

Reopening strait likely a lengthy effort

By ALISON BATH
Stars and Stripes

NAPLES, Italy — While planning for a multinational effort to secure the Strait of Hormuz has intensified in recent weeks, a series of U.S.-Iran strikes over the last few days has underscored the inherent dangers in reopening the waterway.

The renewal of hostilities with no clear path forward in resuming a U.S.-Iran ceasefire reached earlier this month puts into further doubt when operations to safely restore the free flow of traffic in the strait could begin.

Military officials and analysts say reopening one of the world's most important waterways will require a lengthy operation likely involving American, European and regional forces, along with civilian maritime organizations.

Such a mission would require a squadron of ships, aircraft, drones and thousands of personnel in what could be a long-term peacekeeping operation, analysts say.

Any multinational mission in the Strait of Hormuz would de-

pend on the coordinated efforts of multiple participating countries.

It also would rely on the involvement of Middle East nations, including Iran, said Kevin Rowlands, a professor and journal editor at the London-based think tank Royal United Services Institute.

"In some way, it's got to involve Iran," Rowlands said. "Even if it's not Iran that is there with platforms taking part in whatever mission it is, there needs to be some kind of coordination with (Tehran)."

The United States also is likely to be involved. President Donald Trump has said U.S. forces already have been searching for mines in the strait, and the U.S.-Iran memorandum of understanding calls for American forces to remain near Iran until a final agreement is reached.

The U.S. agreed to remove its forces from the vicinity of Iran within 30 days after a final deal is concluded.

European leaders have offered to take a prominent role in the

mission but have indicated their forces will not enter the strait until they have assurances that the U.S.-Iran ceasefire agreement will hold.

Rowlands said the European mission would remain neutral. European efforts would likely start with smaller operations that could be scaled up, if successful, into a mission that would last months or potentially years, he said.

Frigates, destroyers and mine countermeasures vessels would work in conjunction with maritime patrol aircraft and helicopters to clear a bottleneck of tankers and other commercial ships trapped in the Persian Gulf since the U.S. and Israel attacked Iran in February.

The effort also would include aerial and surface drones and other autonomous, uncrewed systems to help restore traffic in the Strait of Hormuz, through which 20% of the world's consumption of petroleum products travels each day.

There were a combined 80 transits through the waterway fa-

cilitated by the U.S. on Tuesday and Wednesday, as well as 85 other vessel transits during the two-day period, according to a Joint Maritime Information Center report released Thursday. The historical average is 138 per day, it said.

Exactly when the effort to clear the strait could begin remains uncertain, as negotiators work to preserve the U.S.-Iran ceasefire and security threats continue.

On Thursday, the U.K. Maritime Trade Operations reported that a cargo ship was hit by an unknown projectile while transiting strait waters near Oman. The strike damaged the vessel's bridge but there were no casualties, the maritime security organization said.

A multinational operation to reopen the strait likely would settle on a specific route through the waterway deemed safe for travel following mine-clearing operations, which would need to remain persistent to ensure that more mines had not been subsequently laid, Rowlands said.

Donahue's looming departure is drawing backlash

By JOHN VANDIVER
Stars and Stripes

Backlash is growing over the looming retirement of a top Army general, with a chorus of his backers questioning the sidelining of a leader they consider instrumental in preparing the military for a new era of warfare.

Gen. Christopher Donahue is slated to relinquish command Thursday of U.S. Army Europe and Africa ahead of his retirement later this summer.

Supporters say he is being forced out by Defense Secreta-

ry Pete Hegseth, who has not publicly explained the move, and reports Wednesday that the four-star general had submitted his retirement papers drew sharp reactions from lawmakers and retired military leaders.

"This is yet another unforced error from a Secretary leading the Pentagon with bro-culture bravado rather than restraint, humility and careful stewardship of the finest fighting force in the world," Sen. Thom Tillis, R-N.C., wrote on X.

Donahue's departure is the

latest in a string of high-profile leadership changes in the upper ranks of the military, including the abrupt firing of former Army Chief of Staff Gen. Randy George earlier this year.

Such moves are part of a broader effort by Hegseth to trim the overall number of general officers while following through on his stated priority of ensuring that leadership decisions are based on merit rather than diversity.

When asked Wednesday about the circumstances surrounding Donahue's retire-

ment, the Defense Department declined to comment and referred questions to the Army. The Army issued a brief statement to reporters thanking Donahue for his service.

Critics have complained that Hegseth hasn't explained or justified his personnel moves. Fox News host Brian Kilmeade, who works at the same network Hegseth once did, was among those who praised Donahue.

"Huge loss for our country ... like losing Tom Brady in prime of career," Kilmeade said on X.

Iran hits US bases in Mideast in new strikes

Stars and Stripes

Iran said it conducted fresh strikes against U.S. military sites in Kuwait and Bahrain early Sunday, adding to a series of retaliatory attacks that have tested the durability of a ceasefire agreement reached earlier this month.

Iran's Revolutionary Guard said via state media that it launched a "large-scale missile and drone operation" against eight U.S. installations in the region, including Ali Al Salem Air Base in Kuwait and the U.S. 5th Fleet headquarters in Bahrain.

In Bahrain, sirens could be heard on the streets of the capital, Manama, and authorities warned residents to take shelter. A residential building in Muharraq Governorate was damaged, with no deaths reported, Bahrain's Ministry of Interior said Sunday on X.

