

Iran gives answer to US peace proposal

Bloomberg News

Iran submitted its response to the latest U.S. proposal to end 10 weeks of war, the state-run Islamic Republic News Agency reported, without giving any further details.

The state-run Islamic Republic News Agency reported on the latest response without giving any further details, and Tehran hasn't yet given any public indication it would accept Donald Trump's plan. The U.S. president proposed that Iran permit passage through the Strait of Hormuz and Washington end its blockade on Iranian ports in the next month.

The U.S. proposal implies Iran's acceptance of ending the conflict, which has killed thousands of people across the Middle East and sent energy prices soaring. The two sides would still need to negotiate later a deal over Iran's nuclear program, which

remains a critical sticking point.

Trump had warned the U.S. might "go a different route if everything doesn't get signed up, buttoned up," suggesting an expanded version of Project Freedom, the brief U.S. effort to break Iran's maritime stranglehold and escort ships through Hormuz.

Iran's latest reply in the drawn-out negotiations follows a series of incidents that further strained a fragile ceasefire in place since April 8. A drone strike on Sunday briefly set a cargo vessel ablaze off Qatar in the Persian Gulf, marking the latest shipping attack in the region.

The United Arab Emirates and Kuwait, both of which have come under attack from Iran in the past two months, said Sunday they had intercepted hostile drones.

Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister Kazem Gharibabadi also warned the U.K. and France in a post on X that the presence of its

warships in Strait of Hormuz will be met with a "decisive and immediate response from the armed forces of the Islamic Republic of Iran."

The conflict that began with U.S.-Israeli strikes on Iran on Feb. 28 has upended oil and gas markets, with soaring fuel prices piling pressure on governments and consumers worldwide.

Saudi Aramco, the world's largest oil company, on Sunday warned it would take several months for the market to return to normal even if the Strait of Hormuz reopened immediately.

Should "trade and shipping remain curtailed by more than a few weeks from today, we anticipate the supply disruption to persist, and the market to normalize only in 2027," Chief Executive Officer Amin Nasser said in a statement.

As the crisis rolls on, the Gulf's biggest economies have been

adapting and finding ways to get at least some of their energy output to market.

Ship-tracking data compiled by Bloomberg showed AIKharaitiyat, a tanker carrying Qatari liquefied natural gas, transited Hormuz this weekend. It marks Qatar's first export out of the region since the crisis began and was bound for Pakistan — a major mediator in U.S.-Iran peace discussions.

The shipment is part of Pakistan's negotiations with Iran to let it obtain extra Qatari LNG cargoes and help meet urgent demand, according to people with knowledge of the matter, who asked not to be identified because the discussions are private.

Meanwhile, Aramco and the UAE's state oil company Adnoc are among firms that have moved crude cargoes through the strait since Iran effectively closed it, Bloomberg reported Friday.

5 bases in US to get directed-energy weapon systems

BY GARY WARNER
Stars and Stripes

Lasers, microwaves and other directed-energy weapons systems will be deployed to defend against illegal drone flights around five military bases under a Pentagon trial program announced Thursday.

The bases chosen, according to a statement from Joint Interagency Task Force 401, are:

One Navy base: Naval Base Kitsap, Wash.

Two Army bases: Fort Bliss, Texas; and Fort Huachuca, Ariz.

Two Air Force bases: Grand Forks Air Force Base, N.D.; and Whiteman Air Force Base, Mo.

The task force was created in 2025 to consolidate efforts to defend U.S. facilities against drones.

Based at the Pentagon and run by the Army, the task force also works with the Department of Homeland Security, Federal Aviation Administration and federal law enforcement agencies.

"Countering unlawful and adversarial drone activity is a homeland defense imperative," said Army Brig. Gen. Matt Ross, Task Force 401 director. "There is no 'silver bullet' to address this challenge, and this trial program integrates cutting-edge technology into the department's broader counterdrone toolkit."

U.S. Northern Command, which oversees most domestic military bases, said in October that drone incursions over installation airspace happen almost daily.

"There were 350 detections reported last year on military installations, and that was 350 over a total of 100 different installations of all types and levels of security," Gen. Gregory Guillot, the NORTHCOM commander, told Congress during a February 2025 hearing.

The bases were selected to allow for testing and assessment of different weapons at a cross-section of installations that have different environments and roles.

The task force said that, within 180 days, it wants to have devices at the bases selected for the trial program.

The counterdrone devices could include high-energy lasers and high-powered microwave systems, the task force said. Mul-

iple systems could be employed for a "layered defense."

"The technology enables service members to disrupt and defeat unlawful or adversarial drone activity while minimizing risk to surrounding personnel and infrastructure," the statement said.

Tests at the White Sands Missile Range in New Mexico and operational use of systems along the border with Mexico have shown that antidrone systems can be used without posing "an undue risk to passenger aircraft."

"We showed that directed-energy systems can counter drone threats while preserving the safety of air travelers," said Army Col. Scott McLellan, deputy director of the task force.

DOD releases 162 declassified UFO files

BY PHILLIP WALTER
WELLMAN
Stars and Stripes

The Defense Department on Friday announced the release of previously classified documents on UFOs and other mysterious sightings, describing the move as part of a broader push to increase transparency around the issue.

An initial batch of 162 files is being published through a new interagency effort called the Presidential Unsealing and Reporting System for UAP Encounters.

