

# STARS AND STRIPES<sup>®</sup>

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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

stripes.com

## US troops in Syria face many perils

*The Washington Post*

RAQQA, Syria—This ruined, fearful city was once Islamic State's capital, the showcase of its caliphate and a magnet for foreign fighters from around the globe.

Now it lies at the heart of the U.S.'s newest commitment to a Middle East war.

The commitment is small, a few thousand troops who were first sent to Syria three years ago to help the Syrian Kurds fight ISIS. President Donald Trump indicated in March that the troops would be brought home once the battle is won, and the latest military push to eject the group from its final pocket of territory recently got underway.

In September, however, the administration switched course, saying the troops will stay in Syria pending an overall settlement to the Syrian war and with a new mission: to act as a bulwark against Iran's expanding influence.

That decision puts U.S. troops in overall control, perhaps indefinitely, of an area comprising nearly a third of Syria, a vast expanse of mostly desert terrain roughly the size of Louisiana.

The Pentagon does not say how many troops are there. Officially, they number 503, but earlier this year, an official let slip that the true number may be closer to 4,000. Most are Special Operations forces, and their footprint is light. Their vehicles and convoys rumble by from time to time along the empty desert roads, but it is rare to see U.S. soldiers in towns and cities.

The new mission raises new questions about the role they will play and whether their presence will risk becoming a magnet for regional conflict and insurgency.

The area is surrounded by powers hostile both to the U.S.

presence and the aspirations of the Kurds, who are governing the majority-Arab area in pursuit of a leftist ideology formulated by an imprisoned Turkish Kurdish leader. Signs that ISIS is starting to regroup and rumblings of discontent within the Arab community point to the threat of an insurgency.

Without the presence of U.S. troops, these dangers would almost certainly ignite a new war right away, said Ilham Ahmed, a senior official with the Self-Administration of North and East Syria, as the self-styled government of the area is called.

"They have to stay. If they leave and there isn't a solution for Syria, it will be catastrophic," she said.

### Risks mount

But staying also heralds risk, and already the challenges are starting to mount.

A Turkish threat to invade the area last month forced the United States to scramble patrols along the border with Turkey, which has massed troops and tanks along the frontier. Turkey regards the main Kurdish militia, the YPG, which is affiliated with the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party inside Turkey, as a terrorist organization and fears the consequences for its own security if the group consolidates power in Syria.

Syrian government troops and Iranian proxy fighters are to the south and west. They have threatened to take the area back by force in pursuit of President Bashar Assad's pledge to bring all of Syria under government control. The government and Iran have been cultivating ties with local tribes, and the U.S. announcement of its intent to counter the Iranian presence in Syria may, in response, further encourage such ties.

Away from the front lines, the

calm that followed the ejection of ISIS from Raqqa and the surrounding territory is starting to fray. A series of mysterious bombings and assassinations in some of the areas retaken from the militants up to three years ago has set nerves on edge. Most of the attacks are claimed by ISIS, and a U.S. military spokesman, Col. Sean Ryan, said there is no reason to believe ISIS is not responsible.

"We know they're regrouping in those areas," he said.

But there are widespread suspicions that any one of the regional powers opposed to the U.S. presence and the Kurds' pursuit of self-governance may be seeking to destabilize the area, finding allies among disgruntled Arabs uncomfortable with the prospect of being governed long term by the Kurds.

The Kurdish forces have sought to include Arabs in their self-governance experiment but retain dominance over its structures at every level, Arabs complain.

### Tribal loyalties

This is a part of Syria where tribal loyalties often trump politics, and the tribes are being courted by all the regional players with an interest in ultimately controlling the area, according to Sheikh Humaidi al-Shammar, the head of the influential Shammar tribe.

At Shammar's outsize mansion, which rises improbably from the empty desert near the Iraqi border, dozens of tribal leaders gathered one recent Friday for his customary weekly divan, sweeping into his cavernous reception room dressed in gold-trimmed robes and flanked by pistol-wielding guards.

The guests ranged, Shammar confided, from sheikhs af-

filiated with the Assad regime and his ruling Baath Party to representatives of ISIS, the Free Syrian Army rebels and the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces — a spectrum of those competing for control in northeastern Syria.

