

NATO eyes Hormuz mission to guard ships

Bloomberg News

NATO is discussing the possibility of helping ships pass through the blocked Strait of Hormuz if the waterway isn't reopened by early July, according to a senior official in the military alliance.

The idea has support from several members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization but doesn't yet have the necessary unanimous support, said a diplomat from a NATO country. Both officials spoke on the condition of anonymity. Leaders from NATO countries will meet in Ankara July 7-8.

"The political direction comes first, and then the formal planning happens after that," said Alexis Grynkeiwich, NATO's supreme allied commander Europe, when asked about the possibility at a Tuesday press conference. "Am I thinking about it? Absolutely."

Such a move would represent

a shift in the military alliance's strategy toward the U.S.-Israeli war in Iran.

Thus far, allies have insisted they would only be involved in the strait once fighting has stopped and they can form a broad coalition that includes many non-NATO countries.

But economic woes are deepening, with the strait's closure sending energy prices soaring and growth forecasts tumbling.

It's unclear exactly how NATO countries could guarantee safe passage for commercial vessels through the strait.

A recent U.S. attempt to do that was halted within days of being launched, despite Washington's considerable military capabilities.

A spokesperson for the North Atlantic Treaty Organization didn't immediately reply to a request for comment.

Iran initially blocked the Strait of Hormuz — which tran-

sits roughly a fifth of global oil and liquefied natural gas supplies — after the U.S. and Israel began bombing the country in late February.

The passageway has since become a source of tension between the U.S. and its European allies in NATO, who have so far refused to heed President Donald Trump's demands that they help reopen the strait.

Trump has repeatedly fumed about the reaction and Washington recently announced it would withdraw 5,000 troops from Germany.

The senior NATO official said that while some allies still oppose authorizing an alliance mission for the strait, they would rally around the idea if the blockage persists.

The NATO diplomat said that several allies do support intervening to help reopen the strait but cautioned that others are still reluctant to be dragged into

the conflict.

Some NATO members like Spain have been unequivocal in their opposition to the war.

Madrid even barred the U.S. from using its airspace and bases to attack Iran.

Most allies, however, have quietly granted access to their bases to provide logistical support.

A coalition led by France and the U.K. is also developing a plan to help secure navigation in the Strait of Hormuz once the fighting abates.

Some countries have even positioned assets in the area in preparation.

That hasn't been enough to placate Trump, whose anger has been specifically targeted at Germany.

So far, however, the U.S. has made no formal request for NATO involvement in the strait, Bloomberg previously reported.

Trump says he stopped Iran strikes for Gulf states

Bloomberg News

President Donald Trump said he held off on a new bombardment of Iran planned for Tuesday at the request of Saudi Arabia and other Persian Gulf allies, who are now pushing for a deal to end the war.

The U.S. delayed the strikes "for a little while, hopefully maybe forever," because "we've had very big discussions with Iran, and we'll see what they amount to," Trump said at the White House on Monday evening.

Hours earlier, he said he was asked by the leaders of Saudi Arabia, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates to suspend plans

for renewed strikes on the Islamic Republic, which Trump said were slated to go ahead on Tuesday.

Qatar said diplomatic efforts are underway to find a resolution to the conflict after Gulf leaders reached out to Trump, according to a Foreign Ministry spokesperson on Tuesday. Tehran hasn't confirmed renewed talks.

"In their opinion, as Great Leaders and Allies, a Deal will be made, which will be very acceptable to the United States of America, as well as all Countries in the Middle East," Trump posted on Truth Social, referring to Saudi Crown Prince

Mohammed bin Salman, UAE President Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed, and Qatari Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad.

The three Gulf nations were targeted by Iranian missiles and drones between the war starting in late February and a ceasefire six weeks ago, damaging energy sites and ports.

Trump gave no details on what targets U.S. forces would have attacked or what kind of deal he would accept, beyond that it would have to include "no nuclear weapons for Iran."

The president has repeatedly threatened renewed military action since a truce was agreed on April 8.

The two sides have failed to progress to a peace deal and their forces clashed this month in the Strait of Hormuz.

The strait, one of the world's most vital shipping chokepoints, remains all but closed, sending energy prices surging and adding to the war's unpopularity in the U.S. Fuel pump prices in the U.S. have spiked to their highest in almost four years.

Brent crude fell around 1% on Tuesday, trading above \$111 a barrel in response to Trump's announcements late Monday. The benchmark is still up more than 50% since the war erupted with U.S.-Israeli strikes on Iran.

DOD watchdog probing US boat strikes

Bloomberg News

WASHINGTON—The Pentagon’s internal watchdog will investigate whether U.S. boat strikes in the Caribbean followed targeting guidelines, amid claims from outside groups that the attacks were illegal.

“The scope of this evaluation includes the joint process for targeted vessels in the US Southern Command area of responsibility as part of Operation Southern Spear,” the Inspector General’s office said in a statement to Bloomberg News, referring to the operation.

The probe was self-initiated and not in response to a congressional query, the agency said.

The evaluation’s objective is to determine

whether the Pentagon adhered to a six-phase process called the Joint Targeting Cycle, wrote Bryan T. Clark, assistant inspector general for evaluations programs, combatant commands and operations in a May 11 memo to Gen. Joseph Donovan, the leader of U.S. Southern Command, and Bradley Hansell, undersecretary for intelligence and security.