Kuwait's military also said in a statement on X that it was confronting hostile missile and drone attacks. No injuries had been reported as of Sunday.

U.S. Central Command, which oversees military operations in the Middle East, did not immediately respond to requests for comment about the Iranian strikes.

In a statement on X, CENTCOM said it conducted strikes late Saturday on 10 Iranian mil-

itary targets in and near the Strait of Hormuz. It said the targets included military surveillance infrastructure, communication systems, air defense sites, drone storage facilities and minelayer capabilities.

It was the second consecutive night that the U.S. launched attacks on Iran. CENTCOM said both waves of strikes were in retaliation for Iranian attacks on commercial ships near the Strait of Hormuz.

Both Iran and the U.S. have warned that they are prepared to escalate attacks, raising questions about whether this month's agreement that halted the fighting and launched broader negotiations over Iran's nuclear program can hold.

In a statement via social media, President Donald Trump said "there may come a point where we are no longer able to be reasonable, and will be forced to military complete the job that we very successfully started."

"If that happens, the Islamic Republic of Iran will no longer exist!" Trump added, echoing a threat that he has made on multiple occasions during the four-month-long conflict.

The Joint Maritime Information Center on Saturday raised the security threat in the Strait of Hormuz to "substantial" after a tank-

er was struck, and published a warning area for potential mines spanning much of the usual transit route. It also said the Omani route recommended by Western navies had been expanded to allow ships to transit in both directions simultaneously, according to a Bloomberg News report.

Several vessels were crossing early Sunday using both the designated Omani and Iranian routes.

The IRGC said on Sunday that based on an agreement now known as the Islamabad Memorandum of Understanding, "traffic control arrangements in the Strait of Hormuz are with Iran, and from now on, violating ships will be dealt with more strongly than before," Press TV reported in a post on X.

An unidentified U.S. official told CNN after the American strikes that they didn't constitute a return to major combat operations for now.

The IRGC also threatened to walk away from talks launched under the U.S.-Iran agreement if the ceasefire is violated again.

Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi visited neighboring Iraq on Sunday and said he discussed the U.S. accord with officials in Baghdad, Bloomberg reported.

Sailor's 2023 fatal fall exposed drug ring aboard USS Ronald Reagan

BY ALEX WILSON

Stars and Stripes

YOKOSUKA NAVAL BASE, Japan — A sailor's fatal fall in 2023 sparked a Navy probe that uncovered a drug distribution network aboard the aircraft carrier USS Ronald Reagan and led to punishment for 58 sailors, according to service officials and heavily redacted court records.

The investigation resulted in six court-martial, 24 administrative separations and 28 cases of nonjudicial punishment, Navy officials said. Court records describe a network that used the U.S. Postal Service to ship hundreds of LSD tablets to Japan that were then distributed to sailors.

The Navy acknowledged in 2023 that an unspecified number of Ronald Reagan sailors were under investigation, but the extent of that probe did not emerge until records became public and recent Navy responses.

"The investigation was comprehensive,

and every Sailor identified as having been involved in misconduct was held accountable," Ronald Reagan spokesman Lt. Cmdr. James Adams said in an email.

The probe began after a 22-year-old boat-swain's mate assigned to the carrier died March 13, 2023, after falling from a Yokosuka barracks. The Navy declined to name him.

An autopsy found LSD in his system, and a search of the sailor's cellphone provided Naval Criminal Investigative Service agents with additional leads, according to a defense filing. Court records don't say what caused or contributed to his fall.

NCIS formally opened its investigation on May 2, 2023. Within weeks, sailors began admitting involvement and identifying others, according to court records.

The Ronald Reagan switched its homeport to Naval Base Kitsap in Bremerton, Wash., in spring 2024, after serving nearly a decade as flagship of the Japan-based U.S. 7th Fleet.

7 hurt in fire aboard LCS Indianapolis

BY GARY WARNER

Stars and Stripes

A fire aboard the Freedom-class littoral combat ship USS Indianapolis on Wednesday morning while in port at Naval Station Mayport in Jacksonville, Fla., caused minor injuries to seven sailors, the Navy said Thursday.

Mayport Fire and Emergency Services and the ship's crew responded immediately and quickly extinguished the localized fire.

"At approximately 11:30 a.m. local time on June 24, 2026, a fire was reported on USS Indianapolis (LCS-17) while the warship was moored at Naval Station Mayport," Navy Surface Force Atlantic said in a statement. "Seven shipboard personnel were evaluated at local hospitals for minor injuries. All have since been released and cleared to return to the ship that same afternoon."

The cause of the incident is being reviewed.

Bolton guilty in classified material case

The Baltimore Sun

Former U.S. national security adviser John Bolton pleaded guilty in federal court at Greenbelt, Md., on Friday to retaining national defense information.

The plea resolves a case accusing Bolton, 77, of mishandling classified material while serving in the White House. He admitted to one count of unlawfully retaining national defense information as part of a plea agreement that dismisses the remaining 17 counts in the indictment, according to the U.S. Attorney's Office for the District of Maryland.

The son of a Baltimore firefighter, Bolton grew up in a row house in a working-class neighborhood. He attended Yale College and Yale Law School. He later

served in several Republican presidential administrations and became one of the nation's most prominent foreign policy figures.

Bolton served as President Donald Trump's national security adviser from April 2018 until September 2019. Prosecutors said he incorporated highly sensitive classified information he learned during his government duties into personal "diary" entries documenting his daily activities.