Shammar has allied his tribe with the United States and the Kurds, and he has contributed fighters from his small Sanadid militia to battles against ISIS. But, he said, he has many concerns — namely, that the U.S. talk of countering Iran will suck the region into a new conflict and that the area's Arabs will be cut out of any deal that is eventually reached with the Kurds.

Shammar's son, Bandar, who leads the Shammar militia, said the tribe supports some form of new arrangement for the Kurds in Syria "because they are our brothers and they sacrificed a lot."

"The main concern of the Arab population is that one ethnicity, the Kurds, is going to build a state for Kurds and impose their authority on the others," he said. "The coalition created the Syrian Democratic Forces to be multiethnic, but really, people see it is not like this. It is a solo actor which authorizes everything and controls everything."

Kurdish leaders say they are working hard to convince the Arab community that their plan for governing will include it. Education sessions are being held in Arab areas to try to bring Arabs around to the views of Abdullah Ocalan, the jailed Turkish Kurdish leader who inspired the YPG's ideology, said Saleh Muslim, a senior official with the Democratic Union Party, the political wing of the YPG. "We are very sincere about living together," he said. "It's a matter of time."

# China could threaten US base in Djibouti

*The Washington Post*

When unveiling the Trump administration's new Africa policy on Thursday, national security adviser John Bolton made a point to speak about a single container port in the tiny East African nation of Djibouti. Officials say the Doraleh Container Terminal is critical for resupplying the only permanent U.S. base in Africa, and Bolton said China could take control of this port.

While Djibouti is slightly smaller than New Jersey and has a population of less than 1 million, its strategic location gives it an outsized influence. At the southern end of the Red Sea, Djibouti is on the shipping route between Asia and the Suez Canal. Every day, an estimated 4.8 million barrels of oil transit the Bab el-Mandab straight adjacent to Djibouti.

Djibouti's proximity to terrorist havens in Yemen and Somalia also made it an ideal location for the U.S. military. Camp Lemonnier, a former French foreign legion base, became an expeditionary base for counterterrorism operations after the terrorist attacks on Sept. 11, 2001. The base, which shares a runway with Djibouti's only international airport, has grown significantly over the years.

The base houses thousands of military personnel to support operations in the region. The military reports killing approximately 254 al-Shabab militants through 32 airstrikes in Somalia this year so far. That is a significant increase over the approximately 150 Somali militants reportedly killed in the previous year. Djibouti is also adjacent to Yemen, where the U.S. has been supporting Saudi-led efforts against Houthi militants.

## Major investments

In October, the military announced \$240 million worth of contracts for expansion of facilities that will include infrastructure to support the Air Force's largest cargo jets. This

is just part of the \$1.4 billion plan for the base that the Pentagon announced in 2012. The Obama administration entered a 30-year lease for Camp Lemonnier in 2014 at a cost of \$63 million per year.

While the United States and other countries have military interests in Djibouti, China has made major investments into the country's infrastructure. This could help Djibouti be a node in China's massive "One Belt, One Road" project to connect markets across Asia, Africa and Europe.

Djibouti's external debt has increased significantly since 2014 and much of this is believed to be infrastructure loans from China. In 2017, China established a military base next to the Doraleh Multipurpose Port, another shipping terminal in Djibouti that it funded.

While there have been other concerns with China in Djibouti, such as accusations that China used lasers against American pilots in Djibouti, American officials have recently expressed concern over a port that was once operated by an external company but has been taken over by the Djibouti government.

## 'Imbalances'

The Doraleh Container Terminal opened in 2008 as a joint venture between DP World, an Emirati company, and the Djiboutian government. In February, the government canceled the agreement with DP World and in September it nationalized the port.

Djiboutian business executive Abdourahman Boreh was instrumental in making the deal to create the Doraleh container terminal. The Djiboutian government claims Boreh was bribed by DP World to facilitate an unfair contract.

"We found out that there were imbalances in the contract to the point that we got convinced that the contract was signed in bad faith," Djiboutian ambassador to the U.S.

Mohamed Siad Douale told The Post. Douale claims that DP World was diverting shipping traffic away from Djibouti, and he provided internal documentation showing that shipping traffic has increased by 33 percent following the termination of the contract in February.

