US politics & policy

US has no immediate plan to strike Iran, Trump tells FT

President says position with Tehran is 'brilliant' in interview just hours before midterm polls close



'We seem to be getting everything we want' in the Iran war, Donald Trump told the FT © Eric Lee/Reuters

Edward Luce in Washington

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The US has no immediate plans to strike Iran, Donald Trump has said, as the president played down speculation that he was preparing to escalate his conflict with the Islamic republic after the midterm elections.

In an interview with the FT on Tuesday, the US president suggested he was content with the state of the stand-off with Iran — even as he signalled he was prepared for more war if necessary.

"We seem to be getting everything we want," Trump said in a six-minute telephone interview.

Asked about strong hints by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu that there would be an attack later this week, Trump said: "I'm ready, we're ready. We're locked and loaded if we need to go, but there may be no reason for it."

The comments from the president came just hours before polls closed across the country in congressional elections that have been dominated by voter anxiety about inflation and the surge in fuel prices that followed his decision to go war with Iran.

The US launched air strikes on Iran on Monday, hitting targets on Qeshm Island in the Strait of Hormuz in what Washington described as a defensive move to protect American military assets in the Middle East.

Trump has claimed that energy prices will fall sharply after the midterms and told the FT there was now more oil passing through the Strait of Hormuz — the critical chokepoint for crude supplies out of the Gulf — than before the war and a US blockade on Iran's ports was successfully stifling Tehran's economy.

"It's a brilliant situation," Trump said.

The US was not "really" fighting Iran, he added. "We're not really in a war, because we hit them with the B2 bombers and wiped out their nuclear potential incapacity. We then hit them again, Epic Fury, etc . . . But if you think about it, we haven't really had a war with them in a long time, six months, maybe more."

Trump added: "I don't consider that we're in war like Ukraine, wars like World War I, World War II."

The US leader underlined that he would not share any attack plans in advance but said indirect negotiations with Iran about the fate of its roughly 1,000lb stockpile of enriched uranium — "nuclear dust", as he calls it — were ongoing.

"Even though it's under hundreds of tons of rock, I would say that I'm not happy that it will be there," Trump said. "So it's one of the things that we do talk to them about. But you know, we're having discussions, and we'll see how that all works out."

Hopes for a breakthrough in US-Iran peace talks have sent oil prices lower, with Brent crude down by more than $10 a barrel in recent days to about $104. But on Tuesday, US petrol prices hit a new average high under any administration.

Trump's subdued tone in his interview with the FT suggested a president whose attention has shifted, at least momentarily, from his job as US commander-in-chief. He took questions on Iran but preferred to focus on what he said would be a Republican midterm victory.

Polling ahead of the vote has pointed to a victory for Democrats, who could succeed in winning control of both the US House and Senate. Republicans have pinned their hopes on Trump driving a high turnout from his Maga base to defend the party's control of Congress.

But on Monday, Trump gave one of history's most bizarre closing election speeches in which he extolled his renovation work on the Lincoln Memorial reflecting pool.

"Every one of [his election rallies] was a home run," he told the FT. "They were packed. They had thousands and thousands of people outside of large arenas and couldn't even get in."

Should Trump's optimism about Republican prospects be misplaced, his tone on the stand-off with Iran could abruptly alter, as it has before.

He added that he was optimistic that Ukraine-Russia peace talks were making ground.

"I think they're both at the point of saying, 'Let's make a deal,'" he said. Trump's optimism is not echoed by Ukrainian negotiators.

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