

'We knew everything'

Trump on Israeli attack on Iran

REUTERS, Washington

After months of urging Israel not to strike Iran while he worked toward a nuclear deal, President Donald Trump told Reuters in a phone interview on Friday that he and his team had known the attacks were coming - and still saw room for an accord.

"We knew everything, and I tried to save Iran humiliation and death. I tried to save them very hard because I would have loved to have seen a deal worked out," Trump said.

"They can still work out a deal, however, it's not too late," he added.

Trump had repeatedly pushed Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to delay an Israeli attack to give diplomacy more time, though the president himself had threatened to



bomb the Gulf nation if nuclear talks failed.

Trump's shifting stance around the Israeli strikes, which he called "excellent" and "very successful" in a series of media interviews on Friday, offered one of the most striking examples yet of how he conducts high-stakes negotiations through both frank public rhetoric and behind-the-scenes maneuvers.

Asked if the US would support Israel against Iranian counterattacks, Trump said he supported Israel. He said he was not concerned about a regional war breaking out as a result of Israel's strikes but did not elaborate.

"We've been very close to Israel. We're their number one ally by far," Trump told Reuters, adding, "We'll see what happens."

Later on Friday, two U.S. officials said the US military had helped shoot down Iranian missiles headed toward Israel.

Speaking to Reuters on Friday, Trump said he had given the Iranians 60 days to come to an agreement and that the time had expired with no deal.

"We knew just about everything," he said. "We knew enough that we gave Iran 60 days to make a deal and today is 61, right? So, you know, we knew everything."

Trump said it was unclear if Iran still has a nuclear program following Israeli strikes on the country.

"Nobody knows. It was a very devastating hit," Trump said.



This handout picture released by the Iranian Red Crescent yesterday shows Iranian Red Crescent volunteers gathered in front of a building partially destroyed in an Israeli strike in Tehran.

PHOTO: AFP

ISRAEL'S ATTACKS ON IRAN

Strikes hint at bigger ambition: REGIME CHANGE

REUTERS, Jerusalem/Washington

Israel's surprise attack on Iran had an obvious goal of sharply disrupting Tehran's nuclear programme and lengthening the time it would need to develop an atomic weapon.

But the scale of the attacks, Israel's choice of targets, and its politicians' own words suggest another, longer-term ambition: toppling the regime itself.

The strikes early on Friday hit not just Iran's nuclear facilities and missile factories but also key figures in the country's military chain of command and its nuclear scientists, blows that appear aimed at diminishing Iran's credibility both at home and among its allies in the region - factors that could destabilise the Iranian leadership, experts said.

"One assumes that one of the reasons that Israel is doing that is that they're hoping to see regime change," said Michael Singh of the Washington Institute for Near East Policy and a former senior official under President George W. Bush.

"It would like to see the people of Iran rise up," he said, adding that the limited civilian casualties in the initial round of attacks also spoke to a broader aim.

In a video address hours after Israeli fighter jets began striking Iranian nuclear facilities and air defence systems, Israel's prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, appealed to the Iranian people directly.

"The Islamic regime, which has oppressed you for almost 50 years, threatens to destroy our country, the State of Israel," Netanyahu said.

Israel's objective was to remove the nuclear and ballistic missile threat, he said, but added: "As we achieve our objective, we are also clearing the path for you to achieve your freedom."

"The regime does not know what hit them, or what will hit them. It has never been weaker. This is your opportunity to stand up and let your voices be heard," Netanyahu said.

But despite the damage inflicted by the unprecedented Israeli attack, decades of enmity toward Israel - not only among Iran's rulers but its majority-Shia population - raises



questions about the prospect for fomenting enough public support to oust an entrenched theocratic leadership in Tehran backed by loyal security forces.

Singh cautioned that no one knows what conditions would be required for an opposition to coalesce in Iran.

Friday's assault was the first phase of what Israel said would be a prolonged operation. Experts said they expected Israel would continue to go after key Iranian nuclear infrastructure to delay Tehran's march to a nuclear bomb, even if Israel, on its own, does not have the capability to eliminate Iran's nuclear program.

US President Donald Trump's administration, while acquiescing to Israel's strikes and helping its close ally fend off Iran's retaliatory missile barrage, has given no indication that it seeks regime change in Tehran.