The Joint Targeting Cycle provides a framework for carrying out a military mission and achieving its goals.

Through last week, there have been as many as 58 attacks on vessels in the Southern Caribbean and Eastern Pacific, according to a database maintained by the legal analysis website Just Security; the latest was on May 8.

SOUTHCOM said in a social media post that the vessel in that instance was “operated by Designated Terrorist Organizations” in the eastern Pacific, killing two people and leaving one survivor.

The Trump administration has asserted that the boats were operated by drug cartels and carried narcotics bound for the U.S. Scores of people have been killed, and the military often releases videos of the vessels being blown up.

Democratic lawmakers, human rights organizations and other critics, however, say that the administration has provided little evidence that the people killed were criminals and that due process has been ignored.

Program to protect civilians being dismantled, DOD watchdog warns

BY LARA KORTE
Stars and Stripes

The Pentagon may be violating federal law with its moves to curb a congressionally mandated program to combat civilian harm, according to a new watchdog agency report.

The Defense Department’s Office of Inspector General found that DOD officials have effectively been shutting down parts of the Civilian Harm Mitigation and Response Action Plan. Established in 2022, the plan evaluates how the U.S. military can better prevent and respond to civilian casualties.

The report, published last week, comes as U.S. defense officials face scrutiny over civilian casualties in the war with Iran. That includes the late February bombing of an Iranian school that killed 175 people, according to Iranian officials.

Adm. Brad Cooper, who leads U.S. Central Command, told lawmakers last week that the school may have been hit by a U.S. bomb, but he dismissed reports of damage to other civilian infrastructure, including schools and health care facilities.

The inspector general found that until last year, the Pentagon had made progress implementing the plan, for example by creating a steering committee and establishing the Civilian Protection Center of Excellence.

The shift began after February 2025, when the acting undersecretary of defense for policy and the secretary of the Army proposed major changes to the program’s implementa-

tion, the report said.

Although Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth did not announce a decision on those proposals, the Pentagon has since ended funding for the program’s data management platforms, stopped holding steering committee meetings and lost or reassigned many of its personnel, according to the report.

“As a result, the [department] may not comply with its civilian casualties and harm policy ... a policy required by Federal law,” the inspector general wrote.

The Pentagon did not respond to a request for comment on the report.

Multiple news outlets have documented DOD’s cuts to the civilian harm reduction mission. ProPublica, citing former personnel, reported in March that around 90% of the staff was gone, with no more than a single adviser at most commands.

Speaking to lawmakers on Thursday, Cooper said nine of the 10 people devoted to civilian harm reduction in CENTCOM had been assigned to new positions in the past year.

According to the report, the Pentagon did not fully implement any of the objectives from the plan last year, citing hiring delays, missed deadlines and inadequate guidance from the steering committee.

In comments in the report, Defense Department officials argued that some components continued meeting statutory requirements and said commands had documented progress implementing the initiative.

Crew member hospitalized following Navy jet collision

Idaho Statesman

BOISE, Idaho—One Navy aviator was hospitalized after four crew members ejected during an accident Sunday at an air show at Mountain Home Air Force Base, Idaho.

Three of the airmen came out of the collision without any injuries, Cmdr. Amelia Umayam, a spokesperson for Naval Air Forces, U.S. Pacific Fleet, said in an email. Umayam said the fourth member was receiving treatment at a Boise-area hospital for a non-life-threatening injury.

“We are grateful to the first responders for the teamwork and care they provided,” Umayam said.

In a video taken by a Meridian man outside of Mountain Home Air Force Base, four parachutes can be seen opening as the fighter jets plunge downward and eventually burst into flames about 2 miles northwest of the base.

The collision occurred during a Gunfighter Skies aerial performance involving two E/A-18G Growler demonstration team aircraft flown by four air crew from the Electronic Attack Squadron 129 from Whidbey Island, Wash., according to a Mountain Home Air Force Base 366th Fighter Wing Public Affairs Office news release.

Further troop cuts only as NATO allies step up

By JOHN VANDIVER
Stars and Stripes

STUTTGART, Germany — The top U.S. military commander in Europe said Tuesday that there are no immediate plans to cut troop levels in Europe beyond the 5,000 being pulled from Germany and Poland, but more reductions could be made down the road as allies bolster their own capabilities.

Air Force Gen. Alexis G. Grynkeiwich, who heads U.S. European Command and serves as NATO's supreme allied commander, said during a news conference in Brussels that the current plan to reduce U.S. forces won't have an adverse effect on the alliance's ability to defend territory along the eastern flank. One reason for that, he said, is that Poland and the Baltic states have increased their

own fighting capabilities over the past 4½ years.

"It's all that I'm expecting in the near term," he said of the 5,000-troop drawdown. "But you know, over the longer term, we absolutely should expect additional (redeployments) as Europe continues to build capability and capacity and step up to provide more of the conventional defense of Europe."

Earlier this month, the Pentagon announced it would pull 5,000 troops from Germany. Grynkeiwich confirmed Tuesday, however, that the bulk of those numbers are being drawn from an Army armored brigade which was in the process of deploying to Poland.

Roughly 4,000 soldiers from the Fort Hood, Texas, brigade had begun deploying to Europe when their nine-month mission

was abruptly canceled last week. Grynkeiwich also confirmed that the other unit affected was a long-range fires battalion that was slated to deploy to Germany later this year. Officials are still working out the details on the remaining reductions, which would involve several hundred troops, he said.

