

The Breakfast Table Times

THE DAY'S NEWS, IN FULL

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TOP STORY

US Turns to Economic Pressure as Iran War Grinds On

WASHINGTON — President Trump escalated the United States' campaign against Iran on Wednesday, promising what he called "economic warfare" — a push to choke off Iran's ability to sell oil and move money, rather than relying on military force alone. The threat sent global oil prices up roughly 2 percent, their highest in nearly a month, as traders worried about supply.

At the center of the standoff is the Strait of Hormuz, a narrow channel between Iran and the Arabian Peninsula. About a fifth of the world's oil normally passes through it. A US naval blockade has kept dozens of vessels from entering or leaving Iranian ports since operations resumed in mid-July. Iran dismissed the pressure as a distraction and insisted it still holds leverage over the strait it borders.

The squeeze is tightening on other fronts too. The United Arab Emirates, a major regional trading hub, announced it would suspend all trade and financial dealings with Iran. Allies across the region are being pressed to pick a side.

Talks between the two governments have started and stalled more than once. As of Thursday, no deal was in place, and each side accused the other of refusing to negotiate seriously. More than 750 American service members have been wounded since the war began, according to Defense Department figures — a reminder that the fighting goes on even as the fight shifts toward money and markets.

BACKGROUND

The war began earlier in the summer after a US-Iran agreement collapsed. Oil markets have swung on every headline since, because the Strait of Hormuz has no easy alternative route — pipelines can carry only a fraction of what tankers move. That geography is why a regional conflict shows up at gas stations worldwide.

Why it matters: Economic pressure is meant to force Iran to the table without more fighting, but it also raises energy prices for ordinary people far from the war, including American drivers — a cost leaders rarely mention when they announce it.

What to watch: Whether the on-again, off-again talks produce a framework, and how far oil prices climb if the blockade holds into September.

Source: CNN, CNBC, Reuters, UPI

NATION & WORLD

Russian Strikes Kill at Least 14 in Kyiv Overnight

KYIV — A large overnight barrage of Russian missiles and drones struck Ukraine's capital and more than two dozen other locations, killing at least 14 people, Ukrainian officials said Thursday. Emergency crews worked through the morning to pull survivors from damaged buildings and put out fires.

The attack was among the deadliest on Kyiv in recent weeks. It came as international efforts to arrange a ceasefire have repeatedly failed to gain traction. Russia invaded Ukraine in 2022, and the war has since settled into a grinding pattern: long-range strikes on cities paired with slow-moving fighting along a front line that has barely moved in months.

Ukraine has again asked its allies for more air-defense systems to intercept incoming missiles. Those systems are expensive and in short supply, and Western governments continue to debate how much to send and for how long. Each large strike sharpens that debate, because a city's survival on a given night can depend on whether interceptors are available.

Casualty figures in the hours after an attack are preliminary and often revised upward as rescue work continues. Millions of Ukrainians have fled the country since the invasion, and some have resettled in the United States, including in New England.

BACKGROUND

Peace talks have stumbled for two years over the same core dispute: Russia's demand to keep territory it has seized, and Ukraine's refusal to accept those lines as permanent. Neither side has shown it can force a decisive win, which is why the war has become one of attrition — measured in months, not battles.

Why it matters: How long allies keep funding Ukraine's defense is an open political question in the US, and the answer shapes whether attacks like this one meet a wall of interceptors or an open sky.

What to watch: Revised casualty counts, and whether the strike shifts the stalled debate over new air-defense shipments.

Source: AP, Reuters, BBC

NATION & WORLD (CONT.)

Midterm Campaigns Heat Up Ahead of November Vote

WASHINGTON — With Election Day set for November 3, campaigns for the 2026 midterm elections are intensifying across the country. Every one of the 435 seats in the House of Representatives is on the ballot, along with about a third of the 100-seat Senate and dozens of governorships.

Midterms fall halfway through a president's four-year term and often function as a referendum on the party in power. Control of Congress is the prize. The party that wins a majority in each chamber sets the legislative agenda, controls committees, and can advance or block the president's priorities. It also holds the power to investigate the executive branch.

Historically, the president's party tends to lose seats in the midterms. The size of any swing depends on turnout, the state of the economy, and the issues voters care about most in the fall. This year, a softening job market and higher energy prices could weigh on the party in power.

Analysts are watching a handful of competitive districts that could decide which party runs the House. Most seats are considered safe for one side or the other, so the outcome hinges on a small number of tossup races where both parties are already spending heavily.

BACKGROUND

The current Congress has been closely divided, which magnifies the stakes of even a few seats changing hands. A narrow majority can stall on its own internal disagreements, as recent budget fights have shown, so both parties are pouring money into a small number of tossup races rather than the safe seats that make up most of the map.