The documents included information classified up to the TOP SECRET level and Sensitive Compartmented Information, including details about foreign adversaries' military plans, covert U.S. government operations abroad and intelligence

gathered from clandestine sources and intercepted communications, according to court documents.

Prosecutors said Bolton sent the diary entries to two family members who were not authorized to receive classified information. The material was transmitted through personal email accounts and a non-government messaging application that were not approved for handling classified information. He also kept copies of the documents at his Bethesda, Md., home, where they were not permitted to be stored.

"Mr. Bolton knew the damage mishandling confidential material could cause to national security, and yet he still committed this misconduct and put Ameri-

can lives at risk," U.S. Attorney Kelly O. Hayes for the District of Maryland said in a statement.

The case drew additional scrutiny after prosecutors said a cyber actor believed to be associated with Iran hacked Bolton's personal email account after he left office. Bolton reported the intrusion to law enforcement but did not disclose that the account contained national defense information, according to court documents.

Bolton faces a maximum sentence of five years in federal prison and agreed to pay a \$2.25 million fine. Under federal law, his conviction also prevents him or his survivors from collecting a federal annuity or retirement pay, according to the plea agreement.

Murder charge spotlights Zion's deadliest trail

Las Vegas Review-Journal

LAS VEGAS — The roughly 1,500-foot elevation gain up to the summit of Angels Landing is enough to frighten even the most experienced hikers. It's a long fall to the bottom.

Twenty years ago, New York-New York casino cocktail waitress Bernadette Vander Meer, 28, made it all the way to the highest peak with her husband before, according to him, she fell to her death. At the time, David Vander Meer told investigators he was preparing to take her photo when she went over the edge, according to an affidavit.

When they asked if he had been unfaithful, he said no. What David Vander Meer didn't mention was that he was deep into an affair with a woman that had started years prior, when she was underage.

According to Bernadette Vander Meer's mother, her daughter had told him she was considering breaking off the marriage. Yet the trip to Zion National Park in

southwestern Utah had been planned to celebrate the couple's upcoming 10-year anniversary.

"It's not just about opportunity, it's about motive," said Randi Minetor, author of the 2017 book "Death in Zion National Park," in an interview. "Why would Bernadette's husband have pushed her off of Angels Landing?"

Minetor's passage about Bernadette Vander Meer declares that readers will never know what really happened. Rather, all that could be deduced is that she fell into the canyon. That narrative changed last week. Authorities alleged that David Vander Meer, a Las Vegas school counselor who turned 49 in jail on Wednesday and died on Thursday, intentionally pushed her.

The affidavit, penned by Washington County attorney's office Lt. Investigator Jessica Bate and released Tuesday, has renewed a nationwide fascination with the trail. According to a 2025 study, there had been 17 hiking fatalities at Angels Landing as of 2024.

Mistrial in LA arson case a blow to US prosecutors

Los Angeles Times

LOS ANGELES — A mistrial was declared Friday in the federal trial of a 30-year-old former Uber driver accused of setting what would become the most destructive wildfire in Los Angeles history.

Jonathan Rinderknecht was on trial for destruction of property by means of fire, arson affecting property used in interstate commerce and timber set afire. But on Friday, the 13th day of trial, U.S. District Judge Anne Hwang declared a mistrial after the jurors said they were unable to reach a verdict on any of the felony charges, with a final vote of 10 to 2 for acquittal.

"The court finds there's a manifest necessity to declare a mistrial in this case due to a jury deadlock," Hwang said.

First Assistant U.S. Attorney Bill Essayli said on the social media platform X that his office would retry the case.

"The evidence is strong that Jonathan Rinderknecht is re-

sponsible for igniting the fire on January 1, 2025, which eventually became the Palisades fire. We fully intend to retry this case before a new jury and obtain guilty verdicts on all charged counts."

Hwang ordered Rinderknecht to remain in custody and scheduled a new trial for Oct. 19.

Outside the courtroom, defense attorney Steve Haney said the jury "was not convinced beyond a reasonable doubt... and it wasn't even close."

Juror No. 4, who identified herself only by her first name, Syrena, said her vote was "not guilty." She cited some of the points Haney had hit on during his defense, including a lack of cellphone data showing Verizon phones in the area, something that could have identified other potential suspects, and gaps of time in surveillance footage.

"There's just not enough proof... a lot of holes," the 49-year-old said. "Without the proof, and all the doubts, I can't say for sure that he's guilty."

SOUTHCOM assists in earthquake relief

By JOHN VANDIVER
Stars and Stripes

U.S. forces have launched an operation to assist disaster relief efforts in Venezuela, which was hit last week by devastating earthquakes, U.S. Southern Command said in a statement Thursday.

The Pentagon directed SOUTHCOM to coordinate with other U.S. agencies that are mobilizing after northern Venezuela was hit with back-to-back earthquakes that registered magnitudes over 7.

The death toll exceeded 1,400 people as of Sunday, with rescuers racing to locate sur-

vivors under the rubble.

Acting President Delcy Rodríguez said Sunday that 33 people had been rescued the day before, The Associated Press reported.

“Our joint forces are moving quickly to bring the unmatched airlift, logistics, and lifesaving capabilities of the U.S. military to help,” the SOUTHCOM statement said.

The command set up an operational planning team that brings together experts who are advising staff and leadership responsible for disaster relief planning and mission-related decisions, according to

the statement.

SOUTHCOM commander Gen. Francis Donovan has directed a wide range of military assets to support the mission.

