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Mattis visits top leaders in Afghanistan

By COREY DICKSTEIN

Stars and Stripes

KABUL, Afghanistan — Defense Secretary Jim Mattis will soon make a recommendation to President Donald Trump for an updated strategy in Afghanistan that could include deploying more American troops there after visiting Monday with top leaders in the war-torn country.

“I heard directly and at length from [US and Afghan officials] in order to provide my best assessment and advice as we go forward — advice to the President (Donald Trump), to the NATO Secretary-General (Jens Stoltenberg) and contributing nations, with whom I coordinate and collaborate,” Mattis said Monday at NATO headquarters in Kabul.

His recommendation could include sending “a few thousand” additional troops to Afghanistan that Army Gen. John Nicholson, the top American commander in the country, told lawmakers in February he needs to break a stalemate with the Taliban.

Mattis told reporters that the decisions have not been made. He said he owes “some degree

of confidentiality” to the White House, which ordered a review of the strategy in America’s longest war, before a decision is made.

Mattis’ visit Monday came just as Afghanistan’s defense minister and top military officer resigned in the wake of a deadly weekend Taliban attack on an Afghan army base.

The United States was not surprised by the resignations of Defense Minister Abdullah Habibi and Army Chief of Staff Qadam Shah Shahim, a senior U.S. military official said Monday. President Ashraf Ghani’s office announced the resignations via social media shortly before Mattis arrived on his previously undisclosed stop in Afghanistan’s capital.

Ghani had been weighing their removal since March, when Islamic State mounted an attack on a Kabul hospital that killed some 50 people, said the military official, who briefed reporters traveling with Mattis on the condition of anonymity.

The attack Friday on an Afghan base near Mazar-i-Sharif left 144 Afghan soldiers dead

and more than 60 others injured, the official said. The complex coordination and intelligence assessments indicate the Haqqani network was involved, the official added. Haqqani is a Pakistan-based terrorist group with connections to the Taliban.

The assault at the headquarters of the Afghan army’s 209th Corps, which appears to be the deadliest insurgent attack on an Afghan military installation, raises questions about the security forces’ ability to combat the Taliban. Pentagon officials have conceded the group has gained ground in several areas throughout the country in the past year.

Mattis said it also underscores the brutal nature of the insurgents the United States has fought for 16 years. “It shows why we stand with the people of this country against such heinous acts perpetrated by ... this barbaric enemy,” he said.

Friday’s attack alongside the March hospital assault are being seen as shocking intelligence and security failures, with many Afghans furious the military could have allowed militants to breach two heavily

guarded installations. Many Afghans called on the government to hold top officials accountable, and a demonstration has been planned for Tuesday in Kabul, according to local news and social media reports.

Afghan troops’ confidence in their leaders has been sapped by widespread corruption among officers, which has left front-line soldiers without ammunition and other supplies they need to hold off the Taliban, Nicholson has said.

The U.S. official said the top leaders’ resignations, alongside a reshuffling of four Army corps commanders, shows Ghani is committed to holding his defense leaders accountable for their shortcomings.

Nicholson on Monday reiterated his previous assessment of the war effort in Afghanistan as a stalemate. Additional troops could come from the U.S. military or a NATO partner nation, Pentagon officials have said.

The White House has not publicly addressed Nicholson’s request.

Stars and Stripes reporter E.B. Boyd contributed to this report.

US general suggests Russia arming Afghan Taliban

Associated Press

KABUL, Afghanistan — The United States must confront Russia for providing the Taliban with weapons, top U.S. military officials said Monday.

At a news conference with Defense Secretary Jim Mattis at his side, Gen. John Nicholson, the American commander in Afghanistan, wouldn’t provide specifics about Russia’s role in Afghanistan but said he would “not refute” that Moscow’s involvement includes giving weapons to the Taliban.

Earlier Monday, a senior U.S. military official told reporters in Kabul that Russia was giving the Taliban machine guns and other medium-weight weapons. The Taliban are using the weapons in Helmand, Kandahar and Uruzgan provinces, according to the official, who briefed journalists on intelligence information on condition of anonymity.

Russia denies it provides any such support to the Taliban. Russia says contacts are limited to safeguarding security and getting the hard-line religious fundamentalists to reconcile

with the government — which Washington has failed for years to advance. Russia also has promoted easing global sanctions on Taliban leaders who prove cooperative.

Asked about Russia’s activity in Afghanistan, where it fought a bloody war in the 1980s, Mattis alluded to increasing U.S. concerns.

“We’ll engage with Russia diplomatically,” Mattis said. “We’ll do so where we can, but we’re going to have to confront Russia where what they’re doing is contrary to international law or

denying the sovereignty of other countries.”

“For example,” Mattis told reporters in the Afghan capital, “any weapons being funneled here from a foreign country would be a violation of international law.”

Mattis met with President Ashraf Ghani and other senior government officials just hours after the nation’s defense minister and Army chief resigned over a massacre of more than 140 Afghan troops at a military base Friday.

Haley: US could strike N. Korea

Associated Press

WASHINGTON—The United States could strike North Korea if it attacks a U.S. military base or tests an intercontinental ballistic missile, President Donald Trump's U.N. ambassador said Monday.

In several television interviews, Nikki Haley praised China's involvement in trying to pressure North Korea to cease missile testing and its leader, Kim Jong Un, as unstable and paranoid.

Asked about the threshold for U.S. action, Haley told NBC's "Today Show" that "if you see him attack a military base, if you see some sort of interconti-

mental ballistic missile, then obviously we're going to do that."