"There are some other additional minor elements that will be shifting as well," he said following a Tuesday meeting of NATO defense chiefs.

Grynkeiwich said the reductions do not represent a major change to the overall U.S. force posture in Europe, where about 80,000 troops are stationed across numerous countries. While one rotational brigade is being withdrawn from Poland, another similar unit continues to operate there.

A second brigade was added after Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022 as part of a broader effort to bolster defenses. Since then, "a lot has happened in the alliance," Grynkeiwich said.

For instance, Baltic allies and Poland have built up their ground combat power, adding "substantially more capability in the ground domain than there was previously," Grynkeiwich said.

There are also multinational brigades in the Baltics, and the German army is in the process of establishing a permanent brigade presence in Lithuania, he pointed out.

"As allies build up their capability, the United States is able to pull capability back and use it for other global priorities," he said.

Marine stole fire truck then crashed it, NC police say

Charlotte Observer

A Marine stationed at Camp Lejeune had been drinking when he climbed into a fire department truck, activated the emergency equipment then drove away, police in eastern North Carolina said.

The joyride ended in a crash and a list of felony charges, including offering a \$15,000 bribe to the arresting officers, the Wilmington Police Department said Monday.

Investigators said the squad truck was on a call at 3:20 a.m. when it suddenly disappeared.

Michael Fanning Jr., 20, "entered a Wilmington Fire Department squad truck and drove away with emergency equipment activated," police said.

Officers were nearby directing traffic, and they quickly began pursuing the truck, officials said.

"However, Fanning failed to stop and fled the area. The incident ended when the stolen vehicle crashed into a pole near the intersection of North MacMillan Avenue and Pine Grove Drive," police said.

"Following the crash, Fanning charged at and assaulted a law enforcement officer before being taken into custody."

One deputy was punched in the face, and another was struck by the fire department truck, court documents report. Details of their injuries were not released.

Fanning is from Ennis, Texas, about a 35-mile drive southeast from Dallas, an arrest warrant says.

He is a lance corporal assigned to the 10th Marine Regiment, 2nd Marine Division

on Marine Corps Base Camp Lejeune, division officials told The Charlotte Observer.

"The incident is currently under investigation by Wilmington Police Department and 2nd Marine Division is fully cooperating with local officials on this matter," division officials told the paper.

Fanning has been charged with speeding to elude arrest, assault with a deadly weapon, offering bribes, larceny from motor vehicle, driving while impaired and other violations.

Navy commissions its final Freedom-class LCS Cleveland

Stars and Stripes

The newest Freedom-variant littoral combat ship, USS Cleveland, has joined the fleet.

Cleveland, commissioned Saturday in its namesake city, is the fourth warship to be named after Ohio's second-largest city

and is the 16th and final Freedom-variant LCS to be built and commissioned in the U.S. Navy.

Hugh Cao, the acting secretary of the Navy, gave the principal address.

Robyn Modly, the ship's sponsor and wife of former act-

ing Secretary of the Navy Thomas Modly, gave the crew the order to "man our ship and bring her to life!"

The USS Cleveland is designed for near-shore operations.

Its many functions include

surface warfare, mine countermeasures and anti-submarine missions. According to the Navy, the ship can travel at speeds exceeding 40 knots.

USS Cleveland will be homeported at Naval Station Mayport, Fla.

Teens kill 3 in Calif. mosque shooting

Los Angeles Times

SAN DIEGO — Two teenage gunmen opened fire at the Islamic Center of San Diego on Monday, killing three people before taking their own lives.

When they arrived at the scene, police found three adults dead in front of the center, San Diego Police Chief Scott Wahl said. One of those was the center's security guard, whose actions saved lives, Wahl said.

An early focus of investigators has been on one of the assailants, a San Diego high school student whose mother reported that he was suicidal and potentially armed soon before the shooting occurred.

The teen, 17, and a second suspect, 18, opened fire at the center Monday around 11:30 a.m., au-

thorities said. They were found minutes later at a location not far from the center, dead of self-inflicted gunshot wounds, according to authorities.

The three victims were identified Tuesday as Mansour Kazihah, Nader Awad and Amin Abdullah by the local chapter of the Council on American-Islamic Relations, according to the San Diego Union-Tribune.

Kazihah was a grandfather "lovingly known as Abu Ezz," and he had managed the mosque store for nearly 40 years, CAIR officials said.

Awad, they said, "turned away community members from the bullets and saved lives."

Abdullah was a security guard who the leadership said "risked

his own life" to alert people in the center, including an attached primary school.

San Diego police are investigating the attack as a hate crime.

One of the guns had hate speech written on it, the sources told *The Times*, and anti-Islamic writings were found in a vehicle.

"At least one of the suspects took a firearm from their parents' home" and left a suicide note, "writing about racial pride," sources said.

Monday afternoon, FBI agents were searching the teen's home, according to law enforcement sources. The house is around 2 miles from the Islamic Center, which is in the Clairemont Mesa neighborhood.

The teenager was enrolled in a virtual learning academy at the

San Diego Unified School District and was on track to graduate high school this semester, according to district spokesperson James Canning.

He previously participated in wrestling at Madison High School but did not take part in any on-campus activities this school year, said Canning.