The amphibious transport ship USS Fort Lauderdale and the littoral combat ship USS Billings, along with C-17 and C-130 Hercules transport planes and surveillance aircraft have been dispatched to provide aid, SOUTHCOM said.

At roughly 6 p.m. Wednesday, a magnitude-7.2 earthquake struck northern Venezuela. Less than a minute later, a quake with a magnitude

of 7.5 hit Yaracuy state.

The arrival of U.S. military personnel in Venezuela to support the relief effort underscores how dramatically relations have shifted between Washington and Caracas, which for years were bitter adversaries.

In a statement, U.S. Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth said the U.S. response reflects Washington’s renewed focus on the region.

“The United States is committed to our hemisphere,” Hegseth said. “When the lives of our friends are on the line, America moves.”

Glide bombs reducing Ukraine oasis to rubble

Bloomberg News

The off-duty soldiers were in a coffee shop near to Peace Square in Kramatorsk when a Russian glide bomb struck nearby.

The owners had taped giant Xs across the windows to stop the regular explosions from shattering them. But the men were showered with glass all the same, a reminder that the fortified city which for years has offered troops a respite from combat has come into range for the Kremlin’s artillery and airstrikes.

Glide bombs are “scarier little guys than drones” and used more than artillery, said another soldier, who shared videos of the aftermath and asked only to be identified by his call sign, Komers, for security reasons. He said the tactic seems designed to intimidate the local population.

After the full-scale invasion of 2022, Kramatorsk became an oasis of sorts for Ukrainian troops as fire moved elsewhere. They would buy new armor or just hang out and smoke hookah pipes during brief stretches

away from the front.

Now Russia’s air campaign is making the city unlivable.

A combined drone and artillery attack earlier this month killed a 78-year-old woman and wounded five other people as cluster bombs hit a bus stop, according to Mayor Oleksandr Honcharenko.

The recent offensive has seen many civilians finally move away. The foreign medic, who asked not to be named for security reasons, said most of their operations are relocating to a town 38 miles to the west. The soldiers though are staying.

“Ukraine’s recent success has turned media attention away from the battle for Donetsk,” said Michael Kofman, a senior fellow at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace and a frequent visitor to the region.

For Komers though, who’s been based in Kramatorsk since early 2024, the biggest recent change has been the increase in glide bomb attacks. Glide bombs fly long distances and carry enough explosives to take out a building.

Doctors learning more about Bundibugyo Ebola’s behavior

Bloomberg News

As more patients recover from the world’s largest recorded Bundibugyo Ebola outbreak, doctors are beginning to piece together how the rare virus behaves — offering the clearest picture yet of one of the disease’s least-studied strains.

The number of recoveries reported by Congolese health authorities almost doubled in a week, rising to 148 on Thursday from 80 on June 18, even as treatment centers admit dozens of patients daily.

Previous Bundibugyo outbreaks had lower reported fatality rates than epidemics caused by the more common Zaire and Sudan species, but doctors have said it’s too early to know whether the current epidemic will follow the same pattern because hundreds of patients remain hospitalized.

A study published June 23 in The New England Journal of Medicine, based on the first 505 laboratory-confirmed patients, provides the clearest description yet of the disease. Patients most commonly presented with fever, vomiting, diarrhea, headache, abdominal pain and loss of

appetite, while bleeding was uncommon when they first sought care. Researchers also found patients who died carried substantially higher viral loads than survivors.

A slower disease course may provide more time to aggressively replace fluids, stabilize blood sugar and electrolyte levels, and administer antiviral drugs before patients become critically ill, said Susan McLellan, director of the biocontainment treatment unit at the University of Texas Medical Branch, who cared for Ebola patients in Sierra Leone during the 2014-16 West African epidemic and later in the Democratic Republic of Congo during an outbreak in 2018.

The next test of whether those advances can further improve survival is expected to begin next week. Researchers plan to launch the first clinical trial of treatments specifically against Bundibugyo Ebola, evaluating whether Gilead Sciences Inc.’s antiviral remdesivir and Mapp Biopharmaceutical Inc.’s monoclonal antibody cocktail MBP134 can reduce deaths from the disease.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Board censures officials in dead-voter case

NC RALEIGH — In a precedential decision, the North Carolina Board of Elections voted Wednesday to censure Wake County election board members Greg Cohen and Jerry Flynn for counting ballots cast by voters who died after voting.

Democratic board members Jeff Carmon and Siobhan O'Duffy Millen repeatedly emphasized that the law is ambiguous and unclear, and that even if it's been the long application adhered to, it does not necessarily make it right.

"There's no statute or rule that clearly instructs the boards of election to remove the ballots of voters who cast a ballot while alive and then predecease the election," Millen says. "I can't believe this."

The ongoing legal battle was prompted in 2022 after the North Carolina State Board of Elections attempted to clear up whether a voter's ballot is counted normally or if it gets removed from the count due to their death. The state board issued formal guidance to counties, instructing them to remove any ballots cast by voters who died before Election Day.

State aims to restrict undocumented students

FL MIAMI — Florida's public universities moved a step closer Thursday to barring undocumented students from enrolling, after the Florida Board of Governors unanimously advanced an admissions change that could take

effect in the 2027-28 academic year.

The proposal targets universities that, in the two most recent academic years, didn't admit all academically qualified applicants. If ultimately adopted, a person "not lawfully present in the United States" would not be eligible for initial enrollment at those universities.