Haley said the U.S. wasn't looking for a fight and wouldn't attack North Korea "unless he gives us reason to do something."

The Trump administration has been working to rally support of its efforts to pressure Pyongyang into abandoning its nuclear program and ending missile tests. Trump spoke to the leaders of China and Japan on Sunday to discuss the matter.

The White House said in a brief statement Monday that Trump and Chinese President Xi Jinping reaffirmed the "urgency of the threat posed by

North Korea." Trump has repeatedly promised that China will earn a better trade deal with the U.S. if it helps to exert pressure on its allied neighboring nation.

When asked what would happen if North Korea tests an intercontinental missile or nuclear device, Haley told NBC, "I think then the president steps in and decides what's going to happen."

Haley said the U.S. is working with China to pressure North Korea on the missile and nuclear testing and other issues, including the detention over the weekend of a U.S. citizen, bringing to three the number of Americans now being held there.

US-Israeli man indicted in bomb threats

Associated Press

JERUSALEM — Israel indicted an 18-year-old American-Israeli Jew on Monday for a wave of bomb threats against Jewish community centers in the United States that stoked fears of a rising wave of anti-Semitism.

Israel's Justice Ministry said the accused was charged at a district court in Tel Aviv in connection with thousands of cases of extortion, publishing false information that caused panic, computer offenses and money laundering.

On Friday, he was charged in federal court in Orlando, Fla., with 28 counts of making threatening calls and conveying false information to police.

Separately, he was charged with three more counts of cyberstalking in an indictment filed in federal court in Athens, Ga.

The Israeli indictment says that in addition to the Jewish centers, the accused also targeted airports, malls, police stations and Republican state Sen. Ernesto Lopez from Delaware. He also offered his intimidation services over the internet in return for compensation in Bitcoin.

Israel has not identified the suspect because he was a minor when he committed the alleged offenses in the country. The American indictment identified him as Michael Ron David Kadar. Kadar was arrested last month after a trans-Atlantic investigation with the FBI and other international law enforcement agencies.

U.S. Jewish groups welcomed the breakthrough in the case, which had drawn condemnation from President Donald Trump. Since Jan. 9, there have been more than 150 bomb threats against Jewish community centers and day schools in 37 U.S. states and two Canadian provinces, according to the Anti-Defamation League.

China calls for restraint in region

BY KIM GAMEL
AND YOO KYONG CHANG
Stars and Stripes

SEOUL, South Korea — Chinese President Xi Jinping called for restraint Monday as North Korea threatened to sink a U.S. aircraft carrier headed toward the divided peninsula amid fears the communist state will conduct another nuclear or missile test to mark its army day.

President Donald Trump spoke with Xi and Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe by telephone Monday to discuss the tense standoff over the North's nuclear weapons program.

Pyongyang frequently conducts what Washington and Seoul call provocations to mark major anniversaries, although it did not carry out a sixth nuclear test as many had expected last week during April 15 celebrations for its late founding father, Kim Il Sung's birthday.

Instead, it staged a massive military parade on that occasion, then tried to launch a missile the following day. The test failed, but the United States and South Korea have been on alert for another effort on Tuesday, when Pyongyang will celebrate its military foundation day.

The USS Carl Vinson also

was closer to the peninsula after confusion and misinformation about its whereabouts last week. The aircraft carrier strike group began joint drills with Japanese destroyers in the western Pacific Ocean this past weekend and was expected to head north after that.

Vice President Mike Pence told reporters during a visit to Australia on Saturday that the aircraft carrier and its accompanying warships will be in the waters off the peninsula's east coast "in a matter of days, before the end of this month." He gave no other details.

The strike group has transferred from the San Diego-based 3rd Fleet's command to the Japan-headquartered 7th Fleet's command, Navy officials said Monday.

North Korea threatened to strike the carrier, saying it was ready to show its "military force" as well.

"Our revolutionary armed forces are fully ready for combat that could sink a U.S. nuclear aircraft carrier with a single strike," the official newspaper Rodong Sinmun said Sunday in a commentary.

That commentary was on the inside pages. Rodong Sinmun's front page featured photos and

news of leader Kim Jong Un visiting a military-run pig farm.

Xi told Trump that Beijing strongly opposes North Korea's nuclear weapons program but hopes "all parties will exercise restraint and avoid aggravating the situation," Chinese state media reported.

Beijing is on edge because Trump has signaled he will take a hard line in dealing with North Korea and shown he isn't afraid to wield unilateral military action with a cruise missile strike against Syria and a massive bombing in Afghanistan.

The Trump administration also has pressed China to do more to persuade North Korea to abandon its nuclear ambitions.

China objects to North Korea's weapons program, which violates U.N. Security Council resolutions, but it also fears a regime collapse that could cause a humanitarian crisis on its border, as well as possibly increase U.S. military influence in the region.

North Korea has conducted five nuclear tests, including two last year, and test-fired nearly 30 missiles, stepping up its efforts despite U.N. Security Council sanctions and diplomatic pressure.

US: Piracy back on the rise in Somali waters

The Washington Post

CAMP LEMONNIER, Djibouti — After years of relative calm, piracy is on the rise again off the coast of Somalia, U.S. officials here said Sunday.

Gen. Thomas Waldhauser, the Marine officer in charge of U.S. Africa Command, said there have been “five or six” piracy incidents in the region in two months.

Waldhauser, speaking at a news conference here with Defense Secretary Jim Mattis, attributed the spike in attacks to the widespread drought and famine gripping the region. He said the ships the pirates were targeting have been small in size and carried goods such as food and oil.

