Standoff in Syria

US troops return fire at pro-Assad fighters; regime claims 1 dead

By Chad Garland
Stars and Stripes

American troops returned fire after being shot at by militiamen and civilians in northeastern Syria on Wednesday, the U.S. military said, in a fight that the Assad regime said left one civilian dead.

One civilian was also wounded after Syrians loyal to President Bashar Assad tried to block a convoy of several American vehicles at an army checkpoint near the town of Qamishli, state media and observers reported.

“After Coalition troops issued a series of warnings and de-escalation attempts, the patrol came under small arms fire from unknown individuals,” said Col. Myles B. Caggins III, a spokesman for the U.S.-led coalition that is aiding local Kurdish and Arab forces battling Islamic State.

The Americans defended themselves, Caggins said in a statement posted online. The statement did not say whether anyone was killed or injured, but a later statement said one American was slightly wounded and has returned to duty.

“The situation was de-escalated and is under investigation,” Caggins said. “The Coalition patrol returned to base.”

SEE SYRIA ON PAGE 7
**Judge OKs T-Mobile’s Sprint deal; worries remain**

By Tali Arbel
Associated Press

NEW YORK — A federal judge has cleared a path for T-Mobile to buy Sprint for $26.5 billion, citing T-Mobile’s track record in promoting competition, even as legal scholars and consumer advocates warn about higher phone bills.

Judge Victor Marrero said he believed that the new T-Mobile would continue to compete with Verizon and AT&T, the industry giants whose size it now rivals.

T-Mobile has promised not to raise prices for three years and said that “efficiencies” it gets from a more powerful network will lead to lower prices down the road. T-Mobile also argued that the combined T-Mobile and Sprint could build a better next-generation, 5G cellular network than either company could alone.

But over a dozen state attorneys general had sued to block the deal, saying that one fewer phone company would cost Americans billions of dollars in higher bills. One of the leading parties, New York Attorney General Letitia James, said that Tuesday’s ruling “marks a loss for every American who relies on their cellphone.”

Gigi Sohn, a former Federal Communications Commission adviser who is now a fellow at Georgetown’s law school, said that while consumers are often promised benefits from mergers, “what they are left with each time are corporate behemoths” that can raise prices and destroy competition.

**WEATHER OUTLOOK**

The weather is provided by the American Forces Network Weather Center, 2nd Weather Squadron at Offutt Air Force Base, Neb.

**EXCHANGE RATES**

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US, Taliban meet again

Trump gives conditional approval to sign peace deal

The Washington Post

American and Taliban negotiators were meeting Wednesday in Doha, Qatar, following a conditional decision from President Donald Trump to sign a peace deal with the militants, according to officials.

One U.S. official and an Afghan official briefed on the matter Wednesday said Trump gave his conditional approval to sign a peace deal with the Taliban if the insurgents can demonstrate their commitment to reducing violence in Afghanistan.

“The administration is prepared to make a deal and has given the Taliban an ultimatum to negotiate in principle during a meeting of their leaders in the next 24 hours,” said an American official, explaining that when Secretary of State Mike Pompeo called Afghan leaders Tuesday, he said the peace talks “deadlock” had been broken.

Both officials spoke on condition of anonymity as they were not authorized to speak to the media.

For months U.S. negotiators have demanded a reduction in violence from the Taliban before formal talks can resume. Taliban negotiators presented a violence reduction proposal in January that would have ceased attacks in cities and highways, but it was unclear how long it would last and if it would apply to the Afghan military as well as U.S. military personnel.

After weeks of back and forth, American and Taliban negotiators have reached an agreement on how exactly violence will be reduced and for how long, according to the Afghan official. However he did not provide details, explaining that information about the negotiations said the reduction would probably be seven to 10 days.

The State Department, in a statement, said “U.S. talks with the Taliban in Doha continue around the specifics of a reduction in violence.”

But it was unclear how long it would last and if it would apply to the Afghan military as well as U.S. military personnel.

National army soldiers stand guard after a suicide attack Tuesday near the military academy in Kabul, Afghanistan.

Virginia Rep. Adam Kinzinger, who was present at the meeting, said if the Taliban abide by the agreement, it could lead to a deal “that was very good for the United States, very good for Afghanistan.”

Peace talks: A Taliban delegation arrived in Doha on Monday for talks that appeared to be going well, with both sides saying they were making progress. The talks were the first of their kind since 2009, when talks between the U.S. and the Taliban in Qatar failed.

Tuesday’s hearing was an effort by senators to follow up on the Afghanistan Papers, the Washington Post’s reporting series based on hundreds of confidential interviews that SIGAR conducted with key figures of the nearly two-decade war that showed the projections of progress in Afghanistan were deliberately misleading despite overwhelming evidence the war had become an unwinnable quagmire.

We cannot show any progress, we lost a trillion dollars, we lost thousands of lives,” said Sen. Josh Hawley, R-Mo. “I just don’t see what’s going on here. I don’t think anybody really knows what we’re doing.”

Sensors to press alliances to expand operations in the Middle East, echoing at home.

Esper said that the U.S. military in Iraq would mean some U.S. troops could be returned to bases in Afghanistan and deploy to other regions such as the Pacific, where the Pentagon has said it wants to shift its focus to counter China and Russia, Esper said.

The United States has about 5,000 troops in Iraq to support operations against ISIS, while NATO’s training mission in the country comprises some 600 members.

NATO suspended training operations in Iraq following the killing last month by a U.S. drone of Iranian Gen. Qassem Soleimani, but Stoltenberg said the alliance expected to resume training in the country “as soon as possible.”

Stoltenberg did not specify how many more troops NATO members would send to Iraq or if any forces would shift from the U.S.-led coalition against ISIS to the NATO campaign in the country.

“It’s too early to say today,” he said, adding details still need to be worked out.

Stoltenberg said Iraq ultimately would decide whether allies remain in the country to train local forces. In the wake of the U.S. airstrike against Soleimani in Baghdad, Iraq’s political leaders complained about a violation of the country’s sovereignty and threatened to eject U.S. troops.

Meanwhile, Esper said he’d also like to see more NATO participation in deterring Iranian aggression in the region. If there was “definite aggression,” the forces could be sent to Saudi Arabia to help with air defense there, he said.

Greater NATO involvement in the Middle East was expected to be high on the agenda of the NATO defense ministers’ meetings, which run until Thursday.

By Steve Beynon
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — John Sopko, the special inspector general for Afghanistan reconstruction, told Congress on Tuesday that measuring progress on America’s longest war is virtually impossible with even the most basic facts trapped behind an ever-expanding umbrella of secrecy.

“Every time we find something that is unclassified and it gets classified … Most of the [methods] of measuring success across the board derived from training and timing before the Senate Homeland Security and Government Affairs Committee.”

Sopko said it is impossible to gauge whether the Afghanistan government could keep order in its country if the U.S. military pulled out because the capabilities of Afghanistan’s army and police force are unknown.

“Question one would be to ask the Afghans how many people [they] control and how much territory, and that’s not relevant, apparently … It’s all secret, classified,” he told the Senate panel.

“$64 billion has gone to training and assisting the Afghan government in training local forces,” Sopko said. “The Afghans [are] capable and American [people] sensitive. It’s that’s because in part because of the Afghan government’s own inability to classify what we can tell you and the taxpayer.”

How many Afghan soldiers do we have? We’re still trying to figure out how many we’re paying for. How many Afghan police are there, really? We don’t know.”

In 2008, Congress created the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, known as SIGAR, to investigate fraud and waste in the war.

The inefficacy and pervasive corruption in Afghanistan’s army and police long have been a top concern for U.S. military leaders.

Sopko has been a bullhorn on Capitol Hill, raising the alarm of incompetence and bureaucratic failures from the U.S. and Afghanistan leadership. He has said the U.S. and Afghan leaders had led to the deaths of 18 American, including two Green Berets who died last week in combat.

“The Afghan military — and particularly the Afghan police — has been a hopeless nightmare and a disaster,” Sopko last week while testifying before the House Foreign Affairs Committee.

What the U.S. and the Afghan government end up classifying is an ever-ballooning list intended to cover up the failures of the war, according to Sopko.

“We have a list of everything that’s classified and it keeps growing,” he said Tuesday before the Senate panel. “The latest is looking at the Afghan special forces. It’s great, we’ve put a lot of money in that. But picking the right types of independent missions the Afghan special forces are doing has gone down. I would bet you that next quarter, that database will be classified.”

By John Vander
Stars and Stripes

NATO allies agreed to expand mission in Iraq by Defense Secretary Mark Esper that NATO members play a larger role in the fight against the Islamic State, the alliance’s top official said.

NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg said on March 29 that the alliance involved in principle during a meeting of defense ministers in Brussels to boost efforts aimed at training Iraqi security forces. Esper was at NATO headquarters in Brussels to press allies to expand operations in the Middle East, echoing at home.

Esper, speaking ahead of the NATO meeting, said NATO doing more in Iraq means the United States could eventually reduce the number of forces it has in the country.

“That’s my ambition, but the first thing is getting NATO in, and once we get NATO in, or more NATO partners in, we can look at reducing our footprint,” Esper told reporters.

An expanded NATO mission in Iraq would mean some U.S. troops could be returned to bases in Afghanistan and deploy to other regions such as the Pacific, where the Pentagon has said it wants to shift its focus to counter China and Russia, Esper said.

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Greater NATO involvement in the Middle East was expected to be high on the agenda of the NATO defense ministers’ meetings, which run until Thursday.

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US flies along Taiwan Strait after Chinese drills

BY CAITLIN DOORNBOS Stars and Stripes

YOKOSUKA NAVAL BASE, Japan — The Air Force flew two B-52 bombers and an MC-130H Commando II tanker along the Taiwan Strait on Wednesday morning after Chinese naval and air forces flew over the island twice this week, Taiwan’s Ministry of National Defense said.

The aircraft flew north to south along the airspace over the Taiwan Strait and were “closely monitored,” the defense ministry said in a statement Wednesday.

Air Force officials did not immediately respond to requests for comment Wednesday.

The 110-mile-wide strait separates mainland China from Taiwan, which Beijing regards as its own.

The U.S. considers Taiwan’s status unsettled, but adheres to the “One China” policy, acknowledging that Beijing considers Taiwan part of China. However, the Taiwan Relations Act provides a framework for the U.S. to aid the self-governing island’s defense.

The flyer comes after China held back-to-back air drills near Taiwan this week.

On Sunday, China held a “combat-readiness patrol,” sending bombers and early warning aircraft flying through the Bashi Channel and Miyako Strait, a Chinese Defense Ministry statement said.

China fighter jets also crossed the “middle line” of the Taiwan Strait, edging closer to Taiwan than mainland China, a report by China’s state-run newspaper Global Times said Tuesday.

Chinese military expert Song Zhongping told Global Times that the demonstrations “are not only warnings to Taiwan secessionists, but also demonstrations of PLA capabilities to solve the Taiwan question by force.”

