Americans have shares."

Qalibaf, the parliament speaker, said earlier that Iran would consider vital infrastructure across the region to be legitimate targets, including desalination facilities critical for drinking water in Gulf nations.

The Fars news agency, which is close to the Revolutionary Guard, published a list of such facilities, including the United Arab Emirates' nuclear power plant. Over the weekend, Iran launched missiles targeting the city of Dimona in Israel, near a facility key to its long-suspected atomic weapons program. The facility wasn't damaged.

With the U.S. deploying more amphibious assault ships and additional Marines to the Middle East, Iran's Defense Council warned against any ground attack, saying it would "lead to the mining of all access routes."

Trump has said he has no plans to send ground forces into Iran but has not ruled it out. Israel has suggested its ground forces could take part in the war.

Israel strikes Tehran and Lebanon

Israel launched new attacks Monday on Tehran, saying it was targeting infrastructure. Explosions were heard in mul-

tle locations. It wasn't immediately clear what had been hit.

Israel is also battling the Iran-linked Hezbollah militant group in Lebanon, which has fired hundreds of rockets into Israel. In recent days, Israel has hit apartment buildings in Beirut and bombed bridges over the Litani River in Lebanon's south.

Lebanese President Joseph Aoun called the targeting of bridges "a prelude to a ground invasion."

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said Israel will continue to strike Iran and Lebanon, even as the U.S. considers a ceasefire.

"There's more to come," he said.

Authorities say Israeli strikes have killed more than 1,000 people in Lebanon and displaced more than 1 million.

Iran's death toll has surpassed 1,500, its Health Ministry has said. In Israel, 15 people have been killed by Iranian strikes. At least 13 U.S. military members have been killed, along with more than a dozen civilians in the occupied West Bank and Gulf Arab states.



Children play beside a fragment of an Iranian ballistic missile that landed in a schoolyard in the Israeli settlement of Peduel in the West Bank. AP PHOTO/OHAD ZWIGENBERG

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