UAP is an abbreviation for unidentified anomalous phenomena, which includes unidentified objects or events in the air,

at sea and on land. The documents can be found at www.war.gov/ufo.

Additional materials will be posted on a rolling basis, the Defense Department said in a statement.

The newly available records include videos, photos and original documents from across the federal government.

Among the files are videos submitted by U.S. Indo-Pacific Command, U.S. Central Command and U.S. European Command described as “unresolved.”

Several photographs of the 1969 Apollo 12 moon landing in which “unidentified phenomena are visible” are also included.

“These files, hidden behind classifications, have long fueled justified speculation — and it’s time the American people see it for themselves,” Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth said in Friday’s statement.

In addition to the Pentagon’s All-domain Anomaly Resolution Office, the White House, the Office of the Director of National Intelligence, the Department of Energy, NASA and the FBI are involved in the declassification efforts.

Director of National Intelligence Tulsi Gabbard said Friday’s release marks the beginning of a continuing process.

Agencies are working to provide “a careful, comprehensive

and unprecedented review of our holdings,” she said.

The materials released are unresolved cases, meaning the government is unable to make a definitive determination on the nature of the observed phenomena, according to a description on the website. This can occur for a variety of reasons, including a lack of sufficient data.

NASA will contribute scientific expertise as more information is examined, agency Administrator Jared Isaacman said.

“We will remain candid about what we know to be true, what we have yet to understand and all that remains to be discovered,” Isaacman said.

China cut back tests to Japan airspace last year

BY BRIAN McELHINEY
AND KEISHI KOJA
Stars and Stripes

EDITOR’S NOTE: Because of editors’ errors, a story about earlier Chinese incursions accidentally ran in Stars and Stripes on Friday. This story contains the latest statistics and information on the matter.

Chinese pilots last year dramatically scaled back their approaches toward Japanese airspace, reducing Japan’s air force response to its lowest level in more than a decade, according to Japan’s Joint Staff.

Japan Air Self-Defense Force pilots scrambled 595 times to meet foreign aircraft during fiscal 2025, according to data released on the Joint Staff’s website on April 17. Japan’s fiscal year runs from April to March.

That’s about 15% fewer intercepts than in fiscal 2024, when Japanese aircraft met foreign challengers 704 times.

It’s also the lowest number of

scrambles since the 567 record in 2012.

China remained the most frequent challenger in fiscal 2025.

Of Japan’s intercepts, 366 involved Chinese aircraft, the lowest number since 2012, when Japan scrambled to meet Chinese pilots 306 times.

In fiscal 2024, Japan intercepted 464 Chinese aircraft, and in the previous fiscal year, 479.

Russia logged the second largest number of airspace challenges. Japan scrambled fighters 214 times against Russian fighters, compared to 237 times during the previous fiscal year, a number the Joint Staff called “average.”

While intercepts decreased, they remain at “a high level,” Japan Chief of Staff Gen. Hiroaki Uchikura said April 17.

Chinese drone approaches also declined to 16 in fiscal 2025, compared to 23 in the previous year, Uchikura said.

Marines Corps to phase out F/A-18 Hornet by 2030

BY GARY WARNER
Stars and Stripes

The Marine Corps will complete a switch from the F/A-18 Hornet to the new fifth-generation F-35 Lightning II by 2030, the service said last week.

An internal administrative message issued Tuesday said the Hornet will be retired from Marine service, and maintenance jobs tied to the F/A-18 Hornet fighter attack plane will be eliminated.

Variants of the Hornet have served in the Marine Corps since 1983. The service has been planning to phase out the Hornet since it received its first Lightnings in January 2012.

The Marines ended new pilot flight training for the Hornet in 2018.

The Navy flies later-model F/A-18E/F Super Hornets and plans to keep the aircraft into the 2040s while also shifting more squadrons to the F-35C. The Navy also flies the EF-18G

Growler, an electronic warfare version of the Hornet.

The 2026 Marine Aviation Plan calls for squadrons to expand to 420 F-35s.

The Marines fly two versions of the F-35. The F-35B, which is the primary variant, has vertical takeoff and landing capability and can fly from some amphibious assault ships. The F-35C is designed for carrier-based launch and recovery using catapults and arresting cables.

The administrative message says Marines with Military Occupational Specialties affected by the change include F/A-18 mechanics and specialists on power plants, airframe and safety equipment.

Positions for technicians on navigation/radar systems and electrical systems are also being eliminated.

Marines in those specialties are encouraged in the memo to retrain for similar roles on the F-35.

ABC challenges FCC in free speech fight

Los Angeles Times

Walt Disney Co.'s ABC is forcefully resisting Federal Communications Commission efforts to soften the network's programming, accusing the federal agency of an overreach that violates First Amendment freedoms.

FCC recently took the unusual step of calling in the licenses of eight Disney-owned television stations for early review. The move — widely interpreted as an effort to chill the network's speech — came a day after President Donald Trump demanded that ABC fire late-night host Jimmy Kimmel over a joke about first lady Melania Trump.

The FCC separately has taken aim at ABC's daytime discussion show, "The View," which delves deeply into politics. The FCC has questioned whether the show

could continue to claim an exemption to rules that require broadcasters to provide equal time for opponents of political candidates.

In its response last week to the FCC, Disney's Houston television station raised the stakes in "The View" dispute, calling the commission's actions "unprecedented" and "beyond the Commission's authority." The ABC station's petition for a declaratory ruling said "The View," has long qualified as a "bona fide" news-interview program with freedom to conduct interviews of legally qualified political candidates.

