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WAR IN IRAN

TRUMP PAUSES EFFORT TO ESCORT SHIPS IN STRAIT



MAJID-ASGARIPPOUR, WEST ASIA NEWS AGENCY

An Iranian woman walks past a mural Tuesday in Tehran, Iran.

Rubio says there's 'no shooting unless we're shot at first'

IDREES ALI, PHIL STEWART AND YOMNA EHAB
Reuters

WASHINGTON — U.S. President Donald Trump said on social media Tuesday that he would briefly pause an operation to help escort ships through the Strait of Hormuz, dubbed Project Freedom, citing progress toward a comprehensive agreement with Iran.

There was no immediate reaction from Tehran.

Hours earlier, Secretary of State Marco Rubio briefed reporters on the effort to escort stranded tankers through the strait. The previous day, the U.S. military said it destroyed several Iranian small boats, as well as cruise missiles and drones.

Rubio and other senior administration officials said Iran could not be allowed to control traffic through the strait.

"There's no shooting unless we're shot at first," Rubio told reporters at the White House, where he said the United States achieved its objectives in its military campaign.

"Operation Epic Fury is concluded," he said. "We're not cheering for an additional situation to occur."

U.S. officials sought to maintain a shaky 4-week-old ceasefire with Iran, even as

U.S. ally the United Arab Emirates said it suffered a new wave of Iranian missile and drone strikes.

One of Trump's central objectives in launching military strikes against Iran was to ensure Tehran does not develop a nuclear weapon, something Tehran denied seeking. However, Iran has yet to hand over more than 900 pounds of highly enriched uranium.

Rubio called a U.S.-proposed United Nations resolution demanding Iran stop attacks and laying mines in the Strait of Hormuz a test of the utility of the U.N. and urged China and Russia not to repeat vetoes.

U.N. Security Council members began closed talks Tuesday on a text the U.S. drafted with Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Kuwait and Qatar, which, if it were to pass, could lead to sanctions against Iran and potentially authorize force if Tehran fails to halt attacks and threats to commercial shipping.

Fresh exchanges of fire Monday underscored the stakes as the U.S. and Iran struggle for control of the narrow waterway.

A previous Bahraini resolution that was backed by the U.S. and appeared to open

a path to legitimize U.S. military action against Iran failed last month after Russia and China exercised their vetoes in the 15-member Security Council.

The new draft avoids explicit language authorizing force while still operating under Chapter VII of the U.N. Charter, which allows the council to impose measures ranging from sanctions to military action.

"Everyone wouldn't want to see this vetoed again, and we've made some slight adjustments to the language," Rubio told reporters at a White House news briefing, while adding: "I don't know if it will avoid a veto or not."

The Strait of Hormuz has been virtually shut since the U.S. and Israel began attacks on Iran on Feb. 28, triggering disruptions that pushed up commodity prices around the world.

Iran effectively sealed off the strait, which handles one-fifth of the world's oil and gas supply, by threatening to deploy mines, drones, missiles and fast-attack craft. The U.S. countered by blockading Iranian ports and mounting escorted transits for commercial vessels.

Please see IRAN, Page A2

High fire danger continues for much of Wisconsin

DNR suspends burn permits for 43 counties

JEFF RICHGELS
jrichgels@madison.com

High fire danger continued this week for much of Wisconsin, as the Department of Natural Resources announced that it has suspended burn permits for 43 counties and asks people to avoid any outdoor burning.

On Tuesday, southern Wisconsin and eastern parts of central Wisconsin were in

high fire danger, which officially means: "Wildfires ignite easily, spread rapidly and can be challenging to control."

Most of northern and central Wisconsin is under very high fire danger, which officially means: "Wildfires started easily and are difficult to control."

Just four counties in west-central Wisconsin were under moderate fire danger, which officially means: "Wildfires can ignite and will spread but are relatively easy to contain."

Fire risk has increased by ongoing dry

vegetation, low humidity, warmer temperatures and breezy conditions, though temperatures and winds were lower on Tuesday than on Monday.

The elevated fire danger will continue until there is significant rainfall, and the DNR said it will continue to prohibit burning with all DNR-issued burn permits for debris burning where the DNR has burn restriction authority in areas with elevated fire danger.

Spring is the most critical fire season in Wisconsin, when even a few days between precipitation can dry out grasses, pine

needles and leaf litter, creating hazardous conditions.

The National Weather Service said precipitation chances are no higher than 30% through Monday in the Madison area.

"The threat of a large wildfire remains extremely high in Wisconsin," the DNR said in a statement. "The DNR is at full staffing and preparedness across the state to respond to any incidents."

Outdoor enthusiasts also should be extra careful with off-road vehicles or equipment that can create a spark and start a fire.