The vote is not the final step. If approved, the proposed change would be opened for 14 days of public comment. If no concerns are raised during that period, it would return to the Board of Governors for a final vote in September.

In practice, the rule would apply to universities that have turned away academically qualified applicants because they lacked the space, faculty, programs or other resources to accommodate them. The proposal includes an exception for cases in which applicants were rejected for nonacademic reasons.

Weinstein accuser says she can't handle 4th trial

NY NEW YORK — Manhattan prosecutors moved to dismiss their rape case against Harvey Weinstein on Thursday after Jessica Mann — among the first women to come forward against the once-powerful Hollywood producer — said she could not bear the brutality of taking the stand a fourth time.

The move announced at a Manhattan Supreme Court hearing came after jurors last month could not agree about whether Weinstein was guilty of raping Mann inside a Midtown hotel room in March 2013. The outcome was a repeat of the dis-

graced producer's 2025 prosecution that ended in a partial mistrial.

The Miramax founder, 74, was found guilty of raping Mann at his first trial in 2020 — in addition to sexually assaulting Miriam Haley, a former "Project Runway" assistant — but that conviction was overturned by the Court of Appeals in 2024 after New York's highest court determined in a split decision that the jury shouldn't have heard sexual assault allegations from other women that didn't make up part of the charges.

In a statement read aloud by Assistant District Attorney Nicole Blumberg, Mann said her participation in Weinstein's prosecutions had stolen a decade of her life and left her feeling "fragmented, silenced, defamed and traumatized."

Camp files for bankruptcy nearly a year after deaths

TX FORT WORTH — Camp Mystic has filed for bankruptcy nearly a year after a devastating July 4 flood killed 28 people at the Christian summer camps for girls in Texas Hill Country.

The camp sought Chapter 11 bankruptcy reorganization on Wednesday, according to the paperwork filed with the U.S. Bankruptcy Court in the Southern District of Texas in Houston.

The camp listed its debt as "exceeding \$10 million," and said it has assets between \$100,001 and \$500,000.

The camp listed four companies as affiliates in its filed paperwork: Camp Mystic LLC, Natural Fountains Properties Inc., Mystic Camps Family

Partnership Ltd., and Mystic Camps Management LLC.

The all-girls Christian camp in Hunt, Texas, experienced flash floods on July 4, 2025, that killed 25 young children, two teenage counselors, and the camp's owner, Dick Eastland.

Lake Superior invaded by bloody red shrimp

MN DULUTH — Donn Branstrator and his team pulled up the traps just offshore of the Duluth-Superior Harbor. There, in the nets, were dozens of tiny wriggling red-spotted shrimp, both male and female, some pregnant, some juvenile.

It was the first evidence that Hemimysis anomala, commonly known as bloody red shrimp, which is native to the Caspian Sea, had established a self-sustaining population in Lake Superior, according to a study published recently in ScienceDirect.

The invasive shrimp, which were found last summer, had survived at least one winter in the frigid Superior waters, and are likely here to stay, said Branstrator, a biologist for the University of Minnesota Duluth.

The shrimp have been known to cause algae blooms and other problems in some of the western European reservoirs they have invaded.

They've been in the Great Lakes since 2006, first in Lake Michigan and Lake Huron, and then quickly spread to Lakes Ontario and Erie. Scientists still aren't sure what harm, if any, the shrimp have caused to those four lakes.

— From wire reports

STARS AND STRIPES®

Single source convenience, reliably independent. Visit www.stripes.com.

Reporting
World, National
and Military News

Messi scores in 7 consecutive WC games

Associated Press

ARLINGTON, Texas — Lionel Messi didn't have much time to try to become the first to score in seven consecutive World Cup games.

Argentina's superstar did it anyway as a second-half substitute.

Messi made it seven straight while extending the all-time men's World Cup scoring record with his 19th goal in Argentina's 3-1 victory over Jordan in a group stage finale Saturday night.

In his first match since turning 39 three days earlier, Messi scored on a free kick in the 80th minute after being taken down just outside the penalty area. The low kick barely above the grass surface split two Jordan defen-

ders into the left corner of the net.

It was his 72nd career goal on a free kick, including his 12th for Argentina. Messi now has 123 international goals — second all-time to Cristiano Ronaldo's 145 — in 202 appearances.

Messi had been one of only three players to score in six consecutive World Cup games along with France striker Just Fontaine and Brazil great Jairzinho.

"What you're seeing, I'm seeing the same thing," coach Lionel Scaloni said through a translator. "It's a little bit of an uncomfortable situation every single time people ask because I no longer know what to say."

Messi also scored on a free kick against Nigeria in the 2014 World Cup and is among six players

since records are available dating to 1966 who scored two free kick goals in the World Cup. He joined Pelé, Rivellino, Téofilo Cubillas, Bernard Genghini and David Beckham.

"I am very happy for him, for the moment he is having," Giovanni Lo Celso said in translated remarks after becoming the first Argentine other than Messi to score in this tournament, also on a free kick in the 19th minute. "The truth is that seeing him every day excites, excites and infects a lot. So obviously seeing him like that for us is very important."

Messi didn't start because Argentina had already clinched first place in Group J, and the game was further meaningless because Jordan was already eliminated

from the knockout stage.

Nevertheless, the decidedly pro-Argentina crowd of 70,649 at the home of the NFL's Dallas Cowboys was eager to see him.