Although authorities have not named the teen, three sources identified him as Cain Clark.

Wahl said Monday that his department got a call from the teen's mother about a "runaway juvenile." He said the mother said guns were missing and that her son left with a companion wearing camouflage outfits.

Police were interviewing her when the first calls of the active shooter came in, he said.

GOP support for ballroom security funding is wobbly

CQ-Roll Call

WASHINGTON — A key senator suggested Monday that Republicans may be prepared to ditch security funding connected to plans for a White House ballroom in a reconciliation bill focused on immigration enforcement.

Senate Budget Chairman Lindsey Graham, R-S.C., said the \$1 billion in Secret Service funding, which has drawn concerns from several Republicans in both chambers, might have to wait for a subsequent reconciliation bill, based on advice from Senate parliamentarian Elizabeth MacDonough over the weekend.

MacDonough advised that the provision spans the jurisdiction of several Senate committees, not just the Judiciary Committee as Republicans had assumed, according to Senate Democrats.

Graham said Republicans are "looking to see if you can do it another way." But that would likely delay funding for Immigration

and Customs Enforcement and the Border Patrol, the bill's prime objective.

Republicans could instead look to a third budget reconciliation package to advance the security funding, the South Carolina Republican said, or consider it with another bill.

"We can do it there," Graham said of a third reconciliation effort. "But we may be able to somehow take another shot at it. But eventually I think we'll be able to do it."

Based on MacDonough's guidance, Republicans had said they would rewrite the provision, which is eagerly sought by President Donald Trump. Graham, however, said Monday that he wasn't sure when new text of the Judiciary Committee portion of the bill, which initially housed the ballroom language, would be released. Republicans want to get the bill to Trump's desk in the coming days, before next week's scheduled Memorial Day recess.

House proposes EV fee, adding to state charges

The Detroit News

WASHINGTON — The U.S. House has proposed an annual, nationwide registration fee of \$130 for electric vehicles to help address weakening reserves for federal road maintenance.

The fee would eventually rise by \$5 every two years beginning in 2029, with a maximum fee of \$150. The proposal also calls for a \$35 fee on plug-in hybrid models, to be eventually capped at \$50.

"(T)he BUILD America 250 Act ensures that electric vehicle owners begin paying their fair share for the use of our roads," said Rep. Sam Graves, R-Mo., who chairs the House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure.

The upcharge had previously been floated on Capitol Hill as lawmakers raised concerns that EV drivers — who do not pay for gas and thus do not pay federal gas taxes that finance roadwork — were benefiting from American roads without sufficiently

contributing to their upkeep.

Most states already impose similar fees on EVs to address the issue below the federal level.

Michigan, notably, has the highest EV charges in the country after lawmakers hiked fees in 2025 as part of a road funding plan. The fees in 2026 are \$267 (up from \$160) for EVs and \$113 (up from \$60) for plug-in hybrids that travel short distances on electricity before switching to gas.

The House proposal for a federal EV charge on top of state charges was part of a bipartisan compromise on a sweeping surface transportation reauthorization bill. The U.S. Senate has not yet put together a proposal.

Congress typically passes a reauthorization bill once every five or six years to set funding levels for federal highway, transit and safety programs. The last one to pass was the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, also known as the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, in 2021.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Airport bus lane to open ahead of World Cup

NY NEW YORK — The Mamdani administration hopes to speed up service on Q70-SBS bus service to and from LaGuardia Airport by building a dedicated bus lane on a stretch of Broadway in Jackson Heights ahead of the World Cup.

The Q70-SBS — currently the city's sole fare-free bus route — connects the E, F, M, R and No. 7 trains, as well as the Long Island Rail Road, to LaGuardia Airport. It sees about 9,000 riders a day, according to city data.

A proposal for the center bus lane will be presented to Community Board 3 in the coming weeks. A Mamdani spokesman said the city intended to complete the lane before the first of the 2026 World Cup soccer matches come to the Meadowlands on June 13.

Graduates boo speaker who praised AI

FL ORLANDO — A University of Central Florida commencement speaker's speech praising artificial intelligence was met with thunderous boos from graduates, a sign of how some young people dislike the technology's encroachment into the workforce.

Gloria Caulfield, an executive from Tavistock Development Co., spoke to graduates from UCF's College of Arts and Humanities and School of Communication on May 8. During her speech, Caulfield lauded AI as the "next Industrial Revolution," setting off a chorus of boos.

"What happened?" Caulfield said, backing away from the lectern and looking to the other university leaders on stage at UCF's arena. "OK, I struck a chord."

Dillon Delaney, one of the UCF graduates at the ceremony, said Caulfield's speech was "tone deaf" and "like watching a car crash in real time."

Delaney didn't boo, he said, but understood why other students did. Caulfield's remarks underscore the growing divide between how corporate executives feel about AI in everyday life and how regular people feel, he added.

Kars4Kids jingle yanked off the air by judge

CA ORANGE COUNTY — The frustratingly unforgettable Kars4Kids jingle, which has been worming its way into listeners' brains for decades, is officially banned from the airwaves in California.

While the 1-877-KARS4KIDS song has been called one of the most memorable jingles in history, a court has ruled it is misleading.