Why it matters: *Whether one party controls both the White House and Congress, or power is split, determines what actually becomes law over the next two years — from spending to taxes to immigration.*

What to watch: *Which way the economy tips before November, since a weakening job market historically hurts the party in power.*

Source: AP, congress.gov

MONEY & WORK

Hiring Reverses as US Economy Sheds Jobs

WASHINGTON — The US economy unexpectedly lost jobs in July, a sharp reversal from the steady, if modest, growth of earlier in the year. The Labor Department's monthly report showed the country shed roughly 23,000 jobs, and the unemployment rate edged higher. Economists had expected a small gain, so the negative number rattled forecasters and financial markets.

A single month does not make a trend. The government often revises these figures in later reports, sometimes substantially. Still, the data added to signs that employers have grown cautious. Hiring has slowed for months, and companies facing uncertainty — about interest rates, prices, and now higher oil costs — tend to pause before adding workers.

The report intensified pressure on the Federal Reserve, the central bank that sets short-term interest rates. Lower rates make borrowing cheaper, which can encourage businesses to expand and hire and push families to spend. But cutting too soon risks reigniting inflation, the very problem the Fed spent years trying to tame. That tension is the heart of the decision the Fed now faces.

Markets responded by betting the Fed is now more likely to cut rates at its next meeting. Traders often move within minutes of a report like this one, long before its full effect reaches ordinary households.

BACKGROUND

The Fed spent the past few years raising rates to fight inflation, deliberately cooling the economy. The risk of that strategy is always the same: cool too much and hiring stalls. A weak jobs report is exactly the signal markets watch to guess whether the Fed will change course.

Why it matters: *A softening job market touches families directly — through raises that don't come, jobs that are harder to find, and the interest rates on car loans and mortgages that the Fed's next move will shape.*

What to watch: *The Fed's next rate decision, and whether August's jobs numbers confirm or reverse July's surprise drop.*

Source: AP, CNBC, NBC News, Fox Business

TERM TO KNOW

attrition

A strategy of winning not through one decisive blow but by slowly wearing the other side down — grinding away their people, weapons, or resources until they can no longer continue.

Used in a sentence: A defense that never blows anyone out but exhausts every opponent by the fourth quarter is winning a war of attrition.

SCIENCE & TECH

Hubble and Gaia Rewrite the Milky Way's Origin Story

BALTIMORE — Astronomers using the Hubble Space Telescope, paired with data from Europe's Gaia mission, have solved a long-standing puzzle about how our galaxy took shape. Their finding: the Milky Way began assembling itself earlier than previously believed, growing in part by absorbing a smaller dwarf galaxy in a collision billions of years ago.

The team traced the motions and chemistry of ancient stars — the ones left over from that early era — to reconstruct events that happened long before Earth existed. Because light and motion carry a record of the past, these stellar "fossils" let researchers read the galaxy's history the way geologists read layers of rock.

The study refines the timeline of galactic growth. It suggests the merger that helped build the Milky Way's inner regions happened sooner than models had assumed. The work builds on years of Gaia's precise measurements of nearly two billion stars, and it has been published in a peer-reviewed journal.

Scientists caution that reconstructing events from billions of years ago always carries uncertainty. The conclusions rest on models of how stars move and age, and future data could shift the picture. Even so, the result adds a firmer chapter to the story of where our galaxy — and the Sun and Earth within it — came from.

BACKGROUND

Galaxies grow largely by cannibalism — bigger ones swallow smaller ones over billions of years. The Milky Way's history has been reconstructed piece by piece from these leftover stellar streams, but the timing of the earliest mergers has been hard to pin down. This result narrows that gap.

Why it matters: Understanding when and how the Milky Way assembled helps scientists model how galaxies form in general, and places our own Sun and solar system within that much larger story.

What to watch: Follow-up studies using Gaia's next data release, which could test whether the revised timeline holds.

Source: NASA, ESA/Hubble, phys.org

SPORTS

Yankees Grind Toward October as Sea Dogs Host a Rising Star

NEW YORK — The New York Yankees beat the Baltimore Orioles 5-3 on the road Wednesday night, a divisional win that carries extra weight with the regular season entering its final stretch. Games against rivals like Baltimore are worth more in the standings. With the playoff field still taking shape, every result now factors into seeding and the wild-card math. The Yankees have spent the season balancing a potent lineup against questions about pitching depth — the same equation that tends to decide October baseball.