"The Commission's actions threaten to upend decades of settled law and practice and chill critical protected speech, both with respect to The View and more broadly," KTRK-TV said in

the filing.

The network's firm stance sets up a clash with the Trump administration, including the president's hand-picked FCC Chairman Brendan Carr, who has made no secret of his disdain for Kimmel and other ABC programming. Earlier this year, Carr announced that exemptions from the so-called "equal time rule," for some programs, including "The View," were no longer valid.

In a statement, the FCC said it would "review Disney's assertion that 'The View' is a 'bona fide news program' and thus exempt from the political equal time rules," according to a spokesperson.

ABC's strenuous arguments mark a turning point for the Disney-owned outlet.

In December 2024, a month after Trump was elected to a second term, the network quickly settled a lawsuit over statements made by news anchor George Stephanopoulos that Trump found offensive — sparking an outcry among free speech advocates, who accused the network of caving on a case it may have won.

But, over the past year, the network has weathered several storms, including a threat by Carr in September to punish ABC if it didn't muzzle Kimmel for comments he made in the wake of conservative activist Charlie Kirk's death. ABC briefly benched Kimmel but protesters loudly bashed Disney. Thousands of consumers canceled their Disney+ and Hulu subscriptions in protest.

FCC releases complaints over Bad Bunny halftime

Los Angeles Times

Bad Bunny's halftime show at this year's Super Bowl was largely embraced as a milestone for Latin music and Puerto Rican culture on America's most prominent pop-cultural stage.

Not everyone thought so, though.

The Federal Communications Commission has released a massive trove of viewer complaints against the musician, the show's broadcast partner NBC, and the NFL. Many of them expressed outrage at the supposed bawdiness of Bad Bunny's Spanish-language lyrics and dancing on a broadcast watched by children.

"NFL halftime show showed 2 men in act of intercourse while behind a pickup truck door," wrote one aghast Ohioan. "The ratings for NFL (sic) made it safe for my children to watch but they witnessed this and became disturbed."

Another viewer from Charlotte, N.C., who seemed familiar

with Bad Bunny's catalog, wrote that they "take issue with the vocal performances of 'Safaera,' which is a track widely known for explicit sexual references and graphic lyrical content, and 'Yo Perreo Sola,' which had choreography featuring overtly sexualized movements, including widespread twerking, grinding, pelvic thrusts and other sexually suggestive conduct."

Those viewers were probably not sated by the FCC's February review of the performance, which found that the songs' lyrics had been appropriately altered for the broadcast.

Just before the Super Bowl, Bad Bunny had won the Grammy for best album and joined a wave of artists speaking out against violent U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement raids in speeches at the ceremony. He demurred on performing in the continental U.S. because of the raids, instead performing a lengthy Puerto Rican residency.

'People flying off the boat': Blast injures 11 in Miami

Miami Herald

MIAMI — Patrick Lee, a seasoned South Florida boat captain, was manning his Tiki boat shuttling people to a vessel on the waters near the Haulover Sandbar near Bal Harbour on Saturday afternoon, when he suddenly saw a throng of people blasted off a nearby, 40-foot boat.

"When we looked back out, we saw three people flying off the boat in a puff of smoke," he said, noting some of the injured people had burns all over them.

The possible explosion around 12:50 p.m. at the sandbar sent 11 people to the hospital and had Miami-Dade Fire Rescue, the U.S. Coast Guard and the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission working what fire crews dubbed a "mass casualty incident."

Over 25 Miami-Dade fire crews aided in rescuing the injured, finding some of the 11 in the water. The agency initially

reported there were 15 patients but retracted that figure. Some of the injured were burned and suffered traumatic injuries.

Authorities could not confirm if an explosion occurred. The boat was docked near the Haulover Marine Center a few hours after the explosion. It is a Press Cruiser 400 Express, a 40-foot cabin cruiser called Nauti Nabors from Sherman, Texas. According to U.S. Coast Guard databases, the vessel is certified for recreational use.

Some of the patients were taken to Jackson Memorial Hospital's Ryder Trauma Center, which houses the Miami Burn Center, according to the audio.

Leo, who declined to give his last name and was not injured, was on board the boat when he said it exploded.

"It was the worst experience of my life," Leo said as he sat down under the shade of a tree near the Haulover Marine Center.

Putin holds low-key Victory Day parade

Bloomberg News

Russian President Vladimir Putin held a relatively low-key military parade Saturday to mark the World War II victory over Nazi Germany, after President Donald Trump brokered a three-day ceasefire with Ukraine.

The annual Victory Day celebration on Moscow's Red Square took place without a display of heavy military equipment for the first time since 2007, though an air force fly-past was held. A contingent of North Korean soldiers joined Russian troops on the square that included drone-system forces for the first time.

In a speech to the assembly,

Putin attempted to draw parallels between the Soviet Union's World War II victory and his own faltering war in Ukraine that's now in its fifth year, though he didn't mention by name the country that had shared in the 1945 defeat of the Nazis.

Ukraine "is armed and supported by the entire NATO bloc," Putin said, without acknowledging that it was Russia that began the February 2022 full-scale invasion. Russians "have a common goal. Everyone makes a personal contribution to the victory," he said.