A California man took the group behind it to court, saying he donated an old car to Kars4Kids, thinking its value would be used to help underprivileged children. He didn't know the money generated was used to support Oorah, a Jewish organization that helps fund young adult trips to Israel.

An Orange County court judge ruled late last week that the New Jersey-based group's advertisements were misleading because they omitted the company's religious affiliation and hid the charity's true mis-

sion.

Kars4Kids must pull its advertisements from the state within 30 days.

Public libraries record drop in book challenges

CO DENVER — Colorado libraries recorded a 25% decrease in challenges to their books, materials, events and exhibits in 2025 compared to the previous year.

Last year, public libraries across the state reported 43 challenges to their books, materials, events and exhibits and two challenges to internet policies, according to data from the Colorado Department of Education's Library Research Service.

In 2024, the state recorded 60 challenges, the data showed.

The decrease comes after years of skyrocketing attempts from conservative movements across Colorado and the country to ban or restrict access to public library books, programs or displays, typically targeting those with LGBTQ+ or race-related themes.

Officers fatally shoot two men in related incidents

TX FORT WORTH — Fort Worth police officers shot to death two men in related encounters at separate locations early Saturday.

The first was a man holding a gun in the 4200 block of Wiman Drive in east Fort Worth, the chief of the city's police department, Eddie Garcia, said. People in the area, where a party was being held, had heard shots about midnight and called police.

Officers confronted the suspect and ordered him to drop

the gun, Garcia said. The suspect did not obey the commands and pointed his gun toward the officers, the chief said. One or more officers shot the man to death.

Four hours later, as officers were working at the Wiman Drive scene, a sport utility vehicle drove by multiple times at a high rate of speed.

The driver did not comply with officers' orders and grabbed an officer's drawn handgun, Garcia said. Multiple officers opened fire, killing the man, Garcia said.

Influencer gets probation in alligator shooting

FL FORT LAUDERDALE — Clavicular, the "looksmaxxing" influencer and streamer whose real name is Braden Eric Peters, has reached a resolution in the misdemeanor case filed after video posted online apparently showed him repeatedly shooting an alligator while on an airboat in the Everglades.

On March 26 in the Everglades and Francis S. Taylor Wildlife Management Area, Peters was among a group of men on an airboat that had stopped near an alligator that did not appear to be moving, according to videos posted on social media.

Andrew Morales, 22, was seen in the videos unholstering a gun from his hip and shooting twice at the alligator in the water. Peters then stood up and shot the alligator repeatedly.

Peters received six months of reporting probation and must complete 20 hours of community service that cannot be streamed or monetized, the state attorney's office said.

— From wire reports

STARS AND STRIPES®

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

Reporting
World, National
and Military News

Wemby scores 41, Spurs win Game 1 vs. Thunder

Associated Press

OKLAHOMA CITY — The longest night of Victor Wembanyama's NBA career was over. His postgame media responsibilities were done, and he had just seen his father and a few other people in a quiet hallway near the San Antonio Spurs locker room.

He didn't walk back to the room. He got a ride — in a wheeled office chair, pushed by a Spurs staffer.

"Save some steps," Wembanyama said.

After the night he had, energy was probably in short supply anyway.

A 41-point, 24-rebound playoff game. Only a few people in the history of basketball had done that — Wilt Chamberlain eight times, Hakeem Olajuwon twice, Kareem Abdul-Jabbar once, Charles Barkley once.

Add Wembanyama to that list now, after his latest masterpiece — in a career-high 49 minutes — carried San Antonio to a 122-115

double-overtime win over the Oklahoma City Thunder in Game 1 of the Western Conference finals on Monday night.

"The best player in the (expensive) world," Spurs guard Stephon Castle announced for all the world to hear in a postgame interview on NBC.

Officially, no, that's not the case. The best player in the NBA world right now is Shai Gilgeous-Alexander, the player who got his second consecutive Most Valuable Player award in a pregame ceremony with Wembanyama looking on. It was an award Wembanyama wanted — and still wants. Seeing Gilgeous-Alexander raise that trophy certainly had an effect on the 7-foot-4 French star.

"He's competitive. If you're a competitor and you see another competitor get rewarded with what you want. ... If that's motivation, we all get motivated by different things," San Antonio coach Mitch Johnson said. "As a competitive person, that would

be my approach and perspective."

Did it matter?

"I've still got a lot to learn," Wembanyama said. "And I want to get that trophy many times in my career."

Are you the best player?

"The world is 8 billion people," Wembanyama said. "That's 8 billion opinions."

Wembanyama's final line: 14-for-25 from the field, 12-for-13 from the foul line and his lone 3-pointer came late in the first overtime, tying the game from well beyond the arc. Without that shot, there's probably no second overtime. There's probably a 1-0 series lead for Oklahoma City going into Game 2 on Wednesday night.

He blocked three shots and changed countless others. He dunked on the Thunder and flexed, more than once. The Spurs outrebounded OKC 61-40. Wembanyama even smiled and posed for the cameras at times. This was his first conference fi-

nals game, on the road no less, and he was as comfortable as could be.

"I think he's a great player with high impact obviously, and when you play against those players it's kind of an acquired thing," Thunder coach Mark Daigneault said. "You're learning as you go. We've gone through that with other great players."

This was a game San Antonio was supposed to lose: underdogs, on the road, without injured point guard De'Aaron Fox, against the defending champions, a team unbeaten in the first two rounds of the playoffs. A 10-point lead in the fourth quarter was given away, and Oklahoma City isn't in the habit of losing leads in the final moments.