“I wouldn’t say it’s a trend, but we’ll watch it,” he said.

After a coordinated international response to piracy in 2010 and 2011, including additional patrols of U.S. and European naval ships in the waters around Somalia, the number of pirate attacks in the past five years has been negligible.

That has changed in recent months.

“It has certainly increased,” said Navy Capt. Richard Rodriguez, chief of staff of the U.S. task force in the Horn of Africa.

Rodriguez told reporters that the U.S. task force is in a monitoring role, while local authorities and units led by the European Union take the lead assessing the resurgent threat.

An Indian ship was hijacked by pirates this month, just weeks after an oil tanker was seized in nearby waters.

In 2011, there were more than 230 pirate attacks off the coast of Somalia, according to the International Maritime Bureau. In the years since, shipping companies have increased security measures, including using anti-boarding devices and armed contractors to deter pirates.

Mattis’ visit marks the first time a high-ranking Trump administration official has visited Africa and comes as the U.S. military increases pressure on militant groups in the region. In March, President Donald Trump gave the Pentagon new authorities to conduct airstrikes against al-Shabab in Somalia, and the U.S. military has conducted about 70 airstrikes against al-Qaida fighters in Yemen in two months.

Camp Lemonnier, the only permanent U.S. base in Africa, has in the past 15 years transformed from an austere Marine outpost to a sprawling installation with 4,000 U.S. troops and dorm-style barracks. Nearby, the Air Force operates an independent drone base. Currently, Marine aircraft from the 24th Marine Expeditionary Unit are staged at Lemonnier to help with operations in the region.

US-Philippines ties better ahead of Balikatan drills

By SETH ROBSON

Stars and Stripes

Thousands of U.S. troops will head to the Philippines for next month’s Balikatan military exercise in a sign that the dark clouds that hovered over the alliance last year may be clearing.

In September, firebrand Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte — at odds with America and Europe over his crackdown on drug dealers — called for U.S. special operators to leave Mindanao island and advocated scrapping future war games with U.S. forces. A month later, Duterte said he wanted all foreign troops out of his country within two years and talked of revising his country’s security agreements, which include an alliance with Washington.

However, the special operators have remained to help Filipinos battle Islamic militants, and there are no signs of scrapping a bilateral agreement allowing U.S. troops on Philippine bases.

At an April 9 ceremony to honor U.S. and Filipino veterans of World War II’s Battle of Bataan, Duterte referred to America as

“the Philippines’ only defense treaty ally,” and said the nations should move their relationship forward with mutual respect.

“Duterte’s people will quietly shelve this anti-Americanism,” Patricio Abinales, a Philippines expert at the University of Hawaii, said last week, citing pushback from the military and the strongman’s affinity for President Donald Trump.

Nearly 3,000 U.S. troops are preparing to train in the islands during Balikatan. That’s fewer than the 5,000 who participated last year, but special operations forces continue to rotate to Mindanao, said Marine 1st Lt. Paul Gainey, a spokesman at the U.S. Embassy in Manila. Special Operations Command Pacific is rotating troops through the country to assist local security forces, he said in an email last week.

The plan to remove the U.S. operators was shelved after Philippine generals in the south complained, Abinales said.

“Do not underestimate the quiet opposition of the Armed Forces of the Philippines to Duterte’s plan to delink the Philippines from her alliance with the U.S.,” Abinales said.

USARAF Africa exercise in Cameroon focuses on countering Boko Haram

By NANCY MONTGOMERY

Stars and Stripes

VICENZA, Italy — Two months after U.S. Africa Command sent a contingent of special operations forces for tactical training with African troops in areas threatened by Boko Haram militants, U.S. Army Africa is set to take training there to the operational level.

During five days in Cameroon that began Monday, USARAF’s inaugural Unified Focus exercise is calling upon 100 field-grade officers, civilian officials and aid-group representatives to consider how to react to plausible crises in the Lake Chad Basin. The region, encompassing parts of Cameroon, Chad, Niger and Nigeria, has seen attacks by Boko Haram and clashes with security forces. In the past eight years, the conflict has killed an estimated 200,000, forced more than 3 million to flee and laid waste to formerly fertile lands.

“It’s to think through problems that may or may not happen,” said Col. Mike Zinno, director of USARAF’s civil-military operations division. “We want them to think through things in a more collaborative

way. When you start talking about all the challenges in the region, you see how much collaboration is necessary for success.”

Unified Focus, unlike February’s tactical Operation Flintlock, will be a tabletop exercise on countering Boko Haram and other extremist groups. It replaces a previous annual exercise, Central Accord, which focused on peacekeeping operations.

Participants will include the State Department, the U.S. Agency for International Development, the International Red Cross and field-grade officers with the Multinational Joint Task Force. The task force, authorized in 2015 by the African Union to combat Boko Haram in a more coordinated way, is made up soldiers from Cameroon, Chad, Niger, Nigeria and Benin.

“There’s promise and potential in being able to work together,” Zinno said. “That said, there are still challenges.”

According to a September report by the Institute for Security Studies, the task force, hampered by “political, logistical, technical and financial challenges,” still struggles to demonstrate effectiveness but is “gradually gaining ground.”

Police search for missing California boy

Associated Press

SOUTH PASADENA, Calif. — Police in Southern California on Sunday finished their search of a park where the passed-out father of a missing 5-year-old boy was found over the weekend and are asking for anyone with information to come forward.

South Pasadena Police Chief Art Miller said investigators have had a difficult time getting answers from the boy's father, Aramazd Andressian Sr., who was arrested Saturday on child endangerment and child abduction after paramedics found him passed out in South Pasadena's Arroyo Park.