Israel has much further to go if it is to dismantle Iran's nuclear facilities, and military analysts have always said it might be impossible to totally disable the well-fortified sites dotted around Iran.

"There's no way to destroy a nuclear programme by military means," Israel's National Security Adviser Tzachi Hanegbi told Israel's Channel 13 TV. The military campaign could, however, create conditions for a deal with the United States that would thwart the nuclear programme.

Analysts also remain sceptical that Israel will have the munitions needed to obliterate Iran's nuclear project on its own.

While setting back Tehran's nuclear programme would have value for Israel, the hope for undermining the regime could explain why Israel went after so many senior military figures, potentially throwing the Iranian security establishment into confusion and chaos, analysts said.

But such a change would come with risk, said Jonathan Panikoff, a former US deputy national intelligence officer for the Middle East who is now at the Atlantic Council.

If Israel succeeds in removing Iran's leadership, there is no guarantee that the successor that emerges would not be even harderline in pursuit of conflict with Israel.

US complicit in Israeli strikes

Says Iran at UN

REUTERS, United Nations

Iran accused the United States of being complicit in Israel's attacks on the Islamic Republic, which Washington denied, telling Tehran at the United Nations Security Council that it would "be wise" to negotiate over its nuclear programme.

Iran launched retaliatory strikes on Israel late on Friday after Israel attacked Iran earlier in the day. Israel's UN Ambassador Danny Danon said Iran had been "preparing for war" and Israel's strikes were "an act of national preservation."

His Iranian counterpart, Amir Saeid Iravani, accused Israel of seeking "to kill diplomacy, to sabotage negotiations, and to drag the region into wider conflict," and he said Washington's complicity was "beyond doubt".

"Those who support this regime, with the United States at the forefront, must understand that they are complicit," Iravani told the Security Council. "By aiding and enabling these crimes, they share full responsibility for the consequences."

US President Donald Trump said Friday that he had given Tehran a 60-day ultimatum, which expired on Thursday, to make a deal over its escalating uranium enrichment program. Danon said intelligence had confirmed Iran could have produced enough fissile material for multiple bombs within days.

Senior US official McCoy Pitt said the United States will continue to seek a diplomatic resolution that ensures Iran will never acquire a nuclear weapon or pose a threat to stability in the Middle East.

Ukraine, Russia swap POWs

AFP, Kyiv

Ukraine and Russia conducted another POW swap - the fourth one in a week - the warring sides said yesterday, under agreements reached in Istanbul earlier this month.

"We continue to take our people out of Russian captivity. This is the fourth exchange in a week," Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky wrote on social media.

"In accordance with the Russian-Ukrainian agreements... another group of Russian servicemen was returned from the territory controlled by the Kyiv regime," Russia's defence ministry said.

The exchange came as Russia repeatedly rejected ceasefire calls and intensified its offensive along the front line, and especially in the northeastern Sumy region, where it seeks to establish a "buffer zone" to protect its Kursk region, previously partly occupied by Ukraine.

Zelensky claimed Russia's advance on Sumy was stopped, adding that Kyiv's forces have managed to retake one village. According to Ukraine, Russia was using 53,000 men in the Sumy operation.

Australian man shot dead in Bali

AFP, Denpasar

An Australian man was shot dead and another one was wounded in a shooting at their villa on the popular Indonesian resort island of Bali early Saturday, according to police who were hunting for two suspects.

Local police chief Arif Batubara said in a statement that two men came to the victims' villa in the popular tourist hub of Badung district just after midnight, stormed inside, and shot the victims.

"We still don't know the motive of the attack," Arif said.

The dead victim was Zivan Radmanovic, 32, while the other man, Sanar Ghanim, 34, was seriously wounded and had been taken to hospital, Arif said.

"We are currently investigating the scene to find out the motive of this attack," he said.

Arif said, according to witnesses including Radmanovic's wife, the perpetrators who fled the scene after the attack were speaking in English with a thick Australian accent.



Mourners bid farewell to the body of a person who was killed following reported Israeli attacks on aid queues in the Sudaniya area in northwestern Gaza, during the funeral at Al-Shifa hospital in Gaza City yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

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