Song added that the Chinese drills aimed to sharpen skills “useful in potential battles against Taiwan’s military force,” the Global Times report said.

China last made a “deep incursion” across the strait’s middle line in 2019 but hadn’t done so for 20 years prior to that, Bonnie Glaser, senior adviser at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, said in Washington last month.

The drills come one month after Tsai Ing-wen was reelected Taiwan’s president on the promise of preserving the island’s sovereignty, after Chinese leader Xi Jinping described unification as “inevitable.”

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Group helps military journalists break into civilian news careers

BY THERON GODBOLD Stars and Stripes

When former Navy journalist Zack Baddorf went looking for similar work in the civilian sector, he expected his experience and veteran status would open doors.

“I built a portfolio and got my bachelor’s. I thought it would translate well to the civilian work force,” he said. “As it turned out, I was wrong; it was a tough transition.”

Baddorf, who now works for the Department of Defense, and Russell Midori, a former Marine journalist, teamed up in May to form the nonprofit Military Veterans in Journalism. They aimed to help fellow former service members find work, but also increase the number of veterans working in the media.

Military Veterans in Journalism provides a network for vets as well as tips on finding civilian jobs, Baddorf said. More than 10 volunteers help run the organization.

“My co-founder, a former Marine, went through similar issues and we sat down and thought there had to be a better way, so we decided to do this,” he said.

Civilians who need former military journalists, Baddorf said. The United States has been at war nearly 20 years at a cost of more than 20,000 lives, about 50,000 wounded and billions in tax dollars. Veterans affairs—employment, health care, and suicide, for example—create frequent headlines.

Yet military veterans are vastly underrepresented in our nation’s newsrooms, he said.

U.S. Census data show that about 7% of Americans have served in the armed forces, but only 1.1% of media workers are post-9/11 military veterans, Baddorf said.

With an average salary of under $35,000 a year for entry-level journalists, according to payscale.com, this is a career that’s more about commitment than income.

After her stint as an aviation supply specialist in the Marine Corps, Babee Garcia obtained a degree in journalism from Montclair State University in New Jersey.

“I was inspired at a young age by broadcast journalism, so I knew early on that this was the career path I wanted to take,” Garcia said Jan. 27 by phone to Stars and Stripes.

She contacted Baddorf last year and Military Veterans in Journalism raised money to send her college journalism team to the Edward R. Murrow Awards, where the team won a 2019 student award for excellence in video reporting.

“We won for a story we did in Puerto Rico in 2018,” Garcia said. “It was a great networking opportunity where I met David Begnaud, the lead national correspondent for CBS.”

The team won for a half-hour report on the aftermath of 2017’s Hurricane Maria. Garcia is now a volunteer with Baddorf’s organization.

Military Veterans in Journalism will host its first workshop in April in New York, Baddorf said.

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2 service members arrested on Okinawa in separate incidents

BY MATTHEW M. BURKE AND AYA ICHIHASHI Stars and Stripes

CAMP FOSTER, Okinawa — An Army sergeant first class and a Marine corporal were picked up by Japanese police over the weekend in separate alcohol-related offenses.

A resident of the Miyagi section of Chatan town summoned police at 3:38 a.m. Sunday after hearing a commotion and catching sight of Sgt. 1st Class Jonathon Levi Sweeney, 30, carrying away the resident’s kayak, Okinawa Police deputy chief Hitoriho Iha said Wednesday. The kayak was kept by the front door.

It was unclear Wednesday where Sweeney is stationed.

Police found him on the street with the kayak and searched him, Iha said. He said Sweeney told the arresting officers that “it is OK to pick up things on the street in the U.S.”

“The suspect said he does not remember stealing the kayak,” Iha said.

Sweeney’s blood alcohol content after his arrest measured 0.12, four times Japan’s legal limit for driving of 0.03, Iha said.

Police on Monday referred a theft charge against Sweeney to the Naha District Public Prosecutors Office, Iha said. He was released that day.

In an unrelated incident, Marine Cpl. Wilfredo De Jesus Romero, 20, assigned to Camp Hansen, was arrested in Kin town at 1:50 a.m. Saturday after allegedly trespassing on the roof of an off-base home, police said Wednesday.

The owner of the two-story home heard noises coming from the roof, looked and found Rome-ro, an Ishikawa Police deputy chief said. The homeowner called police. Some government officials in Japan customarily speak on condition of anonymity.

The police spokesman said Romero found his way to the roof via a flight of stairs outside the building.

Romero told police he wanted to “see the night view,” the spokesman said. His blood alcohol content after his arrest measured 0.12.

Police released Romero on Sunday and referred a trespassing charge against him to the Naha District Public Prosecutors Office the same day, the police spokesman said.

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So you’re stationed overseas and it’s an election year...

This handy flowchart on absentee voting lays it all out.

**DO YOU WANT TO VOTE IN U.S. ELECTIONS?**

- **YES**
  - Have you registered to vote absentee and requested your ballot?
    - **YES**
      - Great! Have you received your ballot yet?
        - **YES**
          - You’re on track. Have you filled out your ballot and sent it in?
            - **YES**
              - Send it in like your regular ballot.
            - **NO**
              - If you haven’t received your state ballot in time to vote, use the Federal Write-in Absentee Ballot (FWAB) as a backup ballot. Get it at FVAP.gov.
        - **NO**
          - If you know someone who wants to vote, share this with them!
          - After you send your ballot, you can check if it was received by your election office. Get started at FVAP.gov.
    - **NO**
      - Great! Have you checked that your ballot arrived?
        - **NO**
          - PRO TIP
            - If your regular ballot arrives, fill that out and send it in too. Don’t worry; only one ballot will be counted.
        - **YES**
          - Wow, you’re one squared-away voter!

- **NO**
  - Go to FVAP.gov and fill out a Federal Post Card Application (FPCA) to register and request your ballot. You can also get one from your VAO. Send it in by August 1 (or your state’s deadline).
China sees drop in new virus cases

Associated Press

BEIJING — China on Wednesday reported another drop in the number of new cases of a viral infection and 97 more deaths, pushing the total dead past 1,100 as postal services worldwide said delivery was being affected by the cancellation of many flights to China.

The National Health Commission said 2,015 new cases had been reported over the last 24 hours, declining for a second day. The total number of cases in mainland China reached 44,653, although many experts say a large number of others infected have gone uncounted.

The additional deaths raised the mainland toll to 1,113. Two people have died elsewhere, one in Hong Kong and one in the Philippines.

In the port city of Tianjin, just south of Beijing, a cluster of cases has been traced to a department store in Baodi district. One-third of Tianjin’s 104 confirmed cases are in Baodi, the Xinhua state news agency reported.

A salesperson working in the store’s small home appliance section became the first individual in the cluster to be diagnosed on Jan. 31, Xinhua said. The store was already closed at that point, then disinfected on Feb. 1. Nevertheless, several more diagnoses soon followed.

The next to have their infections confirmed were also salespeople at the store. They had not visited Wuhan recently and, with the exception of one married couple, the patients worked in different sections of the store and did not know one another, according to Xinhua.

Japan's Health Ministry said that 39 new cases have been confirmed on a cruise ship quarantine at Yokohama, bringing the total to 174 on the Diamond Princess.

And in Singapore, the bank DBS on Wednesday cleared a downtown office and told some 300 employees to work from home after one of its staff was infected with the virus.

“Were also currently conducting detailed contact tracing with all employees and other people the affected person may have come into contact with,” DBS said.

The U.S. Postal Service said that it was “experiencing significant difficulties” in dispatching letters, parcels and express mail to China, including Hong Kong and Macau.

Both the U.S. and Singapore Post said in notes to their global counterparts that they are no longer accepting items destined for China, “until sufficient transport capacity becomes available.”

The Chinese mail service, China Post, said it was disinfecting postal offices, processing centers and vehicles to ensure the virus doesn’t spread via the mail and to protect staff.

It said the crisis is also impacting mail that transits China to other destinations including North Korea, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Mongolia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Vietnam.

The World Health Organization has named the disease caused by the virus as COVID-19, avoiding any animal or geographic designation to avoid stigmatization and to show the illness comes from a new coronavirus discovered in 2019.

The illness was first reported in December and connected to a food market in the central Chinese city of Wuhan, where the outbreak has largely been concentrated. Zhong Nanshan, a leading Chinese epidemiologist, said that while the virus outbreak in China may peak this month, the situation at the center of the crisis remains more challenging.

“We still need more time of hard working in Wuhan,” he said, describing the isolation of infected patients there a priority.

“We have to stop more people from being infected,” he said. “The problem of human-to-human transmission has not yet been resolved.”

S. Korea to reduce troop numbers for Cobra Gold

BY KIM GAMEL and YOO KYONG CHANG

SEOUL, South Korea — South Korea tentatively plans to sharply reduce the number of troops sent to Thailand for Asia’s largest multinational military exercise due to fears about the spread of a newly discovered coronavirus, its navy said Wednesday.

Seoul originally planned to ship about 400 service members along with eight amphibious personnel carriers to participate in Cobra Gold, a nearly two-week exercise that begins Feb. 24.

Instead, only about 30 senior-level troops are expected to travel to Thailand for the simulated command post exercise. The South’s forces will forgo the usual field maneuvers, the navy said in a statement, adding a final decision will be made this week.

“We changed the plan for the safety of our sailors,” a South Korean navy official said.

The decision comes as South Korea steps up efforts to prevent the spread of the coronavirus, a pneumonia-like disease that has killed more than 1,000 people in China and sickened tens of thousands in several other countries.

South Korea has confirmed 28 cases, while Thailand has 33. No deaths have been reported in either country. The World Health Organization has declared it a global health emergency and renamed the South Korean virus, which appeared in December in the Chinese city of Wuhan, COVID-19.

Cobra Gold, co-sponsored by the United States and the United Nations, began in 1982. Nearly 30 other nations attended the exercise last year as part of military training, disaster-relief planning and relationship building.

Some 4,000 Americans will participate in the drills this year, according to Thai media.

Japan confirms 39 new virus cases, 174 total on ship

Associated Press

TOKYO — Japan’s health ministry said Wednesday that 39 new cases of a virus had been confirmed on a cruise ship quarantine at a Japanese port.

The ministry also said the virus was confirmed in a official who participated in the initial quarantine checks the night the ship returned to Yokohama Port near Tokyo on Feb. 3. The quarantine official is being treated in a hospital.

The new cases bring Japan’s total to 203 people with the new disease, COVID-19.

Concerns over the virus have rerouted and canceled other cruises. The Westerdam cruise ship carrying 2,257 passengers and crew is now in the Gulf of Thailand with nowhere to dock after being refused entry in Japan, Taiwan, the Philippines and Thailand. There are no confirmed cases of the virus on board, but it stopped in Hong Kong less than two weeks ago.