Investigators don't know why the man was unconscious, Miller said, adding that there is no evidence he was attacked.

Andressian's statements have been "convoluted and contradictory," Los Angeles County Sheriff's Capt. Chris Bergner said. The department is helping with the investigation.

The mother of Aramazd Andressian Jr. reported Saturday that her estranged husband

had failed to drop the boy off at a prearranged meeting place. The parents are divorcing and share custody.

The boy was last seen by his mother on Tuesday when the two spoke through a video call. The boy was supposed to speak to his mother via video call again on Thursday, but that did not happen, officials said.

Miller asked the public to report if they had recently spotted the father's car, described as a silver four-door 2004 BMW. The car was seen early Friday morning in Orange County.

"There's got to be someone out there that knows the whereabouts of Aramazd Andressian," Miller said. "I'm asking you as a law enforcement official and as a parent, if you know anything, please contact us."

Andressian's bail was initially set at \$100,000, but detectives later went back to a judge to explain the boy is still missing and provide additional information about the circumstances. The judge then upped Andressian's bail to \$10 million, Miller said.

Five are dead after house fire in NYC

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Investigators are scouring for clues to what sparked a New York City house fire that killed five people, including two young boys and two teenage girls.

The fire broke out Sunday afternoon in the middle class neighborhood of Queens Village. Television news footage showed flames chewing through the roof of the two-story home and roaring in upstairs rooms of the house as smoke poured out.

"It was a fire that moved very, very quickly, and the loss was horrendous," said Mayor Bill de Blasio. "This is the devastation of a family," he said. "There's a lot we need to know about what happened here."

There was no immediate theory on what started the blaze. A burned-out car was found behind one of the homes, and witnesses reported hearing loud booms, but Fire Commissioner Daniel Nigro said there didn't appear to be an explosion.

Nigro said a motorist saw

someone tumble from a window as smoke billowed, and called the fire department. The victim, a roughly 46-year-old man, fell onto the porch roof and then the lawn and survived, Nigro said.

The wood-frame home burned rapidly and was engulfed in flames by the time firefighters arrived. They struggled to reach some of the victims who were as high up as the attic, Nigro said. They managed to remove a 2-year-old and another person who had been trapped in the attic, he said. But they were too late to save them.

Police early Monday morning said the victims included two boys ages 2 and 10, two girls ages 16 and 17, and a 20-year-old woman. They said the man who escaped is in the hospital and is expected to survive. Officials have not released the names of the victims.

A neighboring home also caught fire and was badly damaged, but no one was inside at the time. Four firefighters suffered minor injuries; no other people were injured.

New Orleans dismantles Confederate monument

Associated Press

NEW ORLEANS — Workers in New Orleans removed the first of four prominent Confederate monuments Monday morning, becoming the latest Southern city to sever itself from symbols viewed by many as a representation of racism and white supremacy.

The Liberty Place monument, which commemorates whites who tried to topple a biracial, post-Civil War government in New Orleans, was taken away on a truck in pieces about 5:35 a.m. after a few hours of work.

The removal happened early in the morning in an attempt to avoid disruption from the monument's supporters, some of whom, according to city officials, have made death threats.

Workers who took the monument down Monday could be seen wearing bulletproof vests, military-style helmets and scarves that obscured their faces. Police were also on hand.

Three other statues to Confederate Gens. Robert E. Lee and P.G.T. Beauregard and Confederate States of America President Jefferson Davis will be removed in later days.

Nationally, the debate over Confederate symbols has become heated since nine parishioners were killed at a black church in South Carolina in June 2015. South Carolina removed the Confederate flag from its statehouse grounds in the weeks after, and several Southern cities have since considered removing monuments.

New Orleans is a majority black city, though the number of black residents has fallen since 2005's Hurricane Katrina drove many people from the city.

The majority-black city council in 2015 voted 6-1 to take the statues down, but legal battles overprevented the removal until now, said New Orleans Mayor Mitch Landrieu, who proposed the monuments' removal.

Since officials announced the removals, contractors hired by the city have faced death threats and intimidation in this Southern city, where passions about the Civil War still run deep.

The removal began at night to ensure police could secure the sites to protect workers and to ease the burden on traffic.

Landrieu said the memori-

als don't represent his city as it approaches its 300th anniversary next year. The mayor said the city would remove the monuments, store them and preserve them until an "appropriate" place to display them is determined.

"The monuments are an aberration," he said.

They're actually a denial of our history, and they were done in a time when people who still controlled the Confederacy were in charge of this city, and it only represents a four-year period in our 1,000-year march to where we are today."

Landrieu has called the Liberty Place monument "the most offensive of the four" and said it was erected to "revere white supremacy."

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Man who went AWOL 45 years ago leaves jail

FL OCALA — A Florida man who went AWOL from the U.S. Air Force and spent 45 years on the lam has returned home after serving a 30-day sentence.

The Ocala Star-Banner reported that Linley Lemburg, 75, was arrested last month. He had been living under an alias and was located by Marion County sheriff's officials after the military sought their help. He went missing in 1972.

Military officials took Lemburg to MacDill Air Force Base in Tampa. He pleaded guilty to desertion.

Air Force officials said a military judge sentenced him to a dishonorable discharge, reduction of rank and 15 years' confinement. His confinement was capped at 30 days, with 21 days credited for time served.

Parents win battle over girl's surname of 'Allah'

GA ATLANTA — A civil rights group that sued Georgia over the state's refusal to allow a couple to officially give their toddler daughter the last name "Allah" says the state has reversed course.