Fans started chanting Messi's name as soon as the second half started, and cheered loudly when he came off the bench merely to go through warmups.

The roar was louder when he stepped onto the field in the 60th minute, replacing Lautaro Martínez, who scored on a penalty kick in the first half.

The knockout round for Argentina begins Friday in South Florida, and in this expanded 48-team tournament that would be the first of five matches in 17 days if La Albiceleste makes it to the final July 19.

Austria, Algeria advance to knockout round after 3-3 draw

Associated Press

KANSAS CITY, Mo. — Algeria and Austria knew that a pedestrian draw Saturday night would have sent both to the knockout round of the World Cup.

They delivered a thrilling 3-3 draw instead.

In the wildest finish of the group stage, Algeria took the lead in stoppage time only for Austria to answer on the final play of the game, making it a win-win result for those teams and a heartbreaking loss for Iran, which was eliminated from the tournament.

"I've been a coach for about 40 years. I don't remember a game that had such a dramatic course, and such an unexpected trajectory," Austria coach Ralf Rangnick said, shaking his head. "Even at the beginning of the match, if someone would have said it would be 3-3, nobody would have believed it. Somebody would have won an incredible bet, I guess."

The game was tied 2-2 in the closing minutes, and Algeria looked as if it was content to run out the clock and allow both teams to advance, when Riyad

Mahrez scored his second goal of the game. That put Austria on the verge of elimination, only for Sasa Kalajdzic to head in the equalizer a couple of minutes later, rescuing Das Team's World Cup hopes.

"The locker room is madness," Rangnick said. "If Alfred Hitchcock — who had nothing to do with soccer, didn't really like soccer — if he had written such a drama, I would have said he was completely mad."

Marko Arnautovic and Marcel Sabitzer also had goals for Austria, which finished second behind Argentina in Group J to advance for the first time since 1982. Its reward is a matchup with European champion Spain on Thursday in Los Angeles.

Rafik Belghali also scored for Les Fennecs. They finished third in the group but get a potentially easier Round of 32 matchup with Switzerland on Thursday night in Vancouver, British Columbia.

"It's a feeling of being extremely happy," Mahrez said. "We're obviously happy, and it was the objective when we arrived — it was to go beyond the first round. That's what we did, and we're all

very happy."

Iran would've advanced as one of the eight best third-place teams had Austria or Algeria won. But when Kalajdzic scored in stoppage time to tie the game one last time, it meant Team Melli was eliminated in heartbreaking fashion.

"When you have 3-3," Rangnick said, "nobody can assume that it was an agreement (to tie) or anything like that."

Rangnick might have been referring to the "Disgrace of Gijón." Few of those new fans of Les Fennecs probably knew about the "Disgrace of Gijón."

Longtime Algeria supporters had been waiting 44 years for some World Cup revenge against Austria. At the 1982 tournament, Austria and West Germany seemingly quit playing after the latter took a 1-0 lead, because that outcome ensured both would advance at the expense of Algeria, which protested to FIFA to no avail and was eliminated from the World Cup.

Austria struck first when Arnautovic perfectly timed a run between two Algerian defenders,

found himself one-on-one with goalkeeper Oussama Benbot, and overcame a stumble to score his record-extending 49th career goal for his nation.

Algeria answered just before halftime, when Belghali's left-footed shot easily beat Austrian goalkeeper Alexander Schlager.

Not content with a 1-1 draw, Austria's Konrad Laimer sent a sharp pass across the field that Sabitzer finished to regain the lead only for Algeria to answer minutes later, when Mahrez scored off a perfect cross from Houssein Aouar.

It remained 2-2 down the stretch, and Algeria began to play keep-away as an antsy crowd began to hoot and whistle. But just when it seemed that would be it, Mahrez and Kalajdzic ended the group stage of the World Cup in memorable fashion.

"I think the match was a little crazy. It sort of went beyond the limits of everyone's endurance," said Algeria coach Vladimir Petkovic. "Let's celebrate our promotion, so to speak, let's rest and then we will begin again for the next round."

Leafs select McKenna as forwards go 1-2-3

Associated Press

BUFFALO, N.Y. — Gavin McKenna's nerves finally eased when lifetime Maple Leafs fan and international pop icon Justin Bieber took the NHL draft stage to announce who Toronto was selecting No. 1.

"He was looking at me and I kind of was thinking, maybe," McKenna said with a laugh. "Crazy. Just crazy what's going on right now."

With most of Yukon watching and a loud presence of Maple Leafs fans in the stands, Toronto chose the Penn State left winger, validating longstanding projections of McKenna being his age group's top prospect. The 18-year-old from Yukon's capital of Whitehorse has been a prolific scorer on both sides of the U.S.-Canada border.

And if Bieber's appearance and taking the stage to the artist's song "Yukon" wasn't enough, McKenna was welcomed to the Maple Leafs with a video message from Toronto captain Auston Matthews.

"Obviously he's on the first line. I'm going to have to prove myself to be able to play with a player like that. But that's my goal," McKenna said about Matthews, who was chosen No. 1 by the Leafs in the 2016 draft, which also happened to be held in Buffalo. "My game's obviously a playmaker, he's a shooter, so I think we could complement each other pretty well."

McKenna represents a major plank in a rebuilding process for a team in transition. Toronto finished last in the Atlantic Division last season and missed the playoffs for the first time since Matthews' arrival. Fortunately, he is accustomed to the spotlight, with a combined for 79 goals and 244 points in 133 games with Medicine Hat in the WHL.