Closer to home, the Portland Sea Dogs, the Boston Red Sox's Double-A affiliate, won 7-5 at Hadlock Field this week. The night drew extra attention because Red Sox prospect Roman Anthony appeared in the lineup on a rehab assignment and homered in his return. Rehab stints send injured major leaguers to the minors for a few games to rebuild their timing before rejoining the big-league club. For fans, they offer a close-up look at a top prospect who would normally be out of reach.

For a Maine baseball family, the two games capture late summer: a pennant race followed nightly from afar, and a future star passing through a ballpark an hour up the road.

Why it matters: For a Maine family that follows the Yankees, the pennant race is the daily drama of late summer. For the same kids, Portland is where they can watch tomorrow's stars in person for the price of a minor-league ticket — even if those stars wear Boston red.

What to watch: Whether the Yankees hold their playoff position down the stretch, and how long Anthony stays in Portland before Boston calls him back up.

Source: MLB.com, ESPN, Portland Sea Dogs

OUR TEAMS

Yankees Won 5-3 at Baltimore
A key win in the AL East race with the playoffs coming

THIS DAY IN HISTORY

1977
NASA launched the Voyager 2 spacecraft. Nearly 50 years later it is still operating, more than 15 billion miles away, the only craft to have flown past all four giant planets and now sending data from interstellar space.

SOUTHERN MAINE

State Clears York Hospital to Join MaineHealth

YORK, MAINE — Maine regulators have approved a plan for York Hospital to become part of MaineHealth, the state's largest health care system. York Hospital has served the town as an independent, community-run institution for more than a century. The approval was announced in early August. It clears a major hurdle, though the two organizations still have steps to complete before the merger is final.

Hospital leaders say joining a large network brings real advantages. It offers shared resources, greater purchasing power, more specialists, and access to expensive technology. A standalone hospital often struggles to afford those things on its own. Leaders argue such support is increasingly necessary as the cost of running a hospital climbs.

Critics see a trade-off. Hospital consolidation is happening across the country, and it worries some experts. Mergers can reduce competition. Patients sometimes face higher prices, or a more corporate feel, once a local institution joins a bigger chain. Regulators said they attached conditions meant to protect local services and keep care within reach.

For now, York Hospital will keep its name and its staff. The larger changes, supporters and skeptics agree, will show up gradually rather than all at once.

BACKGROUND

Independent community hospitals have been disappearing nationwide, squeezed by thin margins, staffing shortages, and the expense of modern medical technology. Many have chosen to join larger systems to survive. York's decision follows that broader pattern, and MaineHealth has absorbed several Maine hospitals in recent years.

Why it matters: *For York-area families, this is the hospital they actually use, so the balance between the resources a big network brings and the local control it may erode is not abstract — it shows up in the care they receive.*

What to watch: *The remaining approval steps, and whether the promised local services hold up after the merger closes.*

Source: Portland Press Herald, Maine Public, Bangor Daily News

GOOD NEWS

Zion Opens Its Backcountry to Wheelchair Users

SPRINGDALE, UTAH — Zion National Park in Utah has begun lending all-terrain wheelchairs. The move makes it one of the first parks in the country to open its rugged trails to visitors who use them. Unlike standard wheelchairs, these have oversized, heavily treaded wheels, and some models are battery-powered. They are designed for the dirt, gravel, roots, and uneven ground that would stop an ordinary chair.

The chairs are free to borrow. They let visitors who had been confined to paved overlooks reach viewpoints and trail sections that were previously off-limits. Advocates for accessible recreation have pushed for this kind of change for years. They argue that access to nature should not depend on whether a person happens to be able to walk a trail.

Park officials described the program as a small change with an outsized effect. It widens who gets to experience one of the country's most dramatic landscapes. Roughly one in four American adults lives with some form of disability. Supporters hope other national parks will study Zion's rollout and adopt similar programs of their own.

For a visitor who had long since given up on the backcountry, the chairs can turn a paved viewpoint into a genuine trail. They can also earn someone a place in a family photo taken somewhere it could never have been taken before.

Why it matters: *Roughly one in four American adults lives with some form of disability, and programs like this test a simple proposition — that public spaces paid for by everyone should be usable by everyone, not just those who can hike.*

What to watch: *Whether other national parks adopt the same program after Zion's rollout.*

Source: Good News Network

WORTH ARGUING ABOUT

1. The US is using oil and trade as weapons to avoid a wider war. Is economic pressure that raises prices for ordinary people on both sides more justified than military force, or just a slower kind of harm?
2. York Hospital can apparently only stay open by giving up its independence to a larger system. When a beloved local institution faces that choice, is preserving the service worth losing local control?
3. A president's party almost always loses seats in the midterms. Is that a healthy check on power, or a near-guarantee of two years of gridlock? Would you design the system differently?