"The message would be that we as a team are ready to go into any environment, in any place, against anybody," Wembanyama said. "And even though we've still got a lot to learn, our effort should be over anybody else's. And tonight, we were relentless."

Knicks, Cavaliers back in spotlight to open East finals

Associated Press

GREENBURGH, N.Y. — Donovan Mitchell and the Cleveland Cavaliers were sent to face Jalen Brunson and the New York Knicks in a nationally televised season opener and again to kick off Christmas, NBA schedule makers clearly viewing that as the Eastern Conference's marquee matchup.

Good guess, it turns out.

Cleveland and New York will be back Tuesday under the same bright lights of Madison Square Garden where they began the season, this time for Game 1 of the conference finals.

"It's go-time now," Brunson said Monday.

The Knicks have been on a record-setting playoff rampage. The Cavaliers, bolstered by the acquisition of James Harden, surged late in the season and powerfully ousted Detroit, the East's No. 1 seed, in the second round.

That sent Mitchell into the conference finals for the first time and also sent him home. He's a native of Elmsford, N.Y., just

down the road from where the Knicks practice.

"Yeah it's great I get to play at home, woo, but it doesn't matter," Mitchell said. "We've got to be locked in and ready to go, and I know we will be."

New York finished third in the East and Cleveland fourth, well behind not only the Pistons but also Boston. But seven months after the Knicks beat the Cavs in Mike Brown's first game as their coach, the teams have become who people thought they would be.

Cleveland began the season as the East's betting favorite, a spot it later reclaimed after acquiring Harden from the Los Angeles Clippers. New York was the second choice entering the season but ascended to the top earlier in the postseason, and the way they're playing it's clear why.

The Knicks have won seven straight games and outscored Atlanta and Philadelphia by a combined 194 points, the largest margin ever through a team's first 10 postseason games. New York reached 140 points

in both series clinchers and appeared likely to get a boost Tuesday as it listed OG Anunoby as probable to play after he missed two games with a strained right hamstring.

"They're rested and they're a juggernaut right now," Cavaliers coach Kenny Atkinson said. "I mean, it's just what it is. It's hard to blow out teams in the playoffs like they've been blowing out. Point differential means something in this league."

Cleveland has been just good enough rather than great for most of this postseason, needing seven games to get by both Toronto and Detroit. But the Cavs won their final two road games against the 60-win Pistons, including a 125-94 rout in Game 7.

Jarrett Allen scored 23 points and Evan Mobley had 21 points and 12 rebounds, a reminder that Cleveland is way more than just its high-scoring backcourt.

"I remember back in the day when I was with Pop, Pop said you need three All-Stars to win a championship. Well, they've got four," Brown said, referring to his time as an assistant to Gregg Popovich in San Antonio.

Newhook, Canadiens edge Sabres in Game 7

Associated Press

BUFFALO, N.Y. — First, Tampa Bay. Now Buffalo. Montreal Canadiens forward Alex Newhook keeps coming up big in Game 7s.

The 25-year-old scored his second seventh-game, series-clincher of the playoffs — this time 11:22 into overtime — in a 3-2 win over the Sabres on Monday night.

“It’s a crazy feeling,” Newhook said. “It’s fun. It’s why you play the game. I think we played well enough to win, so we’re looking forward now.”

After Buffalo’s Tage Thompson and captain Rasmus Dahlin misplayed the puck at Montreal’s blue line, defenseman Alexandre Carrier drove up the right wing before sending a cross-ice pass, hitting Newhook in stride entering the Sabres zone.

Just before reaching the top of the left circle, and with linemate Jake Evans flashing in front of goalie Ukko-Pekka Luukkonen, Newhook snapped a shot just inside the far right post. It was his

team-leading seventh goal of the postseason and followed his behind-the-net goal with 8:53 left in regulation that broke a 1-1 tie in the Canadiens’ 2-1 win in Game 7 of their first-round series against the Lightning.

“I wasn’t sure if Jake touched it, so I kind of looked at him to see if he was going to celebrate or not,” Newhook said. “Great to see you find the back of the net. And there’s no better feeling celebrating with your teammates after a win like that.”

Newhook is now among only 14 NHL players with two career game-winning goals in Game 7, with Boston’s Nathan Horton (2011) the only other one to do so in a single postseason.

“I’m so happy for him,” Montreal goalie Jakob Dobes said, noting Newhook missed three months of the season with a broken ankle. “He deserves it. He deserve all, everything that is happening to him. ... I mean, what a hell of a player.”

Montreal won despite squan-

dering a 2-0 first-period lead, with Dahlin forcing overtime by scoring 6:27 into the third period. And they improved to 17-9 in Game 7s, passing the Bruins for most Game 7 wins in the NHL playoffs.

The Canadiens advance to the Eastern Conference finals, where they’ll face well-rested Carolina in a series set to open at the Hurricanes on Thursday. Carolina has swept each of its first two series, and has been off since a 3-2 overtime win against Philadelphia on May 9.

The Hurricanes’ 11-day break between playoffs games is the longest in NHL history.

“It’s going to be important to take a second and enjoy this but turn the page pretty quickly,” said Montreal defenseman and alternate captain Mike Matheson. “They’ve had a lot of time off, a lot of time to prepare, so we’re going to have to flip that switch very quickly.”