In 2016, Boreh was cleared of wrongdoing by an international arbitration court in Britain. Boreh declined to speak to The Post about his involvement in the dispute over the Doraleh Container Terminal.

In September, the High Court in London issued an injunction against Djibouti in the dispute with DP World, but the government ignored this ruling.

## 'Just unfair'

"We did not recognize the arbitrator award to DP World because it was just unfair," Douale said. He dismissed the notion that Djibouti would hand over control of the Doraleh Container Terminal to China.

"Djibouti is a sovereign state and Djibouti is in control of its ports," Douale said. "Our sole intention is to build an economic future for our population."

Some American officials are not convinced by such assurances.

"The Djiboutians are up to their neck in debt to China," Reuben Brigety, former U.S. ambassador to the African Union told The Post. Brigety said he expects this leverage to be used to force the Djiboutian government to hand control of the port to a Chinese company within the next six months.

"The Chinese will eventually use that enormously important strategic position to crowd out U.S. military operations," Brigety said.

Handing over the operation of the port would not only allow China to constrain operations at Camp Lemonnier, Brigety explained, it would also have economic consequences in the region. The ports in Djibouti are a major transit point for goods shipped to Ethiopia,

Africa's second most populous country.

## 'Asleep at the switch'

"The United States is asleep at the switch while all of this is happening," Brigety said in November, before the Trump administration announced the new Africa strategy.

In November, Sen. Chris Coons, D-Del., and Sen. Marco Rubio, R-Fla., sent a joint letter to Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and Defense Secretary Jim Mattis voicing concern about the Doraleh Container Terminal.

"China's control of Doraleh could allow it to impede U.S. military operations in the Horn of Africa," the letter stated.

Chairman of the House Armed Services Committee Rep. Mac Thornberry, R-Texas, has also expressed concern.

"Anyone who believes that China is only concerned about the Indo-Pacific region is ignoring the clear evidence in Africa and elsewhere," Thornberry said in a statement following a March tour of East Africa, which included a stop in Djibouti.

"It's hard to overstate how concerned Chairman Thornberry is about this issue," Claude Chafin, communications director for the House Armed Services Committee, told The Post.

The first pillar of the Trump administration's new Africa strategy is advancing trade and commercial ties between the United States and Africa. While investment in Djibouti could increase American influence, China certainly has a head start.

Brigety already sees how the American interests could be impacted in Djibouti.

"It's like a game a chess in which you can see checkmate five moves out and if the United States does not take some action to reverse it in short order our interests will absolutely be harmed, quite seriously."

# Runway project draws protests

BY MATTHEW M. BURKE  
AND AYA ICHIHASHI  
*Stars and Stripes*

CAMP FOSTER, Okinawa — Landfill on a controversial new U.S. military runway that will one day facilitate the relocation and closure of Marine Corps Air Station Futenma began Friday in Okinawa following years of protests and legal challenges.

Construction began before noon at Camp Schwab — a Marine Base in Henoko — as workers pumped water out of a walled-off footprint of the runway in Oura Bay and began to replace it with soil, Okinawa Defense Bureau spokesman Masashi Katsuren told Stars and Stripes.

“We are pumping the water out and reclaiming with dirt at the same time,” Katsuren said. “Of course we are following the prefectural guidance on red soil spill prevention to protect the environment.”

Futenma is in a densely populated urban area in the central part of the island. Relocating air operations to the remote northern coast is the

latest move by the U.S.-Japan alliance to consolidate vast U.S. military holdings on the island. It is also seen as a safer and less intrusive alternative.

A small but passionate protest movement — backed by popular support — has stood fervently opposed to the relocation of Marine air operations within the prefecture.

Nago police said that while there were more protesters outside Schwab’s front gate than usual, they declined to estimate the number. No arrests had been made as of Friday evening.

Past Okinawan governors and local politicians have tried everything in their power to derail the project, but Tokyo and its allies in Washington have remained steadfast that it is the “only solution.”

While the landfill work has been years in the making and is a significant step toward completing the runway, Katsuren said the .02 square-mile section being filled, called “area 2-1,” represents only 4 percent of the .6 square-mile reclamation project.

Area 2-1 is scheduled to be

completed by July 31, 2020.