The American Civil Liberties Union of Georgia sued last month on behalf of Elizabeth Handy and Bilal Walk, who had chosen the name ZalyKha Graceful Lorraine Allah. The group said Thursday it is dropping its lawsuit because the Georgia Department of Health has issued a birth certificate with the name the couple chose.

A Department of Public Health lawyer had argued state law requires a baby's surname to be that of the father or the mother for the initial birth record.

Man sentenced for burial plot sale scam

MA WOBURN — A Massachusetts man has pleaded guilty to selling unused burial plots that already had been purchased by other people and pocketing the cash.

Prosecutors said John Hughes, 71, was sentenced Thursday to two years of probation and was ordered to pay nearly \$75,000 in restitution to the city of Melrose. He pleaded guilty in Middlesex Superior Court to multiple counts of larceny.

Authorities said Hughes, of Revere, was appointed administrator of a city-owned cemetery in 2007. Beginning in 2011, he started selling unused burial plots at discounted rates, even though the plots already had been sold. He didn't tell city officials and kept the money. He sold 13 plots in all.

Woman rescued after 8 hours in crashed car

IN SULLIVAN — A school bus driver is credited with spotting a car in which a woman was trapped for about eight hours after a crash in rural western Indiana.

The Sullivan County sheriff said the car driven by Tina Gourley Baker, 53, of Sullivan, went off a county road during rain early Friday and into a ditch, where she was suspended upside down with her head submerged in standing water.

Sheriff Clark Cottom said the crashed car wasn't spotted until Brenda Howard saw it from her Southwest Sullivan School district bus. Emergency crews found Baker nearly unconscious at the scene about 20 miles south of Terre Haute.

Cottom said the woman was taken to a hospital for treatment of mild hypothermia, along with bumps and bruises.

Click a pic of a gator, then upload for science

NC KURE BEACH — Wildlife officials want people in North Carolina to give alligators some distance — but to take pictures of them first, if possible.

Wildlife Resources Commission Diversity Program coordinator Allen Boynton said those photos will help state biologists determine exactly where alligators live in North Carolina.

Boynton told the StarNews of Wilmington that growing populations in southeastern North Carolina are leading to more interactions between alligators and humans.

Photos can be uploaded at the www.inaturalist.org website. They will be placed on a map for the public to see as well.

Man pleads guilty in illegal liposuction case

AZ TUCSON — A Tucson man accused of performing liposuction procedures while not having a medical license has pleaded guilty to felony charges.

Gustavo Nunez faces up to 178 years in prison when sentenced Aug. 7 on guilty pleas Friday for 28 counts of charges that include aggravated assault, fraud and practicing medicine without a license.

The Arizona Attorney General's Office said seven victims had procedures performed by Nunez between 2012 and 2014 and that three were hospitalized after botched surgeries and one sustained life-threatening injuries.

Nunez was arrested after two women went to hospitals with serious aggressive infections stemming from liposuction procedures. Other women reported they had procedures he performed.

Codefendant Ilda Gar-

cia pleaded guilty and was sentenced to seven years in prison.

Man gets life term for killing 3 with machete

IA ADEL — A 25-year-old man has been sentenced to life in prison for hacking to death his girlfriend, her teenage daughter and their landlord with a machete in central Iowa.

The Des Moines Register reported that Carlos Hernandez-Ventura was sentenced Friday, a month after being found guilty on three counts of first-degree murder.

Prosecutors said Hernandez-Ventura used a machete on Oct. 29 to kill Lourdes Flor De Leake, 34; Melany Barraza, 14; and Juan Jimenez Tejada, 78, at a home in Perry, about 30 miles northwest of Des Moines.

Hernandez-Ventura testified at trial that Leake's estranged husband ordered the deaths, but investigators say they found no evidence he was involved.

Rare crocodile is bitten, has surgery at zoo

FL MIAMI — A 13-year-old endangered male crocodile is recovering from surgery at Zoo Miami.

Zoo officials said the crocodile underwent a procedure Friday to treat an infected wound likely caused by a bite from another crocodile. The nearly 10-foot-long, 396-pound reptile had sustained a wound to its left front wrist.

The reptile had to be immobilized and transported to the zoo hospital, where it received several X-rays before the infected material was surgically removed. The crocodile will remain hospitalized for the next several days.

From wire reports

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Reporting
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and Military News

'Iso Joe' plays hero in Utah's win over LAC

Associated Press

SALT LAKE CITY — Joe Johnson saved the Utah Jazz — again.

"Iso Joe" has become a major problem for the Los Angeles Clippers.

Johnson scored 28 points, and the Jazz beat the Clippers 105-98 on Sunday night to tie their first-round playoff series at 2-all. It was Utah's first home playoff win since 2010.

"He's so sure with the ball," Jazz coach Quin Snyder said. "It's not often you find a guy that has that combination of skill, as far as his ability to handle the ball and make plays. And the strength to get to spots on the floor.

"The thing that really takes us to a unique place is he's such a willing passer. He basically either scored or assisted on every basket (down the stretch). ... We knew this is who he is and he knows it's playoff time."

Johnson, who hit the winning shot in Game 1, scored 11 straight Jazz points during a crucial stretch in the fourth quarter, including a pull-up jumper for a 91-90 lead with 3:55 remaining after Utah trailed by seven with 7:37 left. The Clippers never led again after controlling the game for most of the night.

"Just trying to be aggressive and make plays," Johnson said. "We had to get stops, which kind of fueled our offense. ... We were getting into the teeth of the defense, whether we had layups, dunks or kick-outs for 3s, thought we did a good job of making the right decision."

