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SPORTS, 1B

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Rubio sees progress in Hormuz talks



Iran has halted most traffic through the Strait of Hormuz while Washington maintains a blockade of Iran-related shipping and ports, disrupting a corridor that normally carries about a fifth of global oil and liquefied natural gas shipments.

AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

Mediators working to facilitate negotiations

Tala Ramadan, Parisa Hafezi and Nandita Bose

REUTERS

DUBAI – U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio said on Aug. 4 there has been progress made in discussions with Iran and Oman on getting more ships through the Strait of Hormuz but no final agreement has been reached.

“There’s been progress made in those talks, but not finality yet. We’re hoping that will happen very shortly,” Rubio told reporters at the State Department.

Qatar said mediators were making progress in efforts to end the U.S.-Iran war on Aug. 4, although Tehran has denied President Donald Trump’s assertion that talks are already underway.

Oil prices fell quickly after the comments from Qatar, extending steep losses on Aug. 3 on hopes that an arrangement could soon be reached to

“We are talking to both sides. Our sole goal at this moment is to make both parties at least agree to start talking.”

Pakistani security official

unfreeze traffic through the blockaded Strait of Hormuz. But for now, the strait remained virtually shut, with another ship reportedly coming under attack while trying to cross it.

Trump said on Aug. 3 that talks with Tehran had started and Iran faced a “last chance” to reach a deal. Iranian officials insisted no negotiations with the United States were taking place. Iran says its only talks are with Oman about the strait, and that no major meetings were planned.

“They are going on right now,” Trump told reporters at an Oval Office event on Aug. 3 when asked about ne-

gotiations, adding that discussions were taking place at the request of Iran, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Qatar. “This is a last chance for them [Iran] to sign a good document.”

Qatar’s foreign ministry spokesperson Majed al-Ansari said diplomatic contacts had reached “very progressive stages.”

Ansari said on Aug. 4 that mediators, including Qatar, Pakistan and Oman, were coordinating closely to facilitate negotiations and exchange draft proposals between Washington and Tehran.

A senior Pakistani security official said: “A lot is happening in the background ... We are talking to both sides. Our sole goal at this moment is to make both parties at least agree to start talking.”

Trump’s comments followed his weekend decision to cancel what he described as “massive attacks” on Iran, extending a pattern in which he has threatened major military action before

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Man arrested in WA wildfire

Blazes force evacuations, destroy many structures

Jeanine Santucci, Thao Nguyen, Janet Loehrke and Noe Padilla

USA TODAY

Authorities in Washington have arrested a man in connection with one of the major wildfires devastating the eastern part of the state, which has destroyed hundreds of homes and forced tens of thousands to flee.

Aaron F. Farinacci, a 37-year-old Spokane resident, was arrested on a single charge of first-degree arson related to the Old Trails Fire, which sprang up on Aug. 1 alongside two other major fires, Spokane County Sheriff John Nowels said at a news conference on Aug. 3. The causes of the other fires are under investigation.

The fires, which began in the Spokane area, have burned more than 10,000 acres and remained 0% contained as of the latest update. About 65,000 people were under evacuation orders on Aug. 3, a dramatic increase from the day before as flames spread through residential areas. Hundreds of structures, including homes and businesses, have been destroyed, according to the California Interagency Incident Management Team 7.

Videos from the fire zone showed towering smoke plumes rising above trees and neighborhoods as airplane tankers dropped fire retardant on the fast-moving flames. Footage also showed homes that were left in ruins among burnt trees as the fires burned along wooded ridgelines near residential areas.

No injuries or fatalities had been confirmed as of Aug. 3, according to Benjamin Cossel, a spokesperson for the California Interagency Incident Management Team 7. But Cossel warned that could change as fire activity subsides and search crews gain access to devastated areas that are currently inaccessible.

He noted that an unspecified number of people remain missing after the fires spread from forested areas into neighborhoods and commercial districts.

“We are still assessing the potential

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Senate committee backs Blanche’s nomination

Aysha Bagchi and Zachary Schermele

USA TODAY

Acting Attorney General Todd Blanche won the support of a key Senate committee Aug. 4 to be confirmed in his role permanently, but his pathway to approval from the full Senate isn’t assured yet.

The 12-10 Senate Judiciary Committee vote on party lines took place a day after Blanche’s nomination got a major boost as Republican Sens. John Cornyn of Texas and Thom Tillis of North Carolina agreed to support him.

They did so after Blanche formally dropped a proposed \$1.776 billion “anti-weaponization” fund and clarified lim-

its to President Donald Trump’s controversial immunity on tax issues.

“We want to express our gratitude to Mr. Blanche and his staff for working with us on this, and we look forward to voting to advance his nomination out of the Senate Judiciary Committee soon,” the two senators said in a joint statement Aug. 3.

Both are leaving the Senate in January. Tillis chose not to run for reelection and Cornyn lost his primary to a Trump-backed challenger.

Tillis had also said, on July 16, that he wouldn’t provide his support until Blanche met with a group of women

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A vote from the full Senate on Todd Blanche’s nomination could take place before the end of the week.

JONATHAN ERNST/REUTERS FILE

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