2 Russians flee virus quarantine at hospital

Associated Press

MOSCOW — One patient jumped out of a hospital window to escape her quarantine and another managed to break out by disabling an electronic lock.

Two Russian women who were kept in isolation for possible infection by a new virus say they fled from their hospitals this month after being refused entry by doctors, poor conditions and fear they would become infected.

Russian health authorities haven’t commented on their complaints.

The incidents occurred amid the outbreak of the virus in China that has already infected more than 40,000 people worldwide. In Russia, only two cases of COVID-19 have been reported. Nevertheless, the authorities took vast measures to prevent the new disease from spreading and hospitalized hundreds of people who returned from China as a precaution.

Most those quarantined in different Russian hospitals complained about dire conditions of isolation rooms and lack of cooperation between doctors, poor conditions and uncertainty about quarantine protocols.

Both women said their hospital stays began after returning from Hainan, a tropical region of China popular with Russian tourists.

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**GEOGRAPHIC**

© Geshamitter 3, 83039 München
The U.S. and Russia have for years worked to deconflict their operations in the country, but it was unclear whether the person killed was a civilian or militia member. U.S. jets ripped through the air above the villages after the incident, the Observatory reported. Photos and videos circulated on social media show an F-15 fighter jet firing a flare over the area.

The man killed was a civilian from Khirbet Ammu village, Syria’s state-run SANA news agency said. Four American vehicles were damaged, it said, and five more were sent as reinforcements.

A cellphone video from the scene shows American troops standing outside several Oshkosh M-ATVs on a rural road and building a concrete building. The video was posted to Twitter by Syrian Kurdish journalist Kamilan Sadoun, who said regime supporters attacked first.

A second video, posted to Twitter by journalist Mohammed Hassan, shows the area, where Hassan says one U.S. vehicle was destroyed. Syria and Russian forces and “a lot of civilians” gathered, and the Syrian checkpoint was emptied, he reported. Hasan later tweeted photos of an F-15 fighter jet firing a flare over the area.

A Russian convoy arrived on the scene, apparently to defuse tensions, the Observatory reported. Moscow backs Assad in Syria’s civil war, now in its ninth year.

The U.S. and Russia have for years worked to deconflict their operations in the country, but a top American diplomat has warned of increased complexity in northeastern Syria, where U.S. troops are deployed and have had “minor dustups” with Russian patrols. War America has occupy austere outposts in the provinces of Hasakeh, where Wednesday’s incident took place, and Deir al-Zour, and where Turkey has also entered the fray.

U.S. troops withdrew from northern Syria in October, ahead of a Turkish incursion to fight Kurdish forces that Ankara views as terrorists. Turkey backs rebel forces in Syria, but also conducts joint patrols with Russia.

The situation has led to “much more detailed ground deconfliction rules” along the road network, Ambassador James Jeffrey, the U.S. envoy to the anti-ISIS coalition, told reporters in January.

Qamishli is where all those roads converge. Jeffrey said, and there is a lot of patrolling there,” a small number of which have led to the “dustups.”

“Nothing serious, nothing particularly threatening,” he said.

In a small but increasing number of occasions the Russians and Syrian regime forces have tried to come “deep into the areas” where the U.S. and Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces patrol, he said in a later briefing.

Wednesday’s incident could lead to increased tensions in the area. Other cellphone video showed men in civilian attire firing on the U.S. convoy with Kalashnikovs.

The video was posted to a channel on the online app Telegram run by Syria’s Radio and Television General Authority.

As several vehicles flying American flags attempted to pass through the area around Qamishli, locals pelted them with stones and blocked their way. Some people mounted the vehicles and ripped down a flag, SANA also reported.

Boosted by US, Turkish president vows to expel Syrian army from Idlib

BY SELCAN HACAOGLU AND FIRAT KOZOK

Bloomberg

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan vowed to drive Russian-backed Syrian government forces from the last rebel stronghold of Idlib, escalating his threats against Damascus after being buoyed by rare public support from the U.S.

Erdogan has massed tanks and commandos in Idlib after at least 14 Turks, most of them soldiers, were killed by forces loyal to President Bashar Assad, and on Wednesday threatened to hit Syrian targets “anywhere” if Turkish troops are harmed again.

“We’re determined to drive away regime forces until the end of February” from the vicinity of Idlib, he said. At least three Turkish army outposts have been cut off in the area.

Assad’s attempt to crush Turkish-backed rebels and al-Qaida militants in the final major opposition holdout after nine years of war has triggered fierce Turkish military retaliation, while testing key strategic alliances.

Turkey and Russia have maintained an uneasy partnership in Syria, where they back opposing sides, but disagreements over who should control Idlib are taking a toll on the relationship.

On Wednesday, Russia directly accused Turkey of failing to abide by agreements meant to contain hostilities in Idlib, warning that the situation was being aggravat

Erdogan said he decided that military and civilian officials from both sides would hold further discussions.

Erdogan said he might soon talk with President Donald Trump on events in Syria after Ankara secured support from a visiting U.S. official in its tussle with the Assad regime.

James Jeffrey, the U.S. envoy for Syria engagement and its special representative to the global coalition to defeat Islamic State, said he had traveled to Turkey to discuss whatever support the country needed to defend its soldiers against “a threat in Idlib from Russia and the Assad government.”

In this frame grab from video, people and soldiers gather next to an American military convoy stuck in the village of Khirbet Ammu, east of Qamishli city, Syria, on Wednesday. U.S. troops returned fire after being shot at in northeastern Syria.
Military downgrades efforts against Sahel extremists

Associated Press

JOHANNESBURG — The U.S. military has switched from trying to degrade Islamic extremist groups in West Africa’s sprawling Sahel region to merely trying to contain them as their deadly threat increases, a new U.S. government report says.

The quarterly report by the inspectors general for the Pentagon, State Department and U.S. Agency for International Development released this week is the first to be unclassified as interest in the U.S. military’s activities in Africa.

Top concerns in Africa include the fast-growing threat from multiple extremist groups in the Sahel region just south of the Sahara Desert and the enduring threat by the al-Qaida-linked al-Shabab in Somalia, which killed three Americans in an unprecedented attack against U.S. forces in Kenya last month.

Consistent pressure on extremist groups is needed to weaken them, the report says, citing Defense Secretary Mark Esper, who has compared it to “mowing the lawn.” That need, along with the often slow development of local partners’ militaries, “could require ongoing commitment of U.S. military resources,” the report adds.

The new report also says that the U.S. Africa Command has expressed concerns to the Pentagon’s inspector general that some resources will be moved from Somalia to the North African nation of Libya, where a conflict between rival governments has drawn the attention of powers including Russia and Turkey.

About 6,000 U.S. military personnel are deployed across Africa, the report says, including 500 special operations forces in Somalia and about 800 personnel in West Africa.

The security situation in Burkina Faso “is deteriorating faster than anywhere else in the Sahel,” says the new report, citing AFRICOM. The West African nation is staggering under a growing number of extremist attacks, as fighters move in from neighboring Mali. Hundreds of civilians have been killed and hundreds of thousands have fled.

Extremist groups linked to the Islamic State group and al-Qaida in West Africa “are neither degraded nor contained,” the new report warns, citing AFRICOM.

The new U.S. military strategy has changed from trying to degrade, or reduce the effectiveness, of those extremist groups in the Sahel to trying to keep them from growing their membership and spreading into new areas, AFRICOM told the Pentagon inspector general in the quarter ending Dec. 31.

Mali’s president this week told French media outlets his government is now in contact with leaders of the most active extremist group, the al-Qaida-linked JNIM, a sign that troubled West African countries are exploring various options, including negotiations, to curb the threat.

JNIM has about 1,000 to 2,000 fighters, and its goal is to “unite all terrorist groups in the Sahel and eliminate Western influence in the region,” the new U.S. report says.

Trump wants Pentagon to review conduct of impeachment witness

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump suggested Tuesday that the Pentagon should review the conduct of a former White House national security aide who played a central role in the Democrats’ impeachment case and potentially consider disciplinary action against him.

Army Lt. Col. Alexander Vindman, who, until last week, was detailed by the Pentagon to the White House to testify before the House impeachment panel that Trump inappropriately pushed Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskiy to investigate former Vice President Joe Biden and his son, Hunter.

Vindman was ousted from his job on the White House National Security Council on Friday, just two days after the Senate acquitted Trump on abuse of power and obstruction of justice charges. He is to be reassigned by the Pentagon. His twin brother, Lt. Col. Yevgeny Vindman, who worked as an ethics lawyer at the National Security Council, was also ousted from his job and was re-assigned to the Army General Counsel’s Office.

Trump has already been sharply criticized for pushing out Alexander Vindman and others who crossed him in the impeachment hearings.

Asked whether he wanted to see Vindman face discipline, Trump said that military officials “can handle him any way they want,” but also suggested that he expected commanders to review the decorated, 20-year officer’s conduct.

“That’s going to be up to the military,” Trump said. “We’ll have to see. They are certainly, I imagine, going to take a look at that.”

Robert O’Brien, Trump’s national security adviser, said later Tuesday that Alexander Vindman was not asked to leave his White House job in retaliation for his testimony in the Democrats’ impeachment case.

“There’s absolutely no retaliation with respect to the Vindmans as far as impeachment goes,” O’Brien said at an event hosted by the Atlantic Council. “But the president is entitled to a staff that he has confidence in and that he believes will execute his policy.”

Trump impeachment process continues

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The House ethics panel looking into allegations of impropriety by House Speaker Nancy Pelosi has delayed its decision on whether to recommend that the House take action against the California Democrat. The delay was announced late Tuesday after the panel finishes its work.

The ethics committee has investigation the matter for several months after the New York Times reported last fall that Pelosi spent $50,000 to renovate her private quarter in the Capitol.

The ethics panel determined that Pelosi had misleadingly told an ethics investigator that she had agreed to pay for the work. Pelosi also had told aides and others that she had paid for the work and had also made another contribution to pay for the work, which she did not.

Pelosi’s aides said she had no knowledge of the newspaper’s story, which first appeared in October. Pelosi told CNN she was surprised by the reports.

The ethics panel said it would address other issues raised by the newspaper’s story, including whether Pelosi had improperly taken part in a decision to use public funds to make the Capitol improvements.

Pelosi also faced questions in the deliberations about whether she had improperly gathered information about ethics complaints by members of Congress.

Pelosi’s ideology trip to Ireland

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — House Speaker Nancy Pelosi announced Tuesday that she will travel to Ireland in June, becoming the latest top U.S. official to visit the island.

Pelosi, the first Irish American woman to be elected to Congress, said the trip would be an opportunity to explore the island of Ireland’s cultural and historical significance.

The trip comes as the United States and Ireland are examining ways to strengthen their economic and diplomatic ties.

Pelosi’s visit, which is expected to take place in June, will be her first official visit to Ireland since being elected speaker in January 2019.