Okinawa Gov. Denny Tamaki tried unsuccessfully Thursday to lobby both Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga and Defense Minister Takeshi Iwaya against moving ahead with the landfill, Kyodo news agency reported. Suga apparently told Tamaki that while the government “recognizes the position of Okinawa” the work would proceed.

The meetings in Tokyo came a day after the prefectural government sent a letter of administrative guidance to Okinawa Defense Bureau, calling the decision to proceed with landfill work illegal and not permitted. Okinawa asked the bureau to halt the construction immediately. However, the guidance was not legally binding.

Tamaki was apoplectic Friday.

“I have demanded a halt to the reclamation work at Henoko; however, I am furious about how the government disregarded Okinawa and is forcing [it],” he said, according to a statement released by his office.

## Plans to curtail surveillance set by agency

*Associated Press*

BOSTON — The Federal Air Marshal Service says it’s curtailing a domestic surveillance program that’s been accused of spying on thousands of unwitting passengers who are not suspected of a crime or appear on a terror watch list.

The agency’s new director, David Kohl, tells the Boston Globe that air marshals are “no longer capturing” any “routine passenger behaviors on a plane that would be seen as normal behavior.”

The changes follow a series of reports by the newspaper that found thousands of ordinary citizens had been swept up in “The Quiet Skies” program and watched by armed, undercover agents through airports and on flights.

Agency officials say marshals no longer document travelers’ minor movements and behavior, such as whether they use the restroom during a flight or fidget in the airport.

## South Korea and US fail to reach deal on cost-sharing

BY KIM GAMEL  
*Stars and Stripes*

SEOUL, South Korea — With an end-of-year deadline fast approaching, the United States and South Korea failed to reach a new military cost-sharing agreement in talks last week as Washington demanded that its ally pay “significantly more,” officials said Friday.

The dispute puts the long-time alliance under pressure at a critical time, as they try to project solidarity in diplomatic efforts to persuade North Korea to give up its nuclear weapons.

Senior diplomats from both sides held three days of talks ending Thursday in Seoul to try to hammer out a new five-year deal, but negotiators were unable to agree on U.S. demands that South Korea increase its share of the burden for main-

taining some 28,500 U.S. troops on the divided peninsula.

“The U.S. government’s position is that [South Korea] should more equitably share in the financial burden,” U.S. Embassy spokesman Grant Guthrie said Friday.

“Our position is [South Korea] must contribute significantly more than it’s currently offering to achieve a fair burden-sharing arrangement in which [it] bears a greater burden for its own defense,” he added, without giving a specific figure.

President Donald Trump has demanded that South Korea increase its contribution to as much as double the current amount, or more than \$1 billion per year, The Wall Street Journal recently reported.

Guthrie said discussions are

ongoing, and both sides are still striving to reach a deal, although he couldn’t comment on whether another formal round of talks might be held this month. A South Korean official ruled out that possibility.

“The U.S. government stands by our [South Korean] ally, including through the shared obligations under our mutual defense treaty,” Guthrie said.

Brinkmanship is common in the burden-sharing talks, which occur every five years.

But Trump has raised the stakes by making efforts to force allies to pay more a key part of his presidential platform.

Seoul insists it already pays a fair share at some \$830 million per year, or nearly half the total cost of stationing the troops in the South, which remains tech-

nically at war with the North since their 1950-53 conflict ended in an armistice instead of a peace treaty.

South Korea also separately footed most of the nearly \$11 billion bill for the expansion of the Camp Humphreys Army garrison as part of a long-delayed plan to relocate most U.S. forces south of Seoul. Trump visited the base with South Korean President Moon Jae-in last year.

U.S. Forces Korea, the main command, notified the Korean Employees Union and the labor ministry on Nov. 7 that local staff will have to be furloughed in the spring if no agreement is reached.

Operations are expected to continue in the meantime, as reserve funds are available, officials have said.

# North Koreans mark 7 years since Kim Jong Il's death

Associated Press

PYONGYANG, North Korea — North Koreans are marking the seventh anniversary of the death of leader Kim Jong Il with visits to statues and vows of loyalty to his son and successor, Kim Jong Un.

As snow fell Sunday, tens of thousands of people offered flowers and paid respects to the late leader at Mansu Hill in central Pyongyang, the location of huge bronze statues of the “Dear Leader” and national founder Kim Il Sung.