Rodney Hood and Joe Ingles, who had a career-high 11 assists, also hit huge baskets for Utah down the stretch. The Jazz needed all the help they could get after Gordon Hayward left with food poisoning.

The series returns to Los Angeles for Game 5 on Tuesday.

Chris Paul had 27 points, 12 assists and nine rebounds for Los Angeles, which played without Blake Griffin after he suffered a toe injury in Game 3. Griffin has been ruled out for the rest of the postseason.

Cavs sweep Pacers

Associated Press

INDIANAPOLIS — LeBron James stuck to the old script Sunday.

Again, he bailed out the Cleveland Cavaliers. And again, he sent the Indiana Pacers home for vacation.

On yet another milestone day for basketball's king, James' crowning achievement was making the go-ahead Three-pointer with 1:08 to play and helping the defending champions hold on for a series-clinching 106-102 victory at Indiana.

"You have to mentally challenge yourself every year and go out and try to do what's right — putting your body on the line, putting your team on the line and trying to be successful," James said. "It's very hard."

The four-time MVP made it look easy. He finished with 33 points, 10 rebounds, four assists, four steals and two blocks.

By winning his 21st consecutive first-round game, James broke a tie with Michael Cooper, Magic Johnson and James Worthy for the longest streak under the NBA's current playoff format.

And by holding on for the win, James improved to 52-0 in the playoffs when his team takes a double-digit lead into the fourth quarter.

James considered the milestones a footnote on a day the Cavs blew a 13-point lead and allowed the Pacers to come all the way back and take a 102-100 lead with 1:31 to go.

"They were giving it all they had," James said. "Obviously, a loss would have ended their season. We just had to weather the storm once again."

For Indiana, it will go down as yet another tormenting chapter in their rivalry with James.

James' teams have eliminated the Pacers four times in six years and completed the first-four game sweep in Indiana's NBA history. Cleveland finished the season 7-1 against the Pacers.

Lance Stephenson led the Pacers with 22 points. George had a series-low 15.

"It's real frustrating to continue on losing to the same team or same person," George said. "Ultimately, he (James) is who I'm always going to have to see and face."

OKC on brink of elimination following loss

Associated Press

OKLAHOMA CITY — James Harden's shot was off, and one of the most unlikely players on Houston's roster came to the rescue.

Nene scored 28 points on perfect shooting from the field, and the Rockets beat the Oklahoma City Thunder 113-109 on Sunday to take a 3-1 lead in their first-round series.

The 6-foot-11 center from Brazil made all 12 of his shots and had 10 rebounds. It was an impressive performance from a reserve who averaged about nine points per game in the regular season.

"He puts the work in," Harden said. "He's a true vet. He's in the weight room. He's doing all the proper things to get his body and his mind right to go out there and compete at a high level every single night. Tonight, it paid off."

Harden finished with 16 points on 5-for-16 shooting, but he had other help, too. Eric Gordon and Lou Williams each scored 18 points, and Trevor Ariza finished with 14.

Houston can close out the series Tuesday at home.

Oklahoma City star Russell Westbrook had a triple-double by halftime and finished with 35 points, 14 rebounds and 14 assists. The Thunder said Westbrook joined Wilt Chamberlain as the only players to claim three consecutive playoff triple-doubles.

Steven Adams scored 18 points for Oklahoma City, and Victor Oladipo had 15.

The Thunder again struggled when Westbrook rested in the second half, and Westbrook wasn't interested in explaining why. He took over a question directed at Adams and defended the team.

"Don't split us up," Westbrook said. "Don't try and split us up. Don't try to make us go against each other or make it 'Russell and the rest of the guys, Russell against Houston.' I don't want to hear that. We're in this together. We play as a team. That's all that matters."

Thomas, Celtics level series with Bulls at 2-2

Associated Press

CHICAGO — Isaiah Thomas scored 33 points as the Boston Celtics beat the Chicago Bulls 104-95 on Sunday to level their first-round playoff series at 2-all.

Boston blew a 20-point lead, but Thomas keyed a third-quarter run that put the Celtics back on top after Chicago briefly went ahead.

Gerald Green made four three-pointers on his way to 18 points, helping the top-seeded Celtics return the favor in Chicago after dropping the first two games at home. Al Horford added 15 points and 12 rebounds.

Game 5 is Wednesday in Boston.

Jimmy Butler carried the Bulls with 33 points and nine assists. Nikola Mirotic and seldom-used Isaiah Canaan each scored 13 points, but Dwyane Wade finished with just 11.

Canaan made his first appearance since April 10, with Bulls coach Fred Hoiberg searching for help at point guard with Rajon Rondo missing his second straight game because of a broken right thumb.

Butler led the Bulls with 17 in the half, but Chicago's offense struggled without Rondo. Jerian Grant started and went to the bench after five ineffective minutes. Michael Carter-Williams then picked up two fouls, forcing the Bulls to go with Canaan in the first quarter.

Washington earns rematch with Penguins

Associated Press

On paper, it looked as if the Washington Capitals could cruise past the Toronto Maple Leafs as the Pittsburgh Penguins and Columbus Blue Jackets beat each other up on the other side of the bracket.

On the ice, the series could not have been more different.

Hardly looking as good as they did in the regular season, the Capitals needed six one-goal games — five of which went to overtime — to eliminate the up-and-coming Maple Leafs.

“Give them credit, they battled hard,” Alex Ovechkin said after a series that was decided by two total goals and two shots separated the teams. “They’re young, but they’re strong. They have a very good future.”