The trip was preceded by a surprise visit in March 2019 to Ireland, where she met with Irish Prime Minister Leo Varadkar and other top leaders.

The trip also came as the United States and Ireland are examining ways to strengthen their economic and diplomatic ties.
Happy Valentine’s Day
From Yokosuka MWR

OFFICERS’ CLUB • 6 - 9 P.M.
FIVE COURSE ROMANTIC VALENTINE’S DAY DINNER
Show your affection by taking your loved one to an enchanting dinner. Start your evening with a bubbly for a memorable night while serenaded by a live classic opera singer accompanied by a pianist. Reservation is required. $70 per couple.

CPO CLUB • 5 - 9 P.M.
5 STAR VALENTINE’S DAY DINNER
Enjoy a romantic setting with live music and a lot of passion. We’ll serve you an elegant five course gourmet dinner paired with the finest wines. Reservations are extremely limited. Purchase your tickets today at the CPO Club cash cage. Only $50 per couple.

CLUB ALLIANCE • 3F BALLROOM • 6 - 9 P.M.
SECRET VALENTINE IN PARIS
Enjoy an intimate candlelight dinner, six courses of decadent food, and piano music with a singer. Reservations are required. $70 per couple.
Trial team quits Stone case over sentence dispute

By MICHAEL BALSAMO and ERIC TUCKER
Associated Press
WASHINGTON — The four lawyers who prosecuted Roger Stone quit the case after the Justice Department overruled them and said it would seek for President Donald Trump’s longtime ally and confidant.

The departures on Tuesday raised immediate questions over whether Trump, who earlier in the day had blasted the original sentencing recommendation as “very horrible and unfair,” had at least indirectly exerted his will on a Justice Department that he often views as an arm of the White House.

The department insisted the decision to undo the sentencing recommendation was made Monday night — before Trump’s tweet — and prosecutors had not spoken to the White House about it. Even so, the departures of the entire trial team broke open a simmering dispute over the punishment of a Trump ally whose case has long captured the Republican president’s attention.

The four attorneys — Aaron Zelinsky and Adam Jed, who were early members of special counsel Robert Mueller’s Russia team, Michael Marando and Jonathan Kravis — comprised the entire Justice Department trial team that won convictions against Stone last fall. Each had signed a recommendation, but Trump tweeted a congratulations to Attorney General William Barr “for taking charge of a case that was totally out of control and perhaps should not have been brought,” suggesting the prosecutors had gone rogue.

It’s unclear what sentence the department will ultimately seek — a new sentencing memo filed Tuesday evening indicated that the original recommendation was too harsh but proposed no specific punishment of its own. A Justice Department official said authorities decided to step in and seek a shorter sentence because they had been taken by surprise by the initial recommendation. The person, who was not authorized to discuss the matter publicly and spoke on the condition of anonymity, said prosecutors had told the department to expect a recommendation for a shorter sentence.

The day of upheaval began with a morning tweet from Trump that the Stone case was a “miscarriage of justice.” He later told reporters he didn’t speak to Justice Department officials, though he said he could if he wanted.

Feds: Ex-convict extorted college students for nearly $1M

Washington, D.C. — A former New York City police commissioner has been sentenced to prison.

Robert Miller, a close confidant of Rudy Giuliani, to prison.

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. — A Tennessee hillside collapsed, roads were flooded and rivers were rising across the Southeast on Tuesday after a day of heavy rains that once again threatened a Mississippi lake where a dam previously was in danger of failing.

The National Weather Service said minor to moderate flooding was expected from central Mississippi to north Georgia following downpours. The Tennessee River was predicted to crest about 7 feet above flood level at Perryville, Tenn., on Sunday.

Near Great Smoky Mountains National Park in eastern Tennessee, tons of rock and soil slid off a 70-foot hillside and blocked the northbound side of a U.S. 441 spur linking the tourist towns of Gatlinburg and Pigeon Forge, the National Park Service said.

At least 45 dump truck loads will be required to clear the road, officials estimated, but no injuries were reported.

Multiple roads were covered with water or washed out because of rainfall that exceeded 5 inches in spots across central Alabama, and forecasters said totals could reach 6 inches by nightfall.

Schools opened late or closed in parts of Alabama, Mississippi and Louisiana because of flash flooding. A flood watch stretched from eastern Texas to Mississippi, and parts of Alabama were under flood warnings.

North of Birmingham in Cullman, the sheriff’s office said Deputy Adam Clark and his police dog were badly injured in a wreck during heavy rains overnight. The cause of the crash was under investigation.

In eastern Mississippi, officials in Starkville said the water at Okibbeha County Lake had once again reached a critical level just weeks after heavy rains caused a mudslide that put the earthen dam in danger of failing.

Pumps had been used to lower the lake level by about 8 feet since mid-January, but officials said the water had risen to an even higher mark than before because of recent storms.

“It has risen over 8.5 feet from our low elevation during pumping and continues to rise,” said a statement by Kristin Campanella, emergency management director in Okibbeha County. Officials also were monitoring the site of a potential dam failure in Yazoo County, where the Mississippi Emergency Management Agency said a 40-acre lake in a subdivision was leaking around a culvert and washing away dirt, threatening four homes and a church. Five homes were evacuated after a levee breach in Leake.

The Tennessee Valley region has received 550% of its normal rainfall in the past seven days, James Everett, senior manager of the Tennessee Valley Authority’s River Forecast Center, said.

Officials monitor a potential dam/levee failure in Yazoo County, Miss., on Tuesday.

Feds: Ex-convict extorted college students for nearly $1M

WASHINGTON — A former New York City police commissioner has been sentenced to prison.

Federal prosecutors said Ray, 60, used “physical, sexual and psychological abuse” to extort money from five different students at Sarah Lawrence College, a private liberal arts college outside New York City. He convinced them they were indebted to him, authorities said, subjecting them to “grueling interrogations” that spanned hours and deprived them of food and sleep.

Ray was taken into custody Tuesday. He has denied the allegations, saying they were the result of a conspiracy against him.

U.S. Attorney Geoffrey Berman told reporters the investigation was prompted by an article that appeared last year in New York magazine.

Ray allegedly ensnared many of his victims while they were sophomores at Sarah Lawrence. His first victims were his daughters’ roommates, Berman said.

Ray moved into the students’ on-campus housing in late 2010, and presented himself as a father figure to the roommates, according to an indictment filed in U.S. District Court.

Prosecutors allege that Ray directed the students to drain money from their parents’ savings accounts and forced some of them into unpaid labor at a family member’s property in North Carolina. Others opened lines of credit or solicited contributions from others to help pay the false debts.

“Ray subjected his victims to almost unspeakable abuse,” Berman said, alleging Ray once tied a woman to a chair and placed a plastic bag over her head that nearly suffocated her. Ray collected more than $500,000 from that woman after forcing her into prostitution, prosecutors said.

Ray was previously known for his role in helping to send former New York City police commissioner Bernard Kerik, who was a close confidant of Rudy Giuliani, to prison.

Ray was convicted of lying to investigators and obstructing the House investigation into whether the Trump campaign coordinated with Russia to tip the 2016 election. None of the departures on Tuesday evening indicated that the original recommendation was too harsh but proposed no specific punishment of its own. A Justice Department official said authorities decided to step in and seek a shorter sentence because they had been taken by surprise by the initial recommendation. The person, who was not authorized to discuss the matter publicly and spoke on the condition of anonymity, said prosecutors had told the department to expect a recommendation for a shorter sentence.

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Just around the river bend

Adam Tremper “surfs” the Fish Ladders under the T. Tyler Potterfield Bridge while kayaking the James River with friends Sunday in Richmond, Va. After heavy rains earlier in the week, the river crested about 2 a.m. on Sunday at 13.53 feet.

**THE CENSUS**

**$80K**

The worth of Rolex watches stolen by two men Connecticut police are looking for. Stamford Police Capt. Richard Conklin said the two men broke into a Lord & Taylor store Thursday, began smashing a glass-topped case of high-end watches and took eight to 10 of the luxury brand watches before fleeing. “It looks like the two parties involved entered the store earlier, probably in an effort to case the location, about an hour and one-half prior to this action they took. They knew right where they were going and were out of the store very quickly,” Conklin said.

**K9 finds 220 pounds of pot in 2 traffic stops**

**FL**

**SPRINGHILL**—Neighbors used sticks, pieces of a gutter and a lawn chair in an attempt to stop a pack of dogs from mauling a Florida woman, who was critically injured in the attack that lasted at least five minutes, authorities said.

The attack only stopped when firefighters arrived at the home in Spring Hill and used their equipment to disperse the dogs, the Hernando County Sheriff’s Office said in a news release.

The woman, who wasn’t identified, was in critical condition at a hospital.

**Neighbors try to stop mauling by pack of dogs**

**FL**

On the morning of February 13, 2020, a Colorado ski resort town has set a record for the world’s largest aerial firework. The 2,800-pound shell flew 2,200 feet above the Steamboat Springs Winter Carnival before it burst, turning the sky bright red and drawing gasps from the crowd. The Steamboat Pilot & Today reported.

**Massive firework shot breaks world record**

**CO**

Steamboat Springs — A massive firework launched over a Colorado ski resort town has set a record for the world’s largest aerial firework. The 2,800-pound shell flew.

**Man wins big lottery prize for a second time**

**NC**

MORGANTON — Lottery luck has smiled on a North Carolina man for the second time in seven years.

Donald Hildebran won $250,000 after buying four 20X The Cash scratch-off tickets at a convenience store in Morganton, the North Carolina Education Lottery said in a news release.

It wasn’t the first time Hildebran has hit it big in the lottery. In 2013, he won $200,000 in the Extreme Cash game.

Hildebran, a retiree from Connelly Springs, told lottery officials he spent some of his first prize on a beach trip and plans to do the same with his new prize.

“I’m going fishing,” he told lottery officials. “I’m going to the beach!”

**Woman accused of stalking former boss**

**FL**

WEST PALM BEACH — A 45-year-old Florida woman is accused of stalking and harassing her former boss in an effort to get her job back, police said.

Brygida Trzaska was arrested on charges of harassing phone calls and stalking, West Palm Beach police said.

After being fired in February 2019 following a dispute over vacation time and sick leave, Trzaska made multiple phone calls to her former boss, sent emails and even waited outside the victim’s home for a chance to speak to her, the Palm Beach Post reported.

Police said the victim received several emails from Trzaska between February and January, wanting to address the termination.

Investigators found that Trzaska called the victim 339 times between Dec. 14 and Jan. 28.

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Teachers unions: Active shooter drills scare kids

By Pat Eaton-Robb
Associated Press

HARTFORD, Conn. — The nation’s two largest teachers unions want schools to revise or eliminate active shooter drills, asserting Tuesday that they can harm students’ mental health and that there are better ways to prepare for the possibility of a school shooting.

The American Federation of Teachers and National Education Association joined with the advocacy group Everytown for Gun Safety Support Fund in calling for an end to unannounced drills or drills that simulate gun violence.