The anniversary observations were expected to continue through Monday across the country.

The death of Kim Jong Il on Dec. 17, 2011, thrust his son into power when he was still in his late 20s and a virtually unknown figure outside of the North.

Despite many predictions from outside experts that he wouldn't be up to the task, Kim Jong Un has consolidated his

power, bolstered the country's economy in the face of intense international sanctions and attained a goal his father and grandfather could only dream of — he is the first North Korean leader to possess an arsenal of nuclear weapons and long-range missiles capable of reaching the United States.

With attention focused on the anniversary, there was little mention in the state media of the issues that have gotten the most attention elsewhere, including a flurry of speculation in South Korea that Kim might visit Seoul by the end of the year.

But the North's official Korean Central News Agency ran a lengthy commentary late Sunday that slammed the United States for “slander” and “sheer malice” against the country and for dragging its feet on efforts to improve relations after Kim's summit with President Donald Trump in Singapore in June.

Virtually all homes and pub-

lic offices in North Korea feature portraits of the elder Kims, who are also memorialized in countless statues, mosaics and cenotaphs around the country. North Korean adults wear pins over their hearts bearing the likenesses of Kim Il Sung or Kim Jong Il, or both.

The North has yet to come out with a Kim Jong Un pin or to order his image join the others on every wall, though Kim and his wife, Ri Sol Ju, have been referred to with increasingly lofty titles — “chairman” for Kim and “respected first lady” for Ri. A special portrait of the young chairman was unveiled recently at a ceremony to welcome the visit of Cuba's president, but none have appeared in public since. And unlike his father and grandfather, Kim's Jan. 8 birthday has yet to be declared a national holiday or even marked on calendars.

None of that should be assumed to be a sign of weakness, however.

## Memorial held for victims of the Christmas market attack

Associated Press

PARIS — Residents of the eastern French city of Strasbourg filled a city square Sunday for a memorial to the four people shot dead and the dozen wounded by a gunman at their famous Christmas market.

The hourlong ceremony took place in Kleber Square by the city's Christmas market, near where the gunman opened fire on Tuesday evening.

According to the local newspaper DNA, more than 1,000 people attended the memorial.

“The presence on Saturday of an extremely large crowd in the Christmas market was an illustration of our commitment to these values on which our living together is based, which we will continue to defend against all those who want to attack it,” Strasbourg Mayor Roland Ries said.

## 42 injured in restaurant explosion

Associated Press

TOKYO — More than 40 people were injured in an explosion Sunday night at a Japanese restaurant in northern Japan, police said.

The explosion occurred in Sapporo, the capital city of Japan's northern main island of Hokkaido, and caused nearby apartment buildings and houses to shake.

The cause of the explosion, which occurred at a two-story restaurant in Sapporo's Toyohira district, is under investigation, police said, adding that they had no further details.

TV footage from Japanese public broadcaster NHK showed the restaurant in flames, with debris scattered on the ground.

## Putin: Rap music should be controlled, not banned

Associated Press

MOSCOW — Alarmed by the growing popularity of rap among Russian youth, President Vladimir Putin wants cultural leaders to devise a means of controlling, rather than banning, the popular music.

Putin says “if it is impossible to stop, then we must lead it and direct it.”

But Putin said at a St. Petersburg meeting with cultural advisers Saturday that attempts to ban artists from performing will have an adverse effect and bolster their popularity.

Putin noted that “rap is based on three pillars: sex, drugs and protest.” But he is particularly concerned with drug themes prevalent in rap, saying “this is

a path to the degradation of the nation.”

He said “drug propaganda” is worse than cursing.

Putin's comments come amid a crackdown on contemporary music that evoked Soviet-era censorship of the arts.

Last month, a rapper known as Husky, whose videos have garnered more than 6 million views on YouTube, was arrested after he staged an impromptu performance when his show was shut down in the southern Russian city of Krasnodar.

The 25-year-old rapper, known for his lyrics about poverty, corruption and police brutality, was preparing to take to the stage on Nov. 21 when local prosecutors warned the venue that his act had elements of what

they termed “extremism.”

Husky climbed onto a car, surrounded by hundreds of fans, and chanted “I will sing my music, the most honest music!” before he was taken away by police.

