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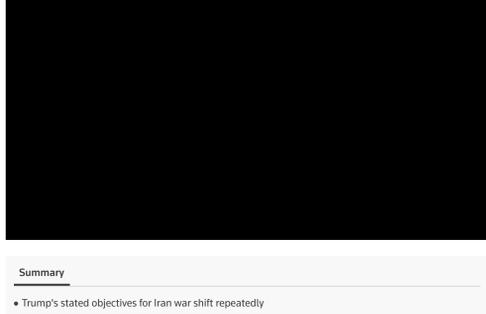
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Trump seeks to justify Iran war, but stated objectives shift

By Nandita Bose, Humeyra Pamuk and Simon Lewis

March 2, 2026 11:57 AM EST - Updated 38 mins ago



Summary

- Trump's stated objectives for Iran war shift repeatedly
- White House defends Trump's 'clear objectives' to safeguard US
- Public framing of Iran operation still being discussed, says White House official

WASHINGTON, March 3 (Reuters) - U.S. President Donald Trump sought to justify a broad, open-ended war on Iran in his most extensive public comments yet on an operation whose stated aims and timeline have shifted since it began over the weekend.

Trump said the U.S. and Israeli air attacks that began on Saturday had been projected to last four to five weeks but could go on longer.

The Reuters Iran Briefing newsletter keeps you informed with the latest developments and analysis of the Iran war. Sign up [here](#).

The military campaign has killed Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, sunk at least 10 Iranian warships and struck more than 1,000 targets. Iran has responded by firing missiles and drones at neighboring Arab states and strangling shipping through the Strait of Hormuz, a key waterway for energy trade.

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"We're already substantially ahead of our time projections. But whatever the time is, it's okay. Whatever it takes," Trump said at the White House on Monday, during his first public event since the conflict began.

He made no mention of regime change, saying the fight was needed to prevent Iran from developing a nuclear weapon, which Tehran denies seeking, and to thwart its long-range ballistic missile program.

"An Iranian regime armed with long-range missiles and nuclear weapons would be an intolerable threat to the Middle East, but also to the American people," Trump said.

In a social media post overnight, Trump said there was a "virtually unlimited supply" of U.S. munitions and that "wars can be fought 'forever,' and very successfully, using just these supplies."

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The remarks followed days of sometimes conflicting statements from the president, who had discussed the attacks in two brief videos and one-on-one interviews with select journalists over the weekend but did not give a televised address to the nation, as is customary in moments of military action. He took no questions from reporters at Monday's event.

White House Press Secretary Karoline Leavitt pushed back on suggestions the administration's messaging on the operation had been muddled.

On X, Leavitt said Trump had outlined "clear objectives," including preventing Iran's proxies from launching attacks and stopping production of roadside bombs like those used against U.S. forces after the 2003 invasion of Iraq.

VARYING MESSAGES

But U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio's comments to reporters in Congress indicating that Israel's determination to attack Iran effectively forced Washington to join the operation have only fueled the debate.

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Humeyra Pamuk is a senior foreign policy correspondent based in Washington DC. She covers the U.S. State Department, regularly traveling with U.S. Secretary of State. During her 20 years with Reuters, she has had postings in London, Dubai, Cairo and Turkey, covering everything from the Arab Spring and Syria's civil war to numerous Turkish elections and the Kurdish insurgency in the southeast. In 2017, she won the Knight-Bagehot fellowship program at Columbia University's School of Journalism. She holds a BA in International Relations and an MA on European Union studies.

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China's foreign minister tells Israeli counterpart that attacks on Iran must end

China - March 3, 2026 - 10:14 AM EST - 26 mins ago

China opposes the military strikes launched by Israel and the U.S. against Iran and demands an immediate cessation of hostilities, Foreign Minister Wang Yi told his Israeli counterpart Gideon Saar on Tuesday, according to his ministry.

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