“Everywhere I travel, I hear from parents and educators about active shooter drills terrifying students, leaving them unable to concentrate in the classroom and unable to sleep at night,” said Lily Eskelsen Garcia, president of the National Education Association.

“So traumatizing students as we work to keep students safe from gun violence is not the answer. That is why if schools are going to do drills, they need to be done in a way to ensure the drills do more good than harm.”

The report released Tuesday recommended that schools concentrate on training teachers to respond to an active shooter incident rather than drilling students. It also issued guidelines for schools that decide to use drills.

Those include giving parents, educators and students advance notice of any drill, working with mental health officials to create age-appropriate and trauma-informed drills, never simulating an actual shooting and tracking the effects of drills.

About 95% of schools drilled students on lockdown procedures in the 2015-16 school year, according to a survey by the National Center for Education Statistics.

“In Indiana, they were shooting teachers with rubber pellets so they would feel the adrenaline of what a school shooting would feel like,” said Shannon Watts, founder of Moms Demand Action, which is part of Everytown.

“In California recently, a superintendent hired a stranger to wear a mask to rattle the doors of classrooms without letting faculty and students know. We’ve seen students asked to pretend to be victims and lie down using fake blood in the hallway.”

Jean-Paul Guibault, the chief executive of the Alice Training Institute, which runs active shooter drills, said that they are effective when done appropriately. He said his company never runs surprise drills, but believes that simulating an event is the best way to prepare for one “and allow students to practice their options, whether that be lock-down or evacuation.”

“According to a recent study conducted by The U.S. Secret Service, most school shootings last for two minutes or less, and nearly half of the events studied ended within one minute,” he said in a written statement. “That means it is up to us to keep ourselves safe for those seconds that will feel as slow as a lifetime. We drill so everyone has a plan when faced with danger, to give people a chance at survival.”

But Abby Clements, who was teaching second grade at the Sandy Hook school in Newtown when a gunman killed 26 people in 2012, said that she doesn’t believe a drill would have saved lives there.

“Our students knew what to do,” said Clements, who now teaches at another elementary school in town. “We taught them what to do in an emergency. We knew evacuation routes and where a safe spot would be in the room. We knew how they could hide inside. But frightening students with some type of active drill, I think that is barbaric.”

There is no way you could possibly be prepared for the infinite number of ways that a shooting could go down with these weapons.

Clements, an active member of Moms Demand Action, said that it breaks her heart when she hears stories like the one about a little girl who refused to wear light-up shoes after a drill, because she was told it could make her an easier target.

“I’ve got kids at the elementary school level who tell me they have to keep a cellphone on them at all times so they can text friends in case,” she said. “It should not be like that.”

Transgender felons seek to ease name change laws

By Mark Scolforo
Associated Press

HARRISBURG, Pa. — A Pennsylvania court this week will consider a legal challenge by three transgender women to a two-decade-old state law that prohibits people who have committed serious felonies from ever changing their names.

Smollett, who is black and gay, was originally charged with disorderly conduct in February 2019 for allegedly staging the attack and lying about it to investigators. The allegations were dropped the last March. The indictment came from a special prosecutor who was appointed after Cook County prosecutors dropped the same charges.

The new charges were sure to reignite many of the tensions that surround Smollett today. When his claims first emerged, he drew a groundswell of support from fans and celebrities who were part of the original investigation into the attack to conduct the latest probe, despite Smollett’s pending civil claims against the city and police officials for malicious prosecution.

He is scheduled to appear in court for arraignment on Feb. 24.
Radical Shiite cleric threatens to reject Iraqi PM designate

Associated Press

BAGHDAD — An influential Shiite preacher who heads a powerful political bloc in Iraq’s Parliament threatened Tuesday to withdraw support for the candidate chosen by rival blocs as prime minister-designate, indicating that the formation of a new government was facing challenges.

Moqtada al-Sadr, who heads the Sairoon bloc that garnered the most seats in parliament following the May 2018 election, said in a statement posted on social media that he was losing confidence in prime minister-designate Mohammed Allawi and threatened to withdraw his support.

Citing “partisan and sectarian pressure” interfering in the government formation process, al-Sadr said that this has lead to a “lack of confidence” and “may even lead to declaring a disavowal” of Allawi’s candidacy.

Allawi, like his predecessor, Adel Abdul-Mahdi, was a compromise candidate of rival blocs Sairoon and Fatah, which includes leaders associated with the paramilitary Popular Mobilization Units headed by Hadi al-Amiri.

In the May 2018 election, neither coalition won a commanding plurality that would have enabled it to name the premier, as stipulated by the Iraqi constitution. To avoid political crisis, Sairoon and Fatah forged a precarious union after he resigned under pressure from protests in December. Allawi’s candidacy met with widespread criticism and threatened to stall government formation.

With Abdul-Mahdi as their prime minister. On Feb. 1, they chose Allawi to succeed Abdul-Mahdi, after he resigned under pressure from protests in December. Allawi has 30 days to formulate a government program and name Cabinet ministers.

A new government was facing indications that the formation of a “lack of confidence” and “may even lead to declaring a disavowal” of Allawi’s candidacy.

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**Horror not so scary anymore for Pedretti**

*By Joseph V. Amodio*

Newsday

Victoria Pedretti doesn’t scare quite so easily anymore. At least, not since she’s become TV’s favorite new horror queen, a sort of “Jamie Lee Curtis, millennial edition.”

Fans of the acclaimed Netflix series “The Haunting of Hill House” know Pedretti from her breakout performance as the warm and sympathetic twin Nell Crain. She nabbed that role just seconds after graduating from Carnegie Mellon University in 2017, and her success has led to two more roles: She returns to that series for its second season (called “The Haunting of Bly Manor,” an all-new spooflet out this year in which she plays a completely different character); and she stars in the second season of “You,” another Netflix hit, playing the object of Penn Badgley’s affection. Unfortunately, he’s a sweet but obsessive serial killer and in the show’s first season, well, things didn’t work out so well for his lady friend.

Pedretti, 24, who grew up in and around Philadelphia, also recently appeared as a murderous Manson hippie in Quentin Tarantino’s “Once Upon a Time ... in Hollywood.” She recently spoke by phone with Newsday contributor Joseph V. Amodio about her experiences with horror and her personal connection with the genre.

**Newsday:** In the first season of “You,” Penn Badgley plays Joe Goldberg, who falls for a young writer. In Season 2, he’s drawn to your character, Love Quinn, an aspiring chef. He seems to really go for creative types.

**Pedretti:** Seemingly. He’s definitely drawn to women who seem to have their own goals and ambitions. Which is a good quality, I guess. Sure, aside from the pesky psychopath thing. Right.

**Newsday:** How are your own skills in the kitchen? Are you much of a chef?

**Pedretti:** Definitely. I love to cook. I spent a lot of time in high school cooking instead of doing my homework.

**Newsday:** What’s your go-to dish?

**Pedretti:** I think pasta tends to warm people’s hearts, you know? I put a lot of love into making pasta. But I like to try new things, too.

**Newsday:** You’re getting to be an old pro when it comes to horror stories and thrillers. Do you like to watch those kinds of tales?

**Pedretti:** Not really. Most of my life I’ve avoided that. I find life scary enough. I’m an actor. (She laughs.) I’m already really sensitive, I’ve gotta admit.

**Newsday:** I’m partial to the classics, like “The Shining” and “Poltergeist.” And I have a special place in my heart for “The Amityville Horror” because my grandparents actually lived in Amityville.

**Pedretti:** Oh, wow! That’s so cool. So much of my experience with horror growing up was with kids trying to get everybody to go to the basement to watch a movie to see who could handle it the most.

**Newsday:** Like a slasher pic?

**Pedretti:** Yeah. Those movies are all jump-scares. They mean a lot to some people, but it’s never been my cup of tea.

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SERIOUSLY THINK IF LIBRARIES LENT OUT CARS INSSTEAD OF BOOKS AND MEDIA.

NOW THAT THE NETWORK INSTALLATION IS HALF-DONE, I HAVE YOU IDIOTS RIGHT WHERE I WANT YOU.

IT'S TOO LATE FOR YOU TO GET A NEW VENDOR, SO I'LL BE PRICE-GOUGING YOU ON UPGRADES YOU DON'T EVEN KNOW YOU WOULD NEED.

WHY ARE YOU TELLING US THIS?! IT MAKES IT MORE FUN FOR ME.

I PUT THAT DOWN AS RESISTIVME. ON AND I THAT ASSUMES WE DON'T BLOW OURSELVES UP FIRST.

OKAY, IT'S TIME TO GIVE PEOPLE THIS TEST FOR WHETHER THEY'RE AN OPTIMIST OR A PESSIMIST.

DO YOU SEE THIS GLASS AS HALF-FULL OR HALF-EMPTY?

I GUESS I SEE IT AS NOT MATTERING BECAUSE ONE DAY WE ALL DIE AND ARE FORGOTTEN AND EVERYTHING ON EARTH IS DESTROYED WHEN THE SUN EXPANDS.

PAGES "TREASURE" HAVE BEEN REMOVED.

Frazz

Dilbert

Pearls Before Swine

Non Sequitur

Candorville

Carpe Diem

Beetle Bailey

Bizarro
Trump broke no laws when he fired Vindman

By Jonathan Turley
Special to The Washington Post

Just because you’re paranoid doesn’t mean they aren’t after you. As President Donald Trump, from the fictional Capt. John Yossarian in Joseph Heller’s satiric novel “Catch-22” could well have come from President Donald John Vindman and Joseph, twin siblings, two impeachment witnesses and a third man, the twin brother of one of the witnesses, Vindman and Sondland were reportedly planning to leave the White House after they were unceremoniously escorted out of the White House. Moreover, the removal of Vindman’s twin brother, who is a military officer and a member of the National Security Council for Europe, Vindman was wrong, they are both legal and not unprecedented.

Various experts, such as CNN legal analyst, ^.1. +81-42.552.2511 ext. 88380; DSN (315)227.7380

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Editorial Staff

Wednesday, February 13, 2020

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Ernie Gates

The Stars and Stripes ombudsman protects the free flow of news and information, reports any attempts by the military or any other authority to undermine the newspaper’s independence. The ombudsman also responds to concerns and questions from readers, and monitors coverage for fairness, accuracy, timeliness and balance. The ombudsman welcomes comments from readers, and can be contacted by email at ombudsman@stripes.com, or by phone at (703) 226-8060.

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Wint alleged to Texas (AHL) on a conditioning assignment.

Yannick Weber during a Feb. 10 game.

Roussel $5,000 for slashing Nashville D

assigned to senior vice president of hockey operations.

Howard pass game coordinator/defensive line coach.

Brunson assistant coach.

LHP Manny Banuelos, LHP Wei-Yin Chen to minor league contracts.