The Capitals’ future is a rematch against the defending Stanley Cup champion Penguins, who dispatched the Blue Jackets in five and have been waiting since Thursday night.

After Washington finished off Toronto in overtime Sunday night on Marcus Johansson’s second goal of Game 6, it’s all set. The Capitals and Penguins will meet in the second round for the second consecutive year with the winner again considered the favorite to come out of the Eastern Conference.

It’s a showdown of the top two teams in the NHL this season after the Capitals won the Presidents’ Trophy with 118 points and the Penguins had 111.

“We know how good they are,” Washington coach Barry Trotz said. “They knocked

us out last year, so we get a chance to go back at them again.”

So it’s Ovechkin vs. Sidney Crosby for the third time in their careers, which have been linked since they entered the NHL together in 2005. Pittsburgh won the previous two meetings, the first in 2009, and went on to win the Cup each time.

Much like a year ago, the Capitals were tested in the first round — though this time it was more Toronto’s speed than Philadelphia’s physicality. The Capitals scored 18 goals to the Maple Leafs’ 16 and had one fewer shot (213-212) over the course of the series.

“They gave us everything they had, and we had to work hard for it and we had to stick with it for a long time,” said Johansson, who was one of the best Capitals players in the series but didn’t score until Game 6. “We’re ready (to face the Penguins). We’re excited. We can’t wait to get going. We’ve worked hard for it. We’ve worked all year and all summer to get back into this position, and now we’re here.”

Meanwhile, those Penguins again got through the first round in five games largely unscathed because even goaltender Matt Murray’s lower-body injury has been shuffled to the back of concerns by the play of Marc-Andre Fleury.

Again a Vezina Trophy finalist after being the top goalie in the league last season, Washington’s Braden Holtby had an uneven series against the Maple Leafs in large part because of some wacky bounces and unpredictable play. Mid-series, Holtby worked on body control and bounced back

to allow just two goals in the final two games of the series.

“You always say expect the unexpected and you really have to reiterate it in those circumstances to just react,” Holtby said. “Don’t guess, just react.”

There had been no guessing needed with the Capitals’ lineup down the stretch, but an upper-body injury knocked defenseman Karl Alzner out for the final four games of the first round and brought Nate Schmidt in. Schmidt saw as much if not more ice time as trade-deadline acquisition Kevin Shattenkirk, and with skating expected to be at a premium again versus Pittsburgh, the 25-year-old is a candidate to keep playing.

“He’s always an energy guy,” center Jay Beagle said. “He’s played great all year. For him to come in and play like he’s been doing is no surprise to us.”

The play of the young Maple Leafs surprised everyone, even though maybe it shouldn’t. Rookie of the year finalist Auston Matthews scored four goals and an inexperienced, untested defense handled and thrived under the pressure.

Toronto’s speed gave the Capitals a nice test before facing the quick Penguins, who used that element to eliminate Washington in six a year ago. Pittsburgh doesn’t have injured defenseman Kris Letang, but is still a formidable puck-moving force and could have veteran winger Chris Kunitz back.

“We’re going to concentrate and relax,” Ovechkin said. “At the same time, we know Pittsburgh is coming to town and it’s going to be crazy.”

Senators survive another OT to advance

Associated Press

BOSTON — After five extra periods in four overtime games, the Ottawa Senators will get a chance to rest before meeting the New York Rangers in the second round of the NHL playoffs.

The Senators eliminated Boston with a 3-2 victory in Game 6 of their first-round series on Sunday, finishing off the Bruins after six straight one-goal games — four of them in sudden death.

“It was quite a fight,” Ottawa coach Guy Boucher said after Clarke MacArthur scored a power-play goal 6:30 into

overtime to help the Senators advance to the Eastern Conference semifinals against the Rangers.

“In overtime, the message was clear — we’re not going to play on our heels. We didn’t work all year just to sit back and hope things turn out our way,” Boucher said. “I thought we played great in the overtime, and instead of being scared to lose, we were hungry to win.”

And no one was hungrier than MacArthur.

The Senators forward sustained a concussion on Oct. 14, 2015 — Game 4 of last season — and missed 156 games before he finally passed a baseline test

in the last weeks of this season and was cleared. He played in only four games this year, without recording a point.

“You’ve been off for a couple of years and you’re thinking, ‘Yeah, I should make this play,’ or, ‘I should be able to do that,’” he said. “I’ve just been trying to stick with it and be patient, and you know it’s slowly coming.”

MacArthur scored in Game 2 against Boston, and then got past David Pastrnak on his way into the Bruins’ zone in overtime, tempting the Boston forward into pulling him down from behind. Just 36 seconds into the power play, MacArthur grabbed a puck that deflected

off goalie Tuukka Rask and beat him on the rebound for the series-winner.

MacArthur, 32, said he doubted at times that he would be ready to return. He failed a baseline concussion test in January, but passed it near the end of the regular season and was finally cleared to return.

After getting a little bit of a tuneup as Ottawa pushed for a playoff berth, he was ready.

“There’s nothing like living in the NHL and living in these playoffs,” MacArthur said. “It (retirement) is something everyone’s going to have to deal with one day. But I want to stretch it out as long as I can.”

Bad blood boils over in Boston's win

Associated Press

BALTIMORE — A spikes-high slide. A near beanball. Harsh talk in the clubhouse.

The rivalry between the Boston Red Sox and Baltimore Orioles soared to a new level over the weekend, and there's no telling what might happen when they soon meet again.