Canucks select Malhotra

The draft featured dueling cheers — and boos — between large contingents of Maple Leafs and Sabres fans, several surprises, nine trades and a poignant father-son moment when Vancouver selected center Caleb Malhotra with the No. 3 pick, joining a team coached by dad Manny Malhotra.

Malhotra said his dad was not aware of the Canucks' draft plans. And he now has bragging rights on his father in being selected four spots higher, after Manny went No. 7 to the New York Rangers in 1998.

Run on defensemen

After forwards went with the first three picks, including Sweden's Ivar Stenberg second to San Jose, the expected run on defensemen began with five selected over the next six picks, and 10 overall.

Buffalo selected Prince Albert blue-liner Daxon Rudolph at No. 4, followed by Lat-

via's Alberts Smits going fifth to the Rangers. Chase Reid, who is from Michigan, went seventh to Seattle as the first American-born player selected.

Smits split last season playing professionally in Finland and Germany, while also representing Latvia at the Milan Cortina Olympics. He became the highest drafted Latvian.

Trades and more trades

This was a much more active first round with picks traded for NHL players than the previous few years. New York got Pavel Dorofeyev from Vegas for picks 26 and 92, and a 2028 first-rounder. Boston acquired JJ Peterka from Utah for a pair of first-rounders. And St. Louis traded two of its picks to Anaheim for Mason McTavish.

The selections featured an international flavor with 10 Canadians, a first-round-record seven Swedes and seven Americans chosen. The first round ended with Ottawa selecting forward Jaxon Cover, who was born in Miami, raised on Grand Cayman where he played roller hockey, and developed his hockey skills in Toronto.

And Bieber wasn't the only music star to make a pick, with country music's Luke Bryan on hand to announce Nashville's selection of Wyatt Cullen before performing a concert a few blocks away.

Russell beats Verstappen, heat to win Austrian Grand Prix

Associated Press

SPIELBERG, Austria — George Russell showed he can stand the heat in more ways than one as he won the Austrian Grand Prix to revive his Formula 1 title chances.

Racing in a heatwave with a broken drinks system, Russell held off Max Verstappen and his own teammate Kimi Antonelli to turn his controversial pole position into a dominant win.

It's the first win for Russell, excluding sprint races, since the season-opening Australian Grand Prix. Russell said it was "incredible to be back on the top step" after a "tricky run of form."

Verstappen took the fight to Mercedes with his upgraded Red Bull car at the team's home

race, but couldn't get close enough for a shot at Russell and finished up on the defensive against Antonelli. The top three were separated by just two seconds at the finish.

Lewis Hamilton and Ferrari failed to build on his breakthrough win at the Barcelona-Catalunya Grand Prix last time out, fading badly in the race despite qualifying well, with the seven-time champion fifth and teammate Charles Leclerc eighth.

Russell takes back second in the standings from Hamilton with his seventh career win and cuts Antonelli's lead to 40 points.

Russell's smart win

Russell took pole Saturday with a lap time set as a yellow

flag was displayed for a crash by Verstappen. Russell argued he'd lifted off enough to be safe and the stewards agreed.

Sunday's win showed off Russell's smart approach to racing in a different way as he managed his pace and stayed out of trouble, even as those behind him lost time battling each other for position.

Leclerc had started second, with Hamilton third, but they gradually dropped back through the field on a track where they lacked power compared to Mercedes and also had difficulties with tire wear.

Hamilton didn't give up without a fight, bringing back memories of his fierce battles with Verstappen in 2021. Hamilton and the Dutch driver fought side by

side in the early part of the race and Verstappen complained Hamilton had forced him wide into a gravel trap.

Heating up

The heatwave sweeping Europe made this the first race of the year to be run under F1's "heat hazard" rules, with drivers required to use cooling vests or carry an equivalent weight in ballast. They lined up for the pre-race Austrian anthem in cooling gear and carrying umbrellas.

Overheating brakes were a hot topic, with Antonelli among those struggling to stop the car. Both Cadillac drivers retired early, with the team's crew rushing to put out a small fire on Valtteri Bottas' car before Sergio Perez reported smoke.

Goodman's 3 HRs lift Rockies over Twins

Associated Press

MINNEAPOLIS — Hunter Goodman hit three homers and drove in five runs, powering the Colorado Rockies to an 8-5 victory over the Minnesota Twins on Saturday night.

Goodman, who also went deep in his final at-bat Friday, launched a solo shot in the first inning and another in the third off starter Mike Paredes (0-1). After grounding out in the fifth, the slugger made it 6-2 in the seventh when he connected for his 25th homer this season, a three-run drive to left-center against reliever Kody Funderburk.

"When Goody gets hot, he stays hot for a while. He's a really tough guy to get out," Colorado manager Warren Schaeffer said.

Kyle Karros added a two-run homer in the eighth. Michael Lorenzen (3-9) allowed two runs and seven hits in 5½ innings to earn his first win since April 24.

Trevor Larnach's three-run double in the ninth made it 8-5 before Jimmy Herget came on to get two outs for his third save.

Astros 8, Tigers 6: Isaac Paredes hit a two-run double in the eighth inning and visiting Houston spoiled its former manager's opportunity at a milestone victory by rallying for a win over Detroit.

Tigers manager A.J. Hinch entered the game with 999 victories, including 481 with the Astros between 2015 and 2019, but his bullpen couldn't get him to 1,000.