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DC 1-0 1.000 23 3

New York 1-0 1.000 23 3

Tampa Bay 0-1 0.000 23 3

W Pct.

Houston 1.000 19 5

Los Angeles 0.500 19 31

Saturday’s games

DC vs. Tampa Bay

New York vs. Detroit

Tampa Bay vs. Los Angeles

Saturday, Feb. 15

New York vs. Dallas

Tampa Bay at Seattle

Dallas vs. Los Angeles

Wednesday’s transactions

BASEBALL

Amos Tuckers

BALTIMORE ORIOLES — Claimed INF Ramon Contreras from St. Louis. Assigned INF Pet Vakalis out to minor league.

BOSTON RED SOX — Promoted bench coach Ben Roberts to interim manager. Signed C Juan Centeno and OF Ceser Puig to minor league deals.

SEATTLE MARINERS — Agreed to terms with RHPs Yusei Kikuchi and Yovani Gallardo. Chosen OFs Mark Canha and Jose Ferreira to senior vice president.

TENNESSEE Volunteers — Promoted Burke Norton and Grinding Lewis to vice president of both the Titans and Nissan Stadium.

National Hockey League

NHL: Friday.

Finnish forward F Antoine Roikee $5,000 for slashing Dallas D Hanstam Wobbe during a Feb. 18 game.

DALLAS STARS — Signed D Taylor Fedoruk to a conditioning assignment.

DETOIT RED WINGS — Assigned F Tomas Hertko and Givi Smirnov to the minor league.

NEW ENGLAND PATRIOTS — Signed DB Logan Lovullo to a minor league contract.

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Tuesday’s transactions

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Tennis

U.S. Open

Saturday’s games

Women’s Singles

No. 1 Ashleigh Barty, Australia, def. No. 16 Paula Badosa, Spain, 6-3, 6-1.

Purse: $575,320

Men’s Singles

Jordan Thompson, Australia, def. Ivo Karlovic, Croatia, 6-4, 6-3, 6-3.

Purse: $391,960

Women’s Doubles

Kwoon Soon Woo, South Korea, and Go Soeda, Japan, 6-4, 6-3.

Purse: $319,904

Men’s Doubles

Pepo Lorenzo, Italy, and Daniello Petrovic, Serbia, 6-4, 6-4.

Purse: $212,940

Men’s Doubles


Purse: $151,904

Rippe assigned the woman she needed to shower before driving her back to her home.

We are aware that two of our players have been arrested and criminally charged.

Ohio State spokesman Ben Johnson said in a statement to the Associated Press: “The players have been suspended from all activities involving the football program. We will share more information when available.”

Rippe is a 6-foot-1, 185-pound cornerback entering his senior season. Ohio State’s top-5 football program, while a W-19, 187-pound redshirt senior safety, according to court documents, is the women’s basketball team.

Sources: Spartans hire Buffs’ Tucker

By LARRY LAGE

Associated Press

EAST LANSING, Mich. — Mel Tucker has agreed to lead Michigan State after making a host of personnel changes according to two people familiar with the decision.

Tucker will replace the school’s all-time winningest coach, who retired the day before the announcement.

One person said the school’s governing board scheduled a meeting later in the day to approve the hire.

Tucker succeeds Mark Dantonio, the school’s all-time winningest coach, who retired last month.

Tucker was also an assistant coach at Ohio State as a defensive backs coach when it won a national title in 2014 under Urban Meyer.

He will be the first head coach for Tucker in the Big Ten since he was an assistant at Michigan under Lloyd Carr from 1997-2004.

Tucker has ties to Michigan State because he was a graduate assistant at the school under Nick Saban in the late 1990s.

“My known Mel for well over 20 years and he is one of the brightest coaches in our profession,” said Saban, who was getting a guy with a great personal character, who knows college football, who can win on the field, and who does it with a tremendous amount of enthusiasm and positive energy.”

After being an NFL defensive coordinator in Cleveland, Jackson- ville and Chicago, Tucker became the assistant coach under Saban at Alabama in 2015. He spent only one season with the Crimson Tide, helping them win a national title, before the Bulldogs hired him away. He also was the interim head coach for Jack- sonville over the final five games in 2011 after Jack Del Rio was fired.

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Sources: Spartans hire Buffs’ Tucker

By LARRY LAGE

Associated Press
PITTSBURGH — The puck ended up on Yanni Gourde’s stick and for a split second, the only thing the Tampa Bay Lightning forward felt was a sense of panic.

It passed. It always does these days for the NHL’s hottest team. Gourde collected Brayden Point’s cross-ice feed and ripped a shot to the short side over the right arm of Pittsburgh goaltender Matt Murray to give the Lightning a 2-1 overtime victory Tuesday night. The win was Tampa Bay’s eighth straight and 20th in its last 23 games and came at the end of a draining back-to-back to start that ended with an emotional overtime triumph in Columbus on Monday.

Barely 24 hours later, the Lightning found a way again despite playing the third period and the extra session without leading scorer Nikita Kucherov, and that was one of the guttier ones I’ve seen.

Evgeni Malkin got his 18th goal for the Penguins and Durrell Helm finished with 36 saves but didn’t get his right arm high enough fast enough to get a piece of Gourde’s winner. It went in at 15:26 in his debut with Pittsburgh after being acquired in a trade with Minnesota on Monday.

The Penguins, who have been searching for a replacement for injured All-Star forward Jake Guentzel, moved aggressively to land Zucker. Pittsburgh sent forwards Frank Vatrano and Brett Connolly and a second-round pick to the Devils, who saw their season-and first since Nov. 23.

Gourde admitted he thought about going over Murray’s glove but sensed an opening up high.

The Lightning’s 38th and last shot ended with the goal lamp blinking red as Gourde’s team-mates poured over the boards in celebration.

“It was a huge team effort and it really felt great to score that goal at the end there, finally,” Gourde said.

Mikhail Sergachev scored his ninth goal and Andrei Vasilevskiy stopped 35 shots for Tampa Bay, which drew within one point of Atlantic Division leader Boston for the best record in the NHL.

“That was definitely a mash tonight,” Lightning coach Jon Cooper said. “A huge league to win in, especially against a team as talented as that. But that was one of the guttery ones I’ve seen.”

Benn scored the game’s first goal in the first period, added a power-play tally in the second and was awarded his third with 1:19 to play when he was pulled down on the way to shooting at an empty net.

Avalanche 3, Senators 0: Mikko Rantanen scored in the first period following a terrific twirl move, Philipp Grubauer stopped 34 shots for his second shutout of the season and Colorado blanked Ottawa. Valeri Nichushkin scored a power-play goal in the third for the Avalanche, who’ve won five straight.

Oilers 5, Blackhawks 3: Leon Draisaitl had a goal and three assists,ailer Yamamoto scored twice and host Edmonton won without captain Connor McDavid in the lineup.

Riley Sheahan and Ryan Nugent-Hopkins also scored for the Oilers (30-20-6), who will be without McDavid for two to three weeks because of a left quadriceps injury.
Blues’ Bouwmeester has cardiac incident, teams postpone game

BY JOE REEDY
Associated Press

ANAHEIM, Calif. — St. Louis defenseman Jay Bouwmeester was conscious and alert, Blues general manager Doug Armstrong said Bouwmeester was awake, alert and moving his arms and legs as he was transported from the arena.

The teams postponed the rest of Tuesday’s game, to be made up at a later date.

The Blues were supposed to fly to Las Vegas, where they are scheduled to play Thursday, but remained in Southern California overnight.

“Thankfully, with the quick response of our medical trainers, Anaheim medical trainers and their team physicians, they were able to stabilize Jay,” Armstrong said.

The hockey community sent tweets of support as word of the episode spread throughout the NHL.

Washington Capitals forward Anders Lee, a teammate T.J. Oshie wrote “Praying for Bo!” while Vancouver Canucks center Jay Beagle tweeted “Praying for Bo!”

Teammates Vincent Dunn and Alex Pietrangelo immediately wrote “Praying for Bo!” while teammates and their fathers remained at the arena awaiting updates.

Bouwmeester’s father was at the game as part of the team’s annual Dads Trip. He went with his son to the hospital while teammates and their fathers remained at the arena awaiting updates.

Ducks and Blues players gathered to see what was wrong before Bouwmeester was taken away. The teams then went to their dressing rooms, and the game was called off a few minutes later tied at 1.

Players from both teams met for hugs and well-wishes after changing out of their gear.

The last player to collapse on an NHL bench was Dallas forward Rich Peverley in 2014. Peverley had an irregular heartbeat, and the quick response of emergency officials made sure he was OK.

The NHL has pages of emergency medical standards that spell out in specific detail that at least two doctors must be in attendance for every game and one must be within 50 feet of the bench. A defibrillator, which was used when Detroit’s Jiri Fischer collapsed in 2005, must be available, along with a triage room and ambulances.

Bouwmeester is in his 17th NHL season and has for that time been known for his strong skating and conditioning. He helped the Bruins win the Stanley Cup last season and won an Olympic gold medal with Canada in 2014.

Associated Press

HOUUSTON — James Harden scored 42 points, Russell Westbrook had 36 and the Houston Rockets stopped Boston’s seven-game win streak with a 116-105 victory over the Celtics on Tuesday night.

Houston broke it open with a 15-2 run that made it 116-98 with about two minutes left. Harden scored six points during the decisive stretch, and Daniel House had five.

Boston had two turnovers and missed numerous shots to allow the Rockets to turn the close game into a one where coach Mike D’Antoni cleared the bench for the last minute with the game well in hand.

Harden had eight rebounds and seven assists, and Westbrook finished with 10 rebounds and five assists. “Harden was great ... and Westbrook was great,” Boston coach Brad Stevens said. “Those guys are two of the best in the world and they showed it again tonight.”

Houston had 20 points in the Celtics’ first loss since Jan. 26.

76ers 110, Clippers 103: Ben Simmons had 26 points, 12 rebounds and 10 assists, pushing the host Sixers to the win.

Joel Embiid also scored 26 points and Tobias Harris added 17 points and 12 boards for Philadelphia, which has the NBA’s best home record at 25-2. Joel Richard-son scored 17 of his 21 points in the fourth quarter.

Kawhi Leonard led Los Ange-les with 30 points, and reserve Landry Shamet scored 19 against his former team.

Richardson nailed his third three-pointer of the quarter to give the Sixers a 102-94 lead with 4:44 left. Then he scored on a driving left-handed layup and made the free throw to complete the three-point play, extending the lead to 11.

Pelicans 138, Trail Blazers 117: Zion Williamson scored a season-high 31 points, powering host New Orleans to the victory.

Playing 26 minutes in just his ninth NBA game, William-son used his 6-foot-6, 285-pound frame, quick feet and explosive vertical to have his way with every defender Portland tried against him.

Jr. Rock led 20 and Josh Hart had 17 points for the Peli-cans, who trailed by as many as 16 in the first quarter before tak-ing command en route to a three straight victory.