Phillip Danault and Zachary Bolduc also scored for the Canadiens. Dobes finished with 37

saves in bouncing back after allowing six goals on 33 shots in an 8-3 loss in Game 6 on Saturday.

Montreal has not lost consecutive games since mid-March, while Dobes improved to 6-0 this postseason when coming off a loss.

Jordan Greenway also scored for Buffalo, while Luukkonen finished with 22 saves.

“It hurts. I told the teams, it hurts,” coach Lindy Ruff said. “The pain will go away. But I won’t let this one game define the season we had. I told the players how proud I was of them.”

The Sabres dropped to 1-7 in Game 7, including 1-3 in overtime.

The Canadiens advance to the NHL’s semifinal round for the first time since facing Vegas in the COVID-altered 2021 playoffs, in which Montreal eventually lost the Stanley Cup Final in five games to Tampa Bay.

This is the first playoff meeting between the two teams since Carolina beat the Canadiens in six games of a 2006 first-round series.

Rossi still hopes to compete in Indy 500 after hand surgery

Associated Press

INDIANAPOLIS — Alexander Rossi had surgery to repair minor injuries to his left hand Monday night following a crash earlier in the day during practice for the Indianapolis 500, his team announced.

Ed Carpenter Racing said Rossi, the 2016 race winner, hopes to drive in Friday’s final practice and again in Sunday’s race, even though his health status is still under evaluation.

Rossi was taken from Indianapolis Motor Speedway to a hospital after his car spun going through the second turn on the track’s 2.5-mile oval and hit the outside wall before skidding down the track with the rear end of his No. 20 car briefly dragging along the top of the wall. The trailing Pato O’Ward tried to avoid a collision, but couldn’t

stop in time and hit the side of Rossi’s car. Romain Grosjean was also collected in the crash.

All three drivers went to the medical center with O’Ward and Grosjean being checked and released within minutes. Rossi, in contrast, was taken to the hospital after the first crash of the month on Indy’s oval.

“Just wrong place, wrong time and just got collected there,” O’Ward said before Rossi’s condition was updated. “These cars don’t stop very well when you’re going at those speeds and with how you run the brakes. Obviously, I just hit the brakes and there wasn’t much I could do to avoid him, so I’m glad Alex is all right and Romain as well.”

It wasn’t clear whether the crash would impact the 33-car starting grid for this weekend’s sold-out race. Three of the eight

fastest drivers in Sunday’s qualifying — Rossi, O’Ward and Conor Daly — all sustained damage to their cars, as did Grosjean, who qualified 24th.

Less than 24 hours earlier, Rossi came within a whisker of winning his first Indy pole. He was bumped out of the top spot by defending 500 champion Alex Palou of Spain. Palou’s four-lap average of 232.248 mph was ahead of Rossi’s 231.990. The Californian still wound up in the middle of the front row and is set to start from a career-best second.

O’Ward, the Mexican driver with Arrow McLaren, earned the No. 6 starting slot, the outside of Row 2, while Daly qualified eighth for his season debut with Dreyer & Reinbold Racing. Now all three, plus Grosjean, will spend the next three days repair-

ing cars they’d spent months fine-tuning.

The grid has already changed because two drivers — Caio Collet of A.J. Foyt Enterprises and Jack Harvey, Daly’s teammate — were sent to the back of the field because of rules violations. IndyCar officials said they found unapproved changes and unapproved hardware on the drivers’ equipment when they went through post-qualifying technical inspection Sunday evening.

Team Penske’s Josef Newgarden posted the fastest lap in a practice session that was abbreviated first by the crash and then rain, which washed out most of the final hour that cars were scheduled to be on the track. One more short practice will be held Friday during the annual Carb Day festivities, which include the pit-stop competition.

Angels win after A's Ginn brings no-no into 9th

Associated Press

ANAHEIM, Calif. — Adam Frazier singled leading off the ninth inning for the first hit against Athletics starter J.T. Ginn, and Zach Neto followed with a two-run homer that gave the Los Angeles Angels a 2-1 victory Monday night.

Neto drove a 2-0 sinker 413 feet to center field, stunning Ginn and the A's while snapping a six-game losing streak for the Angels. It was their third walk-off win this season.

Ginn (2-2) struck out 10 and issued one walk on 105 pitches. He also hit Neto with a pitch in the sixth.

"Just a crazy game to play," Ginn said. "I fell behind 2-0, threw a good sinker, and he was waiting on it and put a good swing on it. So, tip your cap to him."

The right-hander was perfect through 4½ innings and came within three outs of the first major league no-hitter since Shota Imanaga combined with two Chicago Cubs relievers for a 12-0 win over Pittsburgh on Sept. 4, 2024.

Lawrence Butler had a pinch-hit RBI single in the top of the ninth that drove in Zack Gelof for the first run of the game.

Mets 16, Nationals 7 (12): Carson Benge led visiting New York to another extra-inning victory, hitting an RBI single and a two-run double during a 10-run 12th inning in a wild victory over Washington.

The Mets became the first National League team to score at least 10 runs in an extra inning since the 1919 Cincinnati Reds broke loose for 10 in the 13th inning at Brooklyn.