Col. Gen. Andrey Mordvichev, the commander of Russia's Ground Forces who took

the post about a year ago, led the Red Square parade for the first time. He earlier headed Russian forces that occupied Ukraine's Mariupol early in the invasion, and later Avdiivka in the country's east.

The parade passed off without incident after days of spiraling tensions between Russia and Ukraine until Trump unexpectedly announced the ceasefire late Friday. The truce would last May 9-11, he said.

Russia had warned it would strike central Kyiv if Ukraine attempted to disrupt the Victory Day commemorations. The Russian Foreign Ministry even advised foreign embassies to evacuate diplomatic staff and citi-

zens from the Ukrainian capital.

The Defense Ministry in Moscow announced last week that the May 9 parade would be held without tanks, missile launchers and other military hardware amid fears of a potential Ukrainian drone attack. Cadets from military schools and youth institutions were also absent.

On Monday, a drone hit a high-end residential building about 4 miles from the Kremlin, a rare attack in the capital as air defenses typically intercept projectiles outside the city. On Friday, Russia faced a massive drone strike, with Ukrainian attacks spanning from southern Russia to the Urals, some 1,056 miles from the border.

Magyar vows to return Hungary to European fold

Bloomberg News

Peter Magyar assumed power as Hungary's prime minister, officially ending Viktor Orban's 16-year rule with a pledge to reverse the nation's autocratic slide and return it to the European mainstream.

Lawmakers elected the 45-year-old as premier on Saturday following his Tisza party's landslide win in April's general election. Magyar's government is expected to be installed by early this week.

Armed with a supermajority in parliament, Magyar vowed to claw back pilfered state assets

and to fully dismantle Orban's political system. In a dramatic confrontation in the chamber, Magyar gave Orban-allied President Tamas Sulyok until May 31 to resign, saying he was not fit for office after looking the other way as the European Union nation slid deeper into autocracy.

In a break from tradition, Orban wasn't present in parliament for the inauguration, which Magyar said signaled his predecessor's "rejection of responsibility, total absence of self-reflection, and the consequence-free exercise of power."

As the nation's new leader, Magyar repeatedly apologized for the failings of Orban's government, including allegations of the systemic abuse of children in state care, as well as the targeting of journalists and civil society groups.

"I want to make it clear: I won't rule over Hungary, I'll serve my homeland," Magyar said. He pledged to change the constitution to introduce limits to executive power.

In a symbolic change, the European Union flag flew outside the neo-Gothic parliament building on the banks of the Da-

nube River for the first time in 12 years — signaling a break with Orban's increasingly pro-Russian and anti-European politics. Lawmakers sang Beethoven's "Ode to Joy," the EU anthem, alongside the Hungarian one at the end of the ceremonies.

Magyar's most urgent task is to unblock more than \$20 billion in EU funds vital for reviving the Hungarian economy and creating room in the budget for key campaign pledges, such as raising spending in long-neglected areas like health care and education.

Passengers evacuate cruise ship hit by hantavirus

Staff and wire reports

Passengers who were evacuated from the hantavirus-hit cruise ship now anchored off Spain's Canary Islands arrived Sunday afternoon in Madrid, where they were being taken to a military hospital. The MV Hondius reached Tenerife, the largest island in the Spanish archipelago off West Africa's

coast, early Sunday.

None of the more than 140 people on the Hondius has shown symptoms of the virus, officials from Spain's health ministry, WHO and cruise company Oceanwide Expeditions said in an Associated Press report.

WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus re-

iterated that the general public should not be worried about the outbreak.

"We have been repeating the same answer many times," he said. "This is not another COVID. And the risk to the public is low. So they shouldn't be scared and they shouldn't panic."

Passengers and crew members were allowed to take only a

small bag with essential items, a cellphone, a charger, and documentation, leaving their luggage on the ship.

Some crew, as well as the body of a passenger who died on board, will remain on the ship, which will sail on to Rotterdam, Netherlands, where it will undergo disinfection, Spanish authorities said.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Judge allows state to kill bears to protect caribou

AK ANCHORAGE — A ruling by an Anchorage Superior Court judge clears the way for the state Department of Fish and Game to kill large numbers of bears in Southwest Alaska in May.

Opponents of the state's predator control program around the Mulchatna caribou herd are suing to overturn its expansion, arguing it violates Alaska's constitution. The two environmental groups that brought the case requested a court injunction last month. But following another hearing in Anchorage, Superior Court Judge Adolf Zeman sided with the state, clearing the Department of Fish and Game to begin killing bears this season.

One of the main issues in the litigation is whether state policymakers have sufficiently collected and assessed bear population data in the region. In his decision, Zeman explained that the plaintiffs had not met the bar required for an emergency order to halt the measure, which has been formally approved by the state's Board of Game.

Woman was jailed after cashing in lottery tickets

SC ALLENDALE — A woman was recently arrested for cashing in lottery tickets that she stole, the South Carolina Law Enforcement Division said.

On April 8, Mary Elizabeth Devoe was charged with breach of trust and intent to defraud, counterfeit game tickets, SLED said last week in a news release.

Then on April 30, the 61-year-old Allendale woman was charged with another count of intent to defraud, counterfeit game tickets.

The charges stem from incidents in December, when Devoe was accused of stealing lottery tickets from Lowcountry Gas & Grill, the restaurant/gas station/convenience store where she worked, arrest warrants show.