Houston trailed 6-5 going into the eighth, but Jeremy Peña's RBI single off Will Vest tied the game, with center fielder James Outman's error putting runners on second and third with two outs. Paredes, who started his career with Detroit, followed with a two-run double to right.

Reds 9, Pirates 7: Eugenio Suárez hit a three-run homer with two outs in the ninth inning

that rallied visiting Cincinnati over Pittsburgh.

Trying to protect a one-run lead, Gregory Soto (4-2) let the first two Reds batters reach safely in the ninth before getting Sal Stewart to ground into a double play. Soto then walked JJ Bleday in front of Suárez, who drove a 2-2 sinker below the strike zone 344 feet the other way to right field.

Suárez's homer came after Esmerlyn Valdéz put the Pirates ahead 7-6 with a pinch-hit homer in the eighth.

Red Sox 4, Yankees 1: Jake Bennett held New York to one run in 6½ innings, Masataka Yoshida hit a leadoff home run off Gerrit Cole and host Boston beat the Yankees for the third straight day.

Willson Contreras had a two-run double and Anthony Seigler hit his first major league homer, a solo shot, for the Red Sox, who have won six of nine and outscored the Yankees 16-5 in the first three games of the series.

Rangers 7, Blue Jays 4: Corey Seager hit a solo home run, Jake Burger had three hits and drove in two runs, and visiting Texas beat Toronto.

Peyton Gray (3-0) threw 2½ scoreless innings for the win and Tyler Alexander finished with his third save in four chances.

White Sox 2, Royals 1: Jacob Gonzalez hit a one-out RBI single in the ninth inning to give Chicago a walk-off win over Kansas City and 10 consecutive home series victories for the first time in franchise history.

Chase Meidroth, Braden Montgomery and Colson Montgomery had two hits each for the White Sox, who have won four of five games.

Mets 6, Phillies 2: Francisco Lindor and Juan Soto each hit a pivotal triple as host New York defeated Philadelphia to stop its seven-game losing streak and give interim manager Andy Green his first win.

Lindor tied the game with a

two-run triple off bulk reliever Alan Rangel (0-1) in the sixth inning. They were the first RBIs since April 22 for Lindor, who returned Wednesday from a two-month stint on the injured list with a left calf strain. Soto added an RBI triple in the seventh and Bo Bichette followed with a sacrifice fly.

Rays 4, Diamondbacks 2: Junior Caminero homered for the third consecutive game, Jonathan Aranda added a two-run home run and host Tampa Bay moved back into the top spot in the AL East with a victory against Arizona.

Five Rays relievers combined to hold the Diamondbacks to seven hits on a bullpen day, with Michael Grove (1-0) picking up the victory after three scoreless innings while retiring nine of 10 batters he faced.

Nationals 4, Orioles 3 (10): Daylen Lile hit a go-ahead single in the 10th inning, Luis García Jr. homered as part of a four-hit day and visiting Washington beat Baltimore.

Clayton Beeter (3-1) pitched a 1-2-3 ninth for the Nationals. Justin Lawrence escaped a bases-loaded jam by inducing Samuel Basallo's game-ending groundout in his Washington debut.

Cubs 8, Brewers 2: Ian Happ hit a three-run homer, newly acquired left-hander David Peterson bounced back for the win after giving up a home run, and the visiting Cubs beat Milwaukee.

Peterson (4-6), acquired Thursday from the Mets, allowed Jackson Chourio's 11th homer on his first pitch, but then settled in to allow two runs on five hits in 5½ innings.

Guardians 4, Mariners 3: Cooper Ingle had a two-run single for his first major league hit, Slade Cecconi (4-6) pitched six shutout innings and host Cleveland beat Seattle.

Brayan Rocchio added an RBI double in the fifth, extend-

ing the Guardians' lead to 4-0. Travis Bazzana scored twice and had a pair of hits, while Khalil Watson has driven in eight runs in the last five games.

Marlins 5, Cardinals 1: Xavier Edwards had three hits and Kyle Stowers hit a pair of RBI singles to lead visiting Miami over St. Louis.

Javier Sanoja and Edwards added run-scoring singles in the fourth to make it 4-0, and Edwards doubled and scored in the seventh as the Marlins moved to 18-5 in June.

Giants 5, Braves 0: Rafael Devers homered twice and drove in four runs as host San Francisco beat Atlanta behind Logan Webb's magnificent pitching.

Webb allowed one hit and struck out six in seven innings as the Giants (34-48) avoided falling 16 games under .500 for the first time since 2018. Mauricio Dubón's one-out double in the second was his only blemish.

Dodgers 15, Padres 3: Mookie Betts' three-run homer capped a nine-run sixth inning that also included consecutive shots by Kyle Tucker and Dalton Rushing as visiting Los Angeles beat San Diego to even a series between the top two teams in the NL West.

Yoshinobu Yamamoto (8-5) held the Padres to two runs and five hits in six innings as the Dodgers rebounded a night after losing 7-1 to former teammate Walker Buehler.

Angels 5, Athletics 2: Denzer Guzman hit a tiebreaking single with two outs in the seventh inning that sent host Los Angeles to a victory over the Athletics.

Angels reliever Ryan Zeferjahn (4-3) struck out two in a scoreless seventh to earn the win and increase his hitless streak to 10 innings, with 19 strikeouts, in his last nine appearances. Kirby Yates threw a 1-2-3 ninth for his 100th career save.