The Nationals made four errors and left 19 runners on base, but kept it close until falling apart in the 12th. Paxton Schultz (0-1) retired his first hitter on a sacrifice bunt, but the next six reached base, starting with Benge's infield single off Schultz's glove that put the Mets up 7-6. Benge scored on Vidal

Bruján's bunt single with the bases loaded, Brett Baty added a two-run single and Marcus Semien's RBI single made it 11-6.

Mariners 6, White Sox 1: Touted prospect Colt Emerson launched a three-run homer for his first major league hit, and host Seattle stopped a three-game slide with a victory over Chicago.

Emerson, the team's top pick in the 2023 amateur draft, connected on a 2-2 pitch from Trevor Richards with two outs in the eighth to extend the lead to 6-1.

Bryan Woo (4-2) pitched six shutout innings for the Mariners, allowing three hits and two walks. The right-hander struck out eight and retired his final 11 batters. He threw 60 of his 90 pitches for strikes.

Phillies 5, Reds 4: Bryson Stott hit a two-run homer with two outs in the eighth inning as host Philadelphia extended its winning streak to five games with a win over Cincinnati.

The Phillies scratched MLB home run leader Kyle Schwarber due to illness, and Stott was moved up to the No. 6 spot in a shuffled lineup and hit his fifth homer of the season.

Spencer Steer's RBI double with two-out in the eighth off reliever Jose Alvarado had given the Reds a short-lived 4-3 lead.

Red Sox 3, Royals 1: Willson Contreras hit his team-leading 10th homer and Sonny Gray outduelled Seth Lugo as visiting Boston beat Kansas City.

Gray (5-1) allowed one run on five hits in six-plus innings. He struck out nine and walked one. He has given up two runs over 16 innings with a 1.13 ERA since returning from the injured list May 6. Three relievers followed Gray, with Aroldis Chapman working the ninth for his 11th save in as many opportunities.

Marlins 12, Braves 0: Javier Sanoja hit his first career grand slam, Joe Mack drove in four runs and host Miami shut out

MLB-leading Atlanta.

Max Meyer (4-0) continued his strong start to the season, limiting the Braves to just three hits over six innings while striking out six and lowering his team-leading ERA to 2.85.

Rays 16, Orioles 6: Yandy Díaz had four hits and four RBIs, Junior Caminero homered and drove in four runs, and host Tampa Bay battered Baltimore pitching.

Ryan Vilade and Jonny DeLuca each added three RBIs for the Rays, who had 18 hits and scored their most runs since May 31 last year in a 16-3 win at Houston. Tampa Bay is 13-3 this month and owns the best record in the majors at 31-15.

Guardians 8, Tigers 2: José Ramírez homered and hit a two-run double on a 3-for-4 night, and visiting Cleveland beat reeling Detroit.

Matt Vierling homered for Detroit, which has lost 11 of 13. Riley Greene, whose 11-game hitting streak was snapped Sunday, had an RBI double among two hits.

Brewers 9, Cubs 3: Jake Bauers homered and drove in four runs, and visiting Milwaukee beat Chicago in the first meeting this season between the longtime NL Central rivals.

Christian Yelich went deep for the second straight day as the Brewers used a 13-hit attack to improve to 9-2 in its last 11 games. Andrew Vaughn had two hits and scored twice.

Yankees 7, Blue Jays 6: Cody Bellinger and Jazz Chisholm Jr. hit two-run homers off Yariel Rodríguez in the seventh inning, and New York survived another shaky performance by David Bednar to beat Toronto as it opened a homestand against AL East rivals following a 2-7 trip.

Paul Goldschmidt drove in two runs, including a home run on Patrick Corbin's first pitch of the game. Bednar allowed a ninth-inning run before stranding a pair of runners by striking out George Springer and retir-

ing Vladimir Guerrero Jr. on a groundout.

Rockies 7, Rangers 6: Ezequiel Tovar hit a two-run double in the first and host Colorado held on for a win over Texas, which lost starter MacKenzie Gore to an injury after just one inning.

The Rockies put up five more runs, including two on a fielding error by Rangers third baseman Josh Jung in the third. Texas rallied for three runs in the eighth to make it a one-run game, but went down quietly in the ninth.

Twins 6, Astros 3: Josh Bell homered twice and drove in four runs as host Minnesota beat Houston.

Bell homered in the second inning to open the scoring, then took Astros starter Tatsuya Imai (1-2) deep to left for a two-run shot in the fourth. It was the 12th multi-homer game of Bell's 11-year career.

Padres 1, Dodgers 0: Miguel Andujar homered off Yoshinobu Yamamoto in the first inning, Michael King struck out nine during seven sharp innings of four-hit ball, and host San Diego snapped Los Angeles' five-game winning streak with a victory.

Mason Miller finished the Padres' five-hitter in their fourth consecutive victory, but only after San Diego's vaunted closer walked his first two batters on nine pitches. Miller recovered to get three straight outs for his major league-leading 15th save, inducing Andy Pages' grounder to third to end it.

Diamondbacks 12, Giants 2: Nolan Arenado hit his seventh career grand slam, Gabriel Moreno added a two-run homer and host Arizona defeated San Francisco.

The Diamondbacks matched season highs with 12 runs and 16 hits. Every Arizona player had at least one hit. Ryan Waldschmidt led the way with two doubles and a single. Corbin Carroll hit his fifth triple of the season.