SLED didn't give an exact value of the winning lottery tickets that Devoe cashed in after stealing them, but according to charges it was more than \$2,000 but less than \$10,000.

Devoe redeemed most of the prize-winning lottery tickets at the store where she worked, the same location from where they were stolen, according to an arrest warrant.

Both the theft and redemption at the store were recorded on surveillance footage, an arrest warrant shows.

Data breach hits colleges, crippling student work

CA LOS ANGELES — A cybersecurity breach at the company behind the Canvas learning management system used widely across higher education institutions, grew into a widespread outage Thursday that left students and faculty at dozens of California campuses locked out of an essential platform used to access coursework, readings and assignments during finals preparations.

The disruption at Instructure follows a breach disclosed last week in which a hacker group claimed it stole hundreds of millions of records tied to students

and employees at roughly 9,000 schools in the U.S., Australia and Europe. The group Shiny-Hunters — which previously has claimed to be behind hacks of Ticketmaster and AT&T — is taking credit.

On Thursday, California students trying to log into Canvas instead got a message in white writing against a black backdrop:

It read: "If any of the schools in the affected list are interested in preventing the release of their data, please consult with a cyber advisory firm and contact us privately at TOX to negotiate a settlement. You have till the end of the day by 12 May 2026 before everything is leaked."

Teen arrested in slaying inspired by TikTok

NY NEW YORK — A 17-year-old boy stopped by cops for jumping a turnstile at a Brooklyn subway station Thursday has been arrested in connection with a Times Square stabbing inspired by a TikTok trend, police said.

After he was caught, the teen admitted that he zeroed in on Leonides Baez, 39, outside of Burger & Lobster restaurant on Monday because he was following a "mess-with-a-crack-head" challenge on TikTok, a police source said.

However, as the suspect awaited arraignment in Manhattan Criminal Court Thursday afternoon and reporters shouted questions at him, he hurled back, "It was self-defense."

Baez was sleeping on the sidewalk when the teen approached and started antagonizing him, the source said. Baez was

stabbed him in the face, torso and back, cops said.

The teen was caught jumping a turnstile just after midnight Thursday. Police quickly realized he was wanted for the Times Square stabbing.

Police recovered a scalpel from the teen, but it wasn't immediately clear if it was the weapon involved in the slaying.

The teen, whose name was not released by the NYPD because he is underage, was charged with murder and weapons possession for the 11:30 p.m. slaying on West 43rd Street near Seventh Avenue.

FBI raids legislator's office, pot business

VA PORTSMOUTH — The FBI raided state Sen. Louise Lucas' office and The Cannabis Outlet last week.

FBI agents in military fatigues gathered in the parking lot outside The Cannabis Outlet, which Lucas has a business interest in. Numerous unmarked vehicles including an armored personnel carrier and multiple vans were in the parking lot outside. Agents could be seen going in and out of the nearby building that serves as the office for the Democratic senator's business, Lucas Lodge LLC, and her political headquarters.

Lucas is a powerful member of the state Senate and chair of the Senate Finance and Appropriations Committee. The scope of the investigation, or its goal, is unclear.

An FBI spokesperson would only confirm the agency was "executing a court-authorized federal search warrant in Portsmouth, Va."

— From wire reports

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Mitchell leads Thunder after Williams' injury

Associated Press

Everybody knows the Oklahoma City Thunder's depth is the envy of the league and the backbone of their aspirations for a second straight NBA championship.

The next impressive player to rise from the Thunder's bottomless depth and onto the national stage is Ajay Mitchell, who has seized the spotlight while replacing injured teammate Jalen Williams during these playoffs.

After delivering career playoff highs of 24 points and 10 assists with no turnovers in the Thunder's 131-108 victory over the Los Angeles Lakers on Saturday night, the Belgian guard is the latest cog in general manager Sam Presti's formidable machine to prove he's ready to contribute to Oklahoma City's aspiring dynasty.

Perhaps only his teammates aren't surprised.

"Yeah, he's a gamer," MVP Shai Gilgeous-Alexander said. "Works super hard. He's never shaken by the moment. It might be a shock to the world, but it's no shock to us. We knew who Ajay Mitchell was the day he stepped

foot in our building, and he's just showing it to the world."

The Thunder are unbeaten in the postseason after taking a 3-0 series lead in the second round, seemingly making their advancement to the Western Conference finals a mere formality.

That's largely thanks to Mitchell, who swiftly stepped up to shoulder an increased offensive load five games ago following Williams' hamstring injury. In the second round, Mitchell has also stepped up to make up for the Lakers' strong defensive effort against Gilgeous-Alexander, who has been limited and erratic by his formidable standard.

"I know what I can do, and when I go out there, I just want to compete and help this team win and play freely," Mitchell said. "Every time I step on the court, I want to be a winning player and help my team. That's really what's been on my mind every time I play."

Mitchell did that impressively in the second half of Game 3, with 18 points and seven assists in the half while largely taking charge of the game at the start of both

quarters. He led the Thunder's 21-6 run out of halftime on the way to a third straight blowout.

Mitchell is averaging 20.7 points per game against the Lakers while hitting 53.3% of his shots and committing only three total turnovers. He has 20 assists while also playing strong defense.

After Williams went down in Game 2 of the first round against Phoenix, Mitchell moved into the starting lineup for Game 3 and promptly went 5-for-20. His teammates remained solidly behind him — and Mitchell has been outstanding ever since.