On Nov. 30, rapper Gone. Fludd announced two concert cancellations, citing pressure from “every police agency you can imagine,” while the popular hip-hop artist Allj canceled his show in the Arctic city of Yakutsk after receiving threats of violence.

Other artists have been affected as well — pop sensation Monetchka and punk band Friendzona were among those who had their concerts shut down by the authorities last month.

## AMERICAN ROUNDUP

### Couple accuses store of misrepresenting rugs

**KS** KANSAS CITY — A couple claims a rug company sold them an “antique Persian rug” that may not have been Persian and could’ve been altered to appear in older condition.

The Kansas City Star reported that Maranatha and David Christie filed a lawsuit against Knotty Rug Co. The Johnson County couple said an appraiser told them the rug they bought for \$28,000 in December 2014 wasn’t antique and possibly not Persian.

The lawsuit also alleges the store misrepresented about 14 other rugs the couple purchased for more than \$39,000 in September 2014.

The lawsuit comes after the store agreed to buy back the Persian rug and two others for nearly \$39,000.

### Theft of Salvation Army kettle caught on video

**MN** BLAINE — The Grinch stealing Christmas is supposed to be a story reserved for movies and books. However, a community in Blaine experienced the real thing, when two thieves stole a red Salvation Army kettle from outside a Cub Foods store on Dec. 4.

Surveillance video showed two people stealing the money intended to go toward Salvation Army services, which include food, shelter, rehabilitation and disaster relief for the poor. The thieves appear to have used bolt cutters to remove the donation bucket from its stand.

“I believe it’s pretty low, pretty pathetic, to prey on a charity at this time of the year that’s raising money to help those in need,” Capt. Mark Boerboom of

the Blaine Police Department said. “It was a brazen theft in the middle of the day.”

Police are still searching for the thieves, known as “the Two Grinches.” Authorities have released photos from the surveillance camera to aid in the investigation. It is not known how much money was in the kettle.

### Police: Woman charged after running over son

**MI** BELMONT — Authorities have charged a woman with reckless driving after police said she ran over her son, 9, while dropping him off at school.

Court records show Tiffany Kosakowski, 36, was arraigned Friday in Kent County with second-degree child abuse and reckless driving causing serious impairment of a body function. She was released on a personal-recognizance bond.

Prosecutors charged Kosakowski after reviewing police reports about the incident that left her son hospitalized in critical condition. MLive.com reported the third-grader was run over Tuesday in the Chandler Woods Charter Academy’s parking lot in Belmont. Police say the rear tire of his mother’s vehicle injured his head and torso.

### Miniature horses help students de-stress

**MO** ST. LOUIS — Saint Louis University has a novel approach for helping students de-stress before finals: miniature horses.

KSDK-TV reported that Taylorville-Illinois-based Heartland Mini Hoofs brought three horses to the school on Tuesday. Outside the library, students squealed as they approached the horses and took

selfies with them.

Andra Ebert of Heartland Mini Hoofs said “your stress goes down” immediately when you touch the horses.

The university’s department of public safety came up the idea of bringing the horses. Officer Josh Johnson said officers know finals are “tough” and said the hope is that the horses will “bring some good.”

Freshman Molly Dippel said she’d been feeling stressed, but “the second I saw this horse, everything disappeared.”

### Restraining order set against sixth-grader

**FL** LAKELAND — A sixth-grade student at a middle school has been issued a restraining order to stay away from another student who he is accused of beating badly.

A judge issued the restraining order last week, requiring the student to stay 50 feet away from the other student.

The judge found that the student had stalked and bullied the victim again following the beating last month.

A police report says that last month the student picked up the victim by his shoulders, slammed him into the pavement and repeatedly punched him in the head after the victim refused to give him popcorn he was selling for a fundraiser.

The Lakeland Ledger reported that following the judge’s decision the student accused of the bullying in Lakeland, Fla., was transferred to another school.

### Candidate loses race after roll of the dice

**AR** WALNUT RIDGE, — A city council candidate in northeastern Arkansas whose runoff election ended in

a tie after he didn’t vote has lost his bid for the seat by a roll of the dice.

The race for a seat on the Hoxie City Council was determined by Cliff Farmer and incumbent Alderwoman Becky Linebaugh rolling dice at the Lawrence County