A tempestuous three-game series between these AL East foes wound up with Orioles star Manny Machado seeing a fastball sail behind his head and Matt Barnes getting ejected for throwing it Sunday in Boston's 6-2 victory.

The high, very inside pitch came two days after Machado spiked Red Sox second baseman Dustin Pedroia with an aggressive slide.

Pedroia watched from the dugout with knee and ankle injuries. Machado apologized with a text message on Friday night, but that evidently wasn't the end of it.

"That's on them," Machado said. "Whatever happened today, I'm going to keep [being] me."

When Machado batted in the sixth inning, Eduardo Rodriguez threw three pitches down and in near the knees. Machado came up again in the eighth and Barnes' fastball whizzed behind Machado and hit his bat. The ball hit Machado and rolled foul, and plate umpire Andy Fletcher tossed Barnes.

"I would never intentionally throw at someone's head. That's kind of a line you don't cross," Barnes said.

Boston manager John Farrell — who on Saturday called the league office to discuss what he called "an illegal slide" by Machado — insisted Barnes' wayward pitch was nothing more than an accident.

"He was trying to take a four-seamer in and above his hands and the pitch got away from him," Farrell said.

But Orioles first baseman Chris Davis

thought the fastball was intentionally directed at Machado's head.

"I think it was completely obvious," Davis said. "I haven't seen a guy miss that bad in a while — behind a guy's head."

Orioles manager Buck Showalter appeared reluctant to criticize the Red Sox, but said, "The courage it takes not to retaliate a lot of times in life is a lot more challenging than doing what ended up happening today."

During Farrell's argument with Fletcher, Pedroia was standing on the top step in the dugout and whistled to catch Machado's attention. He mouthed the words "It's not me," evidently trying to show he was not seeking revenge. Machado acknowledged Pedroia and later pointed to his head.

"I had nothing to do with that. That's not how you do that, man," Pedroia said afterward. "I'm sorry to him and his team. If you're going to protect guys, you do it right away."

Murphy helps Nationals slam former team

Associated Press

NEW YORK — As usual, Daniel Murphy was diplomatic about all the damage he's done to the New York Mets since they let him leave as a free agent.

Max Scherzer knows that's just a mirage.

"He wants to beat their brains in. He won't say anything, and he won't say anything to us — it's not like he's in here boasting that he wants to beat the Mets," Scherzer said. "But he wants to beat them apart. That's the way this is. That's just the way this goes."

Murphy hit an early grand slam against his former team, Scherzer pitched eight fiery innings and the Washington Nationals topped New York 6-3 on Sunday night for their seventh straight victory.

Ryan Zimmerman added a two-run homer for the Nationals, who completed a three-game sweep of the short-handed Mets in the first series this season between the NL East rivals.

Murphy, booed by the Queens crowd, is batting .386 with eight home runs and 25 RBIs in 22

games against the Mets since leading them to the 2015 World Series with a record-setting postseason.

"Come here and things are familiar. I don't know if that has anything to do with it," Murphy said. "It's a good way to end the series."

Minus slugger Yoenis Cespedes and three other injured regulars, New York (8-11) has lost four in a row and eight of nine to fall 5½ games behind the Nationals, who own the best record in the majors at 13-5. The winning streak is their longest since a seven-game run last April.

Scherzer (3-1) struck out nine and walked one in his latest win over the Mets.

Rangers 5, Royals 2: Yu Darvish pitched eight innings in his longest outing since elbow surgery two years ago and the host Rangers scored the tying and go-ahead runs without a hit, completing a four-game sweep.

Rockies 8, Giants 0: Kyle Freeland scattered six hits over seven sharp innings, Gerardo Parra hit a two-run homer and the Rockies finished off their first three-game sweep of the

Giants at Coors Field since 2002.

Blue Jays 6, Angels 2: Marcus Stroman pitched a seven-hitter for visiting Toronto, and Devon Travis hit a go-ahead, two-run homer during a four-run eighth inning.

Mariners 11, Athletics 1: Nelson Cruz homered and drove in five runs for visiting Seattle, and Taylor Motter hit his first career grand slam.

Yovani Gallardo (1-2) pitched into the seventh for his first win with the Mariners, who ended a three-game losing streak and won for only the second time in 11 road games.

Reds 7, Cubs 5: Bronson Arroyo pitched six innings of three-hit ball, and host Cincinnati salvaged the finale of the weekend set.

Dodgers 6, Diamondbacks 2: Brandon McCarthy gave Los Angeles a much-needed strong start, Yasmani Grandal homered in a six-run fifth inning and the visiting Dodgers averted a sweep.

Astros 6, Rays 4 (10): Brian McCann and Yuli Gurriel hit RBI singles in the 10th inning, and Houston rallied for

the road win.

Phillies 5, Braves 2: Cesar Hernandez, Aaron Altherr and Odubel Herrera hit consecutive homers in the eighth, helping host Philadelphia complete a three-game sweep.

Pirates 2, Yankees 1: Pittsburgh's Ivan Nova gained a measure of revenge over his old team, limiting the visiting Yankees to just four hits over seven innings.

White Sox 6, Indians 2: Melky Cabrera drove in a pair of runs, Derek Holland tossed six strong innings and the host White Sox busted out of an offensive funk.

Tigers 13, Twins 4: John Hicks had three hits, including his first career homer, and drove in five runs to lead Michael Fulmer and Detroit to the road win.

Cardinals 6, Brewers 4: Mike Leake pitched six effective innings and drove in two runs, leading visiting St. Louis to its sixth win in seven games.

Marlins 7, Padres 3: Justin Bour capped visiting Miami's six-run sixth inning with a three-run homer.