"He's just finding his footing," Gilgeous-Alexander said. "It's his first run in the playoffs, and it's obviously a different ballgame. He's just getting more and more comfortable as the game goes on, as the series goes on. ... I was never worried that he wasn't going to figure it out, and he's shown that."

Mitchell played as a rookie last season, albeit sparingly: He contributed 6.5 points per game in 36 regular-season contests, earning an early role in the Thunder's rotation before missing nearly the

entire second half of the regular season with turf toe.

He averaged just 8 minutes per game during the postseason title run, but Presti and coach Mark Daigneault saw enough to re-sign Mitchell to a three-year, \$9 million contract — a deal that looked like a ridiculous steal even before this playoff emergence.

Mitchell has proved he can be a creator and a scorer, but he earned Daigneault's trust by contributing on defense. Daigneault recognizes Mitchell's inexperience in the postseason, but it hasn't stopped the coach from putting Mitchell at the center of their effort.

"He doesn't have a ton of basketball (playing time) in the NBA," Daigneault said. "The growth curve of players young in their career is steep, and he's a guy that's hungry, (but) he's also humble. So he grows from all of his experiences. He's been great in the postseason so far, but he hasn't been wholly efficient yet. I think that's a little bit the intensity of the games, the physicality, the length. ... And yet he stays aggressive and he just keeps playing."

Harden's heroics lift Cavs past Pistons to Game 3 victory

Associated Press

CLEVELAND — James Harden endured plenty of criticism after the first two games of Cleveland's Eastern Conference semifinal series against Detroit.

With the Cavaliers in danger of falling into a 3-0 hole that no NBA team has ever overcome, the 17-year veteran showed he can still come up big in the clutch.

Harden hit three shots in the final two minutes Saturday to lift the Cavaliers to a 116-109 victory over the Pistons in Game 3.

"I love it. When my number's called, just getting to my spots," said Harden, who finished with 19 points and seven assists in 40 minutes. "Donovan Mitchell had been working so extremely hard throughout the course of

the game, just trying to find opportunities to help him. So that last minute and a half, two minutes, however long it was, it presented itself. And for me, just going out there and taking my shots."

Harden was 8 of 14 from the field after going 3 of 13 in Thursday's 107-97 loss at Detroit. His long-distance shooting also picked up as he went 3 of 7 on 3-pointers. He was 3 of 20 from beyond the arc in his last four games before Saturday.

"It's the James Harden I've seen for how many years he's been in the NBA. That's the James we needed tonight," Cavaliers coach Kenny Atkinson said. "We were searching and we got some good screenings into

the matchups we wanted and he went to work."

Harden was scoreless in the fourth quarter and took only two shots during the second half on Thursday, along with a critical turnover in the final minute that ended any hopes of a Cleveland comeback.

The 2018 NBA MVP had nine points in the fourth quarter on Saturday, with seven coming in the final 89 seconds.

With the shot clock running down, Harden drove the lane and hit a 16-foot step-back jumper with 1:29 remaining to push Cleveland's lead to 108-104.

After a driving dunk by Detroit's Cade Cunningham, Harden came up big again. He drove past Duncan Robinson and made

a floating 7-footer in the paint to put the lead back up to four.

Cunningham responded with a 3-pointer before Harden provided the decisive blow with 25 seconds remaining on a step-back 3-pointer while being guarded by Tobias Harris to make it 113-109.

"(James Harden) We understand that he hit some tough shots and made an impact on the game. But we can be tougher than that," Harris said.

After committing 11 turnovers the first two games of the Detroit series and averaging 5.2 in Cleveland's first nine games, Harden had three on Saturday. It was only the second time he has committed fewer than four this postseason.

Canes top Flyers in OT for 2nd sweep

Associated Press

PHILADELPHIA — Jackson Blake scored 5:28 into overtime for his second of the game, Logan Stankoven also scored in regulation and the Carolina Hurricanes finished a four-game sweep with a 3-2 victory over the Philadelphia Flyers to advance to the Eastern Conference finals for the second straight season.

Frederik Andersen made 15 saves for Carolina, which has not lost in eight playoff games.

Alex Bump and Tyson Foerster scored for the Flyers.

Taylor Hall and Jaccob Slavin assisted the winning goal. Blake's shot from the slot bounced off Dan Vladar's glove and over the goal line.

"Once I saw it go in, just excitement," Blake said.

Vladar stopped 37 shots for Philadelphia.

Carolina will play the winner of Buffalo and Montreal in the Eastern Conference finals after

the NHL's first 8-0 start in the playoffs since 1985.

"Everyone is chipping in; everyone is doing their job," Hall said.

Andersen has started every game in the postseason, winning them all.

"He's just playing lights out," Hurricanes coach Rod Brind'Amour said.

The Hurricanes, who reached the Eastern Conference finals for the third time in four years, are looking for their first Stanley Cup since 2006. Carolina is the 24th team in league history to win eight or more consecutive games during a playoff run. Eighteen of them have won the Stanley Cup.

"For me, it's just fun to sit back there and watch it, to be honest," Brind'Amour said.

Philadelphia scored just five goals over the four games. After an unlikely berth in the playoffs, fans saluted the home team when it was over with chants of,

"Let's go, Flyers!"

"I can't ask for more," Flyers coach Rick Tocchet said.

Bump scored 5:52 into the third period to tie the game at 2-2.