Trail Blazers star Damian Lillard scored 20 points — less than half of his 42-point average in his previous 10 games.

Wizards 126, Bulls 114: Bradley Beal scored 30 points, and host Washington held off Zach LaVine and Chicago for the victory.

Rui Hachimura added 20 points for the Wizards, who won for the fourth time in six games.

LaVine scored 19 of his 41 points in the fourth quarter as the Bulls whittled an 18-point deficit down to six points.

Spurs 114, Thunder 106: LaMarcus Aldridge had 25 points and 14 rebounds, and the San Antonio Spurs won at Oklahoma City to stop a five-game slide.

Dejounte Murray also scored 25 points for the Spurs, who had dropped eight of 10 overall. Patty Mills had 20 points, and fellow reserve Derrick White finished with 17. Led by Aldridge and Murray, San Antonio made 25 of 27 foul shots.

Rockets end Celtics’ streak as Harden scores 42 points

NBA scoreboard

NBA roundup
Unbeaten Aztecs win Mountain West title

San Diego State improves to 25-0 with its walloping of New Mexico

Associated Press

San DIEGO — The San Diego State Aztecs won the Mountain West Conference championship, showered with confetti, cut down a net at Viejas Arena, doused coach Brian Dutcher with Gatorade and then reset their goals.

Just keep winning.

Junior forward Matt Mitchell had 22 points and 12 rebounds for his first career double-double and scored his 1,000th point for No. 4 San Diego State, which beat New Mexico 82-59 Tuesday night to win the MWC title and remain the nation’s only undefeated team at 25-0.

“The hardest thing in basketball, obviously other than winning a Final Four, is winning a regular-season conference title, because you have to do it over the whole season,” Dutcher said. “To have the title outright already with four games to play is an incredible accomplishment.

“I told them in the locker room, now we have to get greedy,” said Dutcher, who has won a Final Four, as Steve Fisher’s assistant at Michigan in 1989. “We’ve got to try to win them all. It won’t be easy. Four really hard games to go, but now that we have the title, we have to have another goal, and that goal has to be to have a perfect season. That will be the next step, to try to finish with a perfect season.”

Yanni Wetzell added 20 points and nine rebounds for the Aztecs (25-0, 14-0 MWC), who clinched at least a share of the title in the first half when Utah State beat Colorado State, then won it outright with a suffocating defense that held New Mexico (17-9, 6-7) to 26 points in the second half.

Malachi Flynn had 15 points and Jasha-Beal Schakel scored 11 for SDSU.

Mitchell, a junior forward from Riverside, scored his 1,000th career point on a bank shot early in the second half. That was part of a 9-2 run that expanded SDSU’s 35-33 halftime lead to 43-35. Mitchell also made a layup on a nice spin move, Flynn hit a jumper and Schakel made a three-pointer.

“We definitely went into the locker and as a team told each other we needed to pick it up and be better,” Mitchell said. “We came out in the second half and I think we definitely wanted this tonight and we wanted to win this on our home court and we came out and showed that in the second half.”

It was a big night for Mitchell. He said surpassing 1,000 points was “special to me because I was able to not only reach 1,000, but reach it on a night we had a banner and win the conference. I definitely will cherish tonight, but tomorrow I have to let it go and move on to the next four games we have.”

San Diego State junior forward Matt Mitchell had 22 points to reach 1,000 for his career, surpassing Kawhi Leonard for the school’s all-time scoring record.

1,000

San Diego State

By the numbers

San Diego State improves to 25-0 with its walloping of New Mexico

Average number of points by which San Diego State has outscored opponents this season, behind only Gonzaga’s margin of 21.6.

.387

Three-point shooting percentage for the Aztecs, tops in the Mountain West Conference.

17.6

Average number of points per game the Aztecs have scored in conference games.

No. 6 Dayton 81, Rhode Island 70

OBI Toppin scored 22 points and led an opening 17-point spurt as the host Flyers dominated a matchup of the Toppin brothers and the Atlantic 10’s top teams.

The teams brought double-digit winning streaks into a chippy game that included seven technical fouls. Dayton (22-2, 11-0) got the better of it in every way, winning its 13th in a row. Toppin had a double-double with 10 points and 10 rebounds. Jalen Crutcher scored 21 points, and Trey Landers matched his career high with 20 points.

Fatts Russell had 19 points for the Rams (18-6, 10-2), who had a 10-game winning streak snapped. Freshman Jacob Toppin had four points.

No. 9 Maryland 72, Nebraska 70

Jalen Smith had 16 points and 13 rebounds, Eric Ayala scored 16 points and the host Terrapins extended their winning streak to seven games and remain alone atop the Big Ten.

After Maryland (20-4, 10-3) let a 14-point lead dwindle to 71-70, Smith blocked a shot and made a free throw on the other end to clinch it.

Donata Scott had 10 points and 10 rebounds for the Terps, and Anthony Cowan Jr. totaled 13 points and 10 assists. It was the first time since 2001 that three Maryland players registered double-doubles in the same game.

Haanif Cheatham scored 20 and Thorir Thorbjornarson added 15 for the Huskers (7-17, 2-11), who have lost nine straight and are 0-9 on the road.

No. 12 Kentucky 78, Vanderbilt 64

Tyrese Maxey scored 25 points and the visiting Wildcats rallied from their biggest half-time deficit of the season.

Kentucky (19-5, 9-2) kept a piece of the lead atop the Southeastern Conference standings with Auburn and LSU. The Wildcats also won their eighth straight over the Commodores, though this was the fifth time in this streak that they’ve had to rally from a double-digit deficit. This time, they trailed by 14 during the first half and were down 35-27 at halftime.

Vanderbilt (9-15, 1-10) was looking to make Kentucky the second straight ranked team to come into Memorial Gym and lose within the past week after the Commodores upset then-No. 18 LSU.

No. 13 Penn State 88, Purdue 76

Mike Watkins matched his season high with 19 points and Seth Lundy added a career-high 18 to lift the visiting Nittany Lions.

Penn State (19-5, 9-4 Big Ten) made a season-high 14 three-pointers for its seventh consecutive victory that also snapped a nine-game losing streak in the series. It was the Nittany Lions’ first win at Mackey Arena since Feb. 18, 2006.

Trevion Williams finished with 17 points and 10 rebounds to lead the Boilermakers (14-11, 7-7), who had their three-game winning streak end.

Michigan State 70, No. 22 Illinois 69

All-Star guard Ayo Dosunmu crumbled to the floor clutching his left knee as the Spartans’ Xavier Tillman threw down a huge dunk at the buzzer to lift his team to a road win.

The severity of Dosunmu’s injury wasn’t immediately made available. The Illini’s leading scorer had 17 points Tuesday and is averaging 13.8 per game.

Rocket Watts led Michigan State (17-8, 9-5 Big Ten) with 21 points, and Tillman had 17. Aaron Henry and Cassius Winston added 13 and 12, respectively.

Andres Feliz scored 15 points and Kofi Cockburn added 11 for Illinois (16-8, 8-5).

No. 25 LSU 82, Missouri 78

Darius Days scored seven of his 20 points in the final five minutes as host LSU rallied to beat Missouri.

LSU (18-6, 9-2 Southeastern Conference) trailed by eight points midway through the second half before taking the lead for good at 72-69 on Days’ three-pointer with 4:43 remaining. Missouri (11-13, 3-8) stayed close over the final minutes.

Boise State 74, Air Force 57

Justinian Jessup scored 18 points, including his team’s first four-point play of the season, and Boise State won its 11th consecutive home game.
Browns’ Garrett reinstated by NFL

By Tom Withers
Associated Press

CLEVELAND — Myles Garre-
tt is allowed to play and chase
quarterback Mason Rudolph with a helmet during a game on Nov.
14, 2019. Garrett was suspended indefinitely after the incident, but
he was reinstated by the league on Wednesday.

There were no updates in the incident involving Pittsburgh QB Mason Rudolph, who went 2-4 without
Garrett and that’s a big relief as the team
went into the bye week.

Browns defensive end Myles Garrett, right, hits Steelers

The league lifted its ban
Wednesday on Garrett, who
ripped off Rudolph’s helmet and
smashed him over the head with
his Twitter account of a scene
from the film “John Wick” with
the subtitle: “But now yeah, I’m
THINKING I’M BACK!!!

Garrett is cleared to return to
his mother by Memphis coach Penny Hardaway

Garrett’s suspension is the lon-
gest for a single game incident in
league history. Tennessee’s Albert
Haynesworth was suspended five
games for stomping on a player’s
helmet-less head in 2006.

Garrett cited to his mother by Memphis coach Penny Hardaway

Garrett appealed his ban and
told independent official James
Thrash during his hearing that
Rudolph had used a slur dur-
ing their skirmish. However
Thrash upheld the decision and
Garrett was done for the season.

The league also suspended Steel-
er defensive lineman Larry Ogun-
jobi was suspended one game.

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The next step is to see what
the NCAA is capable of presenting
to us in April.

Sen. Jerry Moran, a Kansas Republican and the chairman of the Subcommittee on Manufacturing,
Trade, and Consumer Protection, said he was notinclined to act until after the NCAA reveals its new rules.

“The reality is, you’re not going to change the re-
sponsor — and that letting players earn endorse-
money won’t create the major problems the
new rules.

Emmert did not fully escape lawmakers’ anger at
Sen. Marsha Blackburn, a Tennessee Republican,
excoriated Emmert for the NCAA’s handling of sex-
ual violence against women. She also noted the case
Emanuel, but it would give some
students an unfair recruiting advantage and open the
door to sponsorship arrangements being used as a
cover for discrimination. "From a recruiting standpoint, we’ll be able to appeal their concern that “guardrails” are needed on en-
dorsement for athletes to avoid destroying col-
lege sports as we know it.

NCAA presses Senate for ‘guardrails’ on athlete pay

Sen. Marsha Blackburn, a Tennessee Republican, xenicated Emmert for the NCAA’s handling of sex-
ual violence against women. She also noted the case
of three football players who were convicted of sexual
abuse while still enrolled in school after he was suspended over $11,500 given
to his mother by Memphis coach Penny Hardaway
to help cover the athletes’ moving expenses. Hardaway gave the money before he was Memphis’ coach.

Blackburn said the NCAA’s lack of consistency and transparency in the Wiseman case had eroded
trust in the organization’s ability to handle issues of player benefits.

“I think a question that must be going through a lot of minds of student-athletes and their parents is,
how in the world are they going to be able to trust you to get this right?” Blackburn said.

F1 cancels Chinese GP

Race was to be in April; organizers unsure if it will be rescheduled

By Rob Harris
Associated Press

LONDON — Formula One orga-
nizers on Wednesday postponed the Chinese Grand Prix due to the outbreak of coronavirus (COVID-19 by the World Health Organization.

One of 22 races on the F1 calen-
dar for 2020, the Chinese Grand Prix was due to be staged on April 19.