Stankoven's seventh tally of the playoffs 4:13 into the third period gave Carolina a 2-1 lead after he finished a beautiful cross-ice pass from Hall with a one-timer from just outside of the crease. Philadelphia evened the score 1:39 later when Bump shot past Andersen's glove side from the slot after a setup from Travis Konecny from behind the net.

Blake tied it at 1-1 with 7:25 remaining in the second when his wrist shot from along the boards caromed off Philadelphia defenseman Jamie Drysdale and past Vladar. It appeared as if Carolina went in front just 28 seconds later when Mark Jankowski beat Vladar, but the goal was overturned following a challenge by Tocchet

when officials ruled that Carolina's William Carrier interfered with Vladar.

The Flyers had a pair of good chances late in the period to take the lead but could not convert. The best opportunity came in the final seconds of the period when Christian Dvorak's wrist shot from close range went off the post on Andersen's glove side.

Carolina finished regulation with a 36-15 advantage in shots.

Russian winger Matvei Michkov was a healthy scratch for the Flyers. Michkov, 23, was the No. 7 overall pick in 2023 by Philadelphia and was heralded as an important piece for the rebuilding franchise's future.

But the right wing struggled in his first playoff experience, garnering one point while accumulating a minus-3 in eight games. It is the second time he has been a healthy scratch this postseason.

Kaprizov helps Wild hand Avs first loss of playoffs

Associated Press

ST. PAUL, Minn. — Kirill Kaprizov scored first and assisted on the next two goals as the Minnesota Wild forced a goalie change and handed the Colorado Avalanche their first loss in this postseason with a 5-1 victory in Game 3 of their second-round NHL playoff series on Saturday night.

Quinn Hughes followed Kaprizov's four-on-four score late in the first period with a four-on-three goal less than two minutes later. Ryan Hartman batted in a deflected power-play shot with 4:23 elapsed in the second period to prompt an early departure for Avalanche goalie Scott Wedgewood in favor of Mackenzie Blackwood.

Nathan MacKinnon got the Avalanche on the board on a power play later in the second

period, but Brock Faber answered just 20 seconds later by deflecting a puck past Blackwood. MacKinnon's first line was the only trio that generated much offense, and the Avalanche had more lapses in defensive coverage than they exhibited in the first two games.

"We played against a desperate hockey team that looked to me like they had more determination," Colorado coach Jared Bednar said. "They were more tenacious, more physical."

Matt Boldy added an empty-net goal and Jesper Wallstedt made 35 saves in his return to the net for the Wild after a 9-6 loss in the unhinged series opener prompted a start for Filip Gustavsson in the 5-2 loss in Game 2.

Four days later, the Wild were a much sharper team.

"I think we take a little breath and take a couple good days to practice and a couple days off and it obviously helps us, everyone, feel better," Kaprizov said.

Faber had two assists and has nine points in nine playoff games. Mats Zuccarello, who took the shot that Faber tipped past Blackwood, also had two assists and has 10 points in seven playoff games. The money man Kaprizov, who signed the richest contract in NHL history before the season and was nicknamed "Dolla Bill Kirill" by his teammates a few years ago, moved into the league postseason lead with 14 points.

"It's that ultra competitor, the way he digs in. It felt like he won every battle. He was flying tonight," Faber said. "That's what he expects of himself. He wants to win as bad as anyone."

The Avalanche will take a 2-1 lead into Game 4 in Minnesota on Monday, before the teams return to Colorado for Game 5 on Wednesday.

The Avalanche faced their first multigoal deficit of this postseason after they had 12 different players score in the first two games of this series.

Wedgewood, who led the NHL in save percentage and goals against average during the regular season, made nine saves. Blackwood had 12.

"I'm not saying that we didn't come out and work hard. I'm just saying that there was a level that they had that we didn't get to," Bednar said. "If you're going to win a hockey game against a really good team in the playoffs, it's not here and there and from certain guys. It has to be everybody."

Rangers snap Cubs' 10-game win streak

Associated Press

ARLINGTON, Texas — Josh Jung and Justin Foscue homered, Alejandro Osuna had a pair of RBI singles and the Texas Rangers beat the Cubs 6-0 on Saturday night, ending Chicago's second 10-game winning streak of the season.

Jung, who finished with three hits, led off the second inning with a homer to snap an 0-for-13 skid since a 13-game hitting streak. Foscue's first career homer leading off the fifth made it a 5-0 lead for the Rangers, who had lost five of six games.

Jalen Beeks (2-1) retired all four batters he faced after relieving Jack Leiter, the Texas starter who had to work around nine baserunners and threw 97 pitches over 4⅓ scoreless innings. Cole Winn and Gavin Collyer followed Beeks to wrap up the Rangers' four-hitter and fourth shutout this year.

Edward Cabrera (3-1) allowed five runs in five innings. He struck out six and walked one.

Chicago (27-13) was held scoreless for the fourth time after winning 20 of its previous 23 games, with those 10-game streaks sandwiching a three-game skid. It was the first time since 1935 that the Cubs had multiple 10-game win streaks in the same season.

Cubs left fielder Ian Happ extended his on-base streak to 30 games when he drew a walk in the first inning. The only longer active streak in the majors is 33 games by the Athletics' Nick Kurtz, who had two doubles Saturday in a 6-2 win over Baltimore.

Leiter allowed multiple runners in each of the first four innings. The right-hander struck out six and walked five, including his last batter to fall one out shy of qualifying for the win.

Braves 7, Dodgers 2: Ozzie Albies and Matt Olson each had two RBIs and Atlanta rocked Blake Snell for five runs in three innings in his season debut for a road win over Los Angeles.

Spencer Strider (1-0) threw six scoreless innings, Austin Riley,

Michael Harris II and Drake Baldwin each drove in a run, and the Braves snapped an eight-game losing streak at Dodger Stadium.

Snell (0-1) had been dealing with left shoulder fatigue, delaying the start of his season after missing much of 2025 because of a left shoulder injury before contributing in the playoffs to the Dodgers' second consecutive World Series title. He had been scheduled to make one more rehabilitation start in the minors, but Los Angeles moved him up with the hope Snell would be able to throw five innings.

Instead, Snell was pulled after allowing four earned runs, six hits and two walks on 77 pitches with five strikeouts.

Twins 2, Guardians 1 (11): Byron Buxton doubled off the wall in left-center with one out in the 11th inning, scoring automatic runner Matt Wallner, and visiting Minnesota beat Cleveland.

Buxton also drove in Minnesota's first run and had its only other hit, belting his 22nd career leadoff homer on the third pitch of the game from Tanner Bibee. The Twins and Guardians each finished with two hits.

Buxton has 13 homers — all in his last 23 games — and is two behind MLB leaders Aaron Judge of the Yankees and Munetaka Murakami of the White Sox.

Minnesota is 20-40 against the Guardians since the start of the 2022 season.

Marlins 8, Nationals 7: Xavier Edwards tied the game with a homer in the seventh inning, Jakob Marsee hit a three-run homer in the eighth and host Florida rallied from down four runs to beat Washington.

It was the Marlins' seventh comeback win of the season and their largest so far, passing a three-run rally against the Colorado Rockies on March 29.

Kyle Stowers finished a triple shy of the cycle and Otto Lopez had a single and a double to extend his hitting streak to 12 games.

Lopez's streak is now the longest in MLB after Jacob Wilson of the A's went hitless against the Baltimore Orioles.

Reds 3, Astros 1: Chase Burns threw six innings of one-run ball, Matt McClain drove in two runs and Cincinnati snapped its eight-game losing streak with a home victory over Houston.

Burns (4-1) struck out two and allowed four hits. The No. 2 pick in the 2024 MLB Draft lowered his ERA to 2.11, good for third in the National League and seventh in the majors.

The Reds' skid was their longest since also dropping eight straight early in the 2024 season.

White Sox 6, Mariners 1: Miguel Vargas homered twice and drove in three runs, and host Chicago beat Luis Castillo and Seattle.

Colson Montgomery also went deep for Chicago, which had lost three straight and four of five overall.

Anthony Kay (2-1) pitched five innings of one-run ball.

Blue Jays 14, Angels 1: Brandon Valenzuela hit a three-run home run, Ernie Clement had a solo homer among his career-high tying five hits and host Toronto used a seven-run fifth inning to rout Los Angeles.

Mason Fluharty (2-0) worked one inning for the win as Toronto set season-highs in runs and hits (20).

Athletics 6, Orioles 2: Brent Rooker hit a three-run homer in the third inning, and the visiting Athletics beat Baltimore.

Aaron Civale (4-1) pitched five scoreless innings for the A's. Shane Baz (1-4) allowed five runs in 4⅓ innings for Baltimore, which lost for the eighth time in 10 games and received boos from the home crowd.

Phillies 9, Rockies 3: Alec Bohm homered twice, doubled and drove in four runs in his return from a two-game benching, Kyle Schwarber hit a three-run homer and host Philadelphia beat Colorado.

Trea Turner had four hits for

the Phillies, who improved to 9-3 under interim manager Don Mattingly.

Royals 5, Tigers 1: Michael Wacha pitched seven scoreless innings, Bobby Witt Jr. hit an inside-the-park home run on a grounder and host Kansas City beat Detroit.

It was the Royals' first inside-the-park home run since Witt did it in August 2023.

Diamondbacks 2, Mets 1: Merrill Kelly bounced back from three straight shaky starts to pitch seven effective innings and Arizona beat New York for a much-needed home win.

Kelly (2-3) allowed a run on three hits and Paul Sewald worked a perfect ninth for his eighth save in as many chances. It was Arizona's third win in 11 games.

Padres 4, Cardinals 2: Manny Machado hit his 375th career homer and 200th in a Padres uniform, Ty France also went deep and host San Diego beat St. Louis.

Fernando Tatis Jr. had a tie-breaking two-run single in the fifth inning to back Randy Vasquez (4-1), who gave up one run and six hits while striking out six in five innings.

Brewers 4, Yankees 3 (10): William Contreras singled home the tying run in the eighth inning and hit a game-ending sacrifice fly in the 10th as host Milwaukee rallied past New York.

The Yankees wasted a brilliant performance from Cam Schlichter and have lost back-to-back games for the first time since they dropped five in a row from April 8-12. On Friday, they got just three hits against Milwaukee's Jacob Misiorowski and Shane Bieber in a 6-0 defeat.

Pirates 13, Giants 3: Nick Gonzales and Joey Bart each had four hits, Brandon Lowe drove in four runs and Pittsburgh had a season-high 20 hits in a road victory over San Francisco.

Every Pittsburgh starter recorded a hit. Oneil Cruz finished with three hits, while Lowe and Ryan O'Hearn each had two.