The decision to postpone the race was taken after a request from the Shanghai promoter to "ensure the health and safety of the travelling staff, competitors and fans," F1 said in a statement.

Motor sport officials from F1’s governing body, the FIA, Chinese organizers and teams will remain in discussions about whether the race can be rearranged.

“ ‘All parties will take the appro-
priate amount of time to study the unique situation and dates for the grand prix later in the year should the situation im-
prove," F1 said.

Other virus-enforced cancel-
lations or postponements range from soccer and Olympic qualify-
ing, to flights and the Hong Kong Grand Prix in October.

The LPGA canceled the Honda
LPGA Thailand, scheduled for Feb.
20-23, and the HSBC Women’s
Walongham in Singapore, the
following week.

It previously postponed the Mexican GP, a PGA on Hainan Island in China.

The Tokyo Olympics open on
July 24 and organizers have re-
husted the Games will not be
canceled or postponed. But many Olympic qualifying events were postponed with China not to travel outside the country.

The Chinese men’s soccer team was quarantined in their hotel for almost two weeks after arriving in Australia for the Asian qualifying tournament for the Olympics.

LPGA presses Senate for ‘guardrails’ on athlete pay

Sen. Jerry Moran, a Kansas Republican and the chairman of the Subcommittee on Manufacturing,
Trade, and Consumer Protection, said he was notinclined to act until after the NCAA reveals its new rules.

“We wish Congress was in a posi tion to be ab le to
to some extent to present to Congress the ability to do that is, that’s a challenge," Moran said in an inter-
view after the hearing. “The next step is to see what
the NCAA is capable of presenting to us in April.”

NCAA critics believe there is plenty of evidence that recruiting is already corrupt — pointing in part to the federal criminal case involving shoe com-
pas paying basketball players to attend schools they sponsor — and that letting players earn endorse-
money won’t create the major problems the
new rules.

The power conferences have advantages and the NCAA was not
the point in the Senate hearing. "The reality is, you’re not going to change the recruiting by limiting the players’ opportunities,

Huma said once states start granting players en-
dorsement rights, Congress would not be inclined to
take those rights away, “ and we’ll have an opportu-
nity to witness the fact that NCAA sports will still be
strong and every team will be able to

There was bipartisan agreement among the sena-
ators at the hearing that athletes should have access to endorsement opportunities and that some regula-
tions are necessary.

Emmert did not fully escape lawmakers’ anger at
the system he presides over.

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ual violence against women. She also noted the case
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The Chinese men’s soccer team was quarantined in their hotel for almost two weeks after arriving in Australia for the Asian qualifying tournament for the Olympics.
The pitcher left the Astros for a 9-year $324 million contract.

Red Sox give Roenicke interim manager's tag

By Jimmy Golen

Associated Press

FORT MYERS, Fla. — It took Ron Roenicke almost five years to get another chance as a major league manager.

He'll need to wait at least until next week for "permanency."

The Red Sox made Roenicke their interim manager Tuesday, promoting the former Brewers skipper to replace Alex Cora on the day Boston's pitchers and catchers reported for the start of spring training.

Although there is no expiration date on Roenicke's tenure, the interim tag will stay until Major League Baseball completes its investigation into whether the Red Sox engaged in illegal sign-stealing during their 2018 World Series championship season. If the probe clears Roenicke, who has denied being part of any rules violations, he is expected to stay.

"We felt that naming Ron our interim manager was the best way to respect the investigation that's ongoing into our 2018 club. But we feel very strongly about Ron's ability to lead this group and how well-suited he is for this task," Chief Baseball Officer Chaim Bloom said in a news conference on the eve of the team's first formal workout.

"We have no reason to think that there is anything that would cause an adverse result for Ron in this investigation," Bloom said. "We're going to respect the ongoing investigation and we'll address permanency once it's complete."

Just one year after winning the World Series in his first season in Boston, Cora was let go when Commissioner Rob Manfred named him as a ring-leader behind the Astros' 2017 illegal sign-stealing. The Red Sox have maintained that there was no similar scheme after Cora took over in Boston the next year.

Manfred said last week that he hoped to have the Red Sox investigation completed before the start of spring training. But a person with knowledge of the probe said Tuesday the investigation will continue at least into next week. The person spoke on the condition of anonymity because there was no formal announcement.

Red Sox pitchers and catchers reported Tuesday and had their first workout Wednesday. Rather than open spring training without a manager, the team gave the job to Roenicke — for now.

Roenicke, 63, takes over a team that is dealing with the fallout not only from the cheating investigation but also the salary dump of onetime AL MVP Mookie Betts and 2012 Cy Young winner David Price.

After winning a franchise-record 108 regular-season games and the World Series in 2018, the Red Sox missed the playoffs for the first time since 2013.

"We're very disappointed — as all these players are — in what happened last year," Roenicke said. "And our focus is to try to get back in the playoffs, and seeing what happens after that."

Roenicke spent five years as the Brewers manager from 2010-15, winning 96 games and the NL Central title in his first season and finishing as runner-up for NL manager of the year. In all, he led Milwaukee to a 342-331 record in five seasons.

Ron Roenicke, right, speaks as Red Sox Chief Baseball Officer Chaim Bloom looks on after being after Roenicke was named interim manager on Tuesday, in Fort Myers, Fla. Roenicke takes over for Alex Cora.

Catcher Christian Vazquez was among the Red Sox pitchers and catchers who reported for spring training Tuesday in Fort Myers, Fla.

‘Permanency’ put on hold

FROM BACK PAGE

he went public in an interview with The Athletic. He took down 10% of major league managers and became for some an MVP — Most Virtuous Player.

Houston manager AJ Hinch and general manager Jeff Luhnow were suspended for the season by Major League Baseball on Jan. 13, and the pair were fired by the Astros later that day. Manfred's conclusions led to the departures of Boston manager Alex Cora, the Astros' bench coach in 2017, and new New York Mets manager Carlos Beltran, Houston's senior player during the title run.

A third of the teams changed managers, including the Mets twice. Milwaukee's Craig Counsell, hired in May 2015, already is the National League's senior skipper. New faces include Dusty Baker (Astros), Joe Girardi (Phillies), Gabe Kapler (Giants), Joe Maddon (Angels), Mike Matheny (Royals), Luis Rojas (Mets), David Ross (Cubs), Derek Shelton (Pirates), Jayce Tingler (Padres) and Ron Roenicke (Red Sox).

Baker, at 70 the oldest big league manager, is tasked with keeping the Astros on track to become the first team to win 100 or more games in four straight seasons. He also will try to steady a core branded as villains by players and fans in other cities.

"You got to go forward and make sure that it doesn't happen again," Baker said. "It certainly is not going to happen on my watch here, and I don't foresee it happening ever again because this has been an embarrassment for a lot of people."

Cora's punishment was delayed by Manfred pending MLB's investigation into the Red Sox, which could conclude this week. Boston's turmoil extended to the investigation but also the salary dump of onetime AL MVP Mookie Betts and 2012 Cy Young winner David Price.

"It was the best way to respect the investigation that's underway once it's complete."

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Gonzalez ‘remorseful’ for sign stealing

Becomes first batter from 2017 Astros team to publicly apologize

Associated Press

FORT MYERS, Fla. — Marwin Gonzalez became the first batter from the 2017 Houston Astros team to win the World Series but was later discovered to have used electronic means to steal catchers’ signs. Gonzalez hit .303 with 23 home runs and 90 RBIs in 134 games, with an OPS (.907) that was 148 points better than any other season of his eight-year career.

DID YOU KNOW?

Minnesota Twins utility player Marwin Gonzalez had a career year in 2017, when he was a member of the Houston Astros team that became the first batter from 2017 to win the World Series.

Fla. As for whether the Astros would have won the title without the assistance of the sign-stealing system, featuring outfield video cameras and trash can banging: “You’re never going to know. That was a great team. Great guys, too. Beside everything that happened, I know for a fact that they’re great guys, but it’s hard to answer that question,” Gonzalez said.

The Houston Astros’ Marwin Gonzalez throws his bat after striking out against Cleveland Indians starting pitcher Carlos Carrasco during the fifth inning of a game in Cleveland on May 26, 2018.

The Angels are targeting mid-May for Ohtani’s return to the big-league mound, general manager Billy Eppler revealed Tuesday while pitchers and catchers reported to Tempe Diablo Stadium.

Ohtani will be available as a designated hitter on opening day, but he will take days away from the big-league team to make rehab pitching starts in the minors.

Eppler and Ohtani have detailed plans for the two-way star’s final comeback from Tommy John surgery and subsequent offseason knee surgery, which pushing back his pitching progress. Maddon is on board with the plans, but he also intends to make decisions by speaking face-to-face with Ohtani.

“I think patience is a key word with all of this,” Maddon said. “I’ve been in development my whole life, so when you’re trying to develop a major league talent like him here, coming off the injury situations that he’s had, it’s important to be very patient, and I am.”

“Maddon is living in the moment and planning for the future. But his return to the Angels has still brought on waves of memories, both here in Tempe and back in Southern California, where he and his wife will settle back into the house they left behind in Long Beach.

Maddon plans to use spring training as a chance to find a balance between the past and the present so he can focus on the Angels’ future.
BREAKING NEWS

Blues’ Bouwmeester collapses on bench

Two players arrested
Riep, Wint accused of rape, kidnapping » College football, Page 17

SPORTS

SPRING TRAINING

Removing the STAIN

As workouts begin, baseball tries to turn page on scandal

BY RONALD BLUM
Associated Press

ORLANDO, Fla. — Baseball returns to the field this week when pitchers, catchers and cheaters report to spring training.

Fans await the annual sunny scenes of favorites stretching on bright green grass in Florida and Arizona.

This year the players bring along dark clouds of scandal — the 2017 World Series champion Houston Astros have been tainted by their sign-stealing scam and the 2018 champion Boston Red Sox have been accused of similar subversion.

Teams hope once workouts start, the stain will fade.

“I think those story lines will weave in and out, but that spring training is that juncture for individual fan bases to be optimistic about what the season ahead holds and it shifts back to that,” Toronto Blue Jays President Mark Shapiro said. “There’s a natural kind of rhythm to spring training that diverts to the positive stories.”

But first, confessions?

Some regard baseball’s blemish from sign stealing as vivid as the acne on the backs of steroids-swelled sluggers of the 1990s and early 2000s.

None of the current members of the Astros have publicly expressed contrition for breaking prohibitions against using a video camera to swipe signs from opposing catchers in 2017 and 2018. Baseball Commissioner Rob Manfred said spring training might be the appropriate time for a group mea culpa because fessing up individually during the offseason “could be sort of a treacherous road to go down.”

Former Astros pitcher Mike Fiers, now with Oakland, sparked the scandal in November when

SEE TURN ON PAGE 22

San Diego State clinches Mountain West
College basketball, Page 20

Blues’ Bouwmeester collapses on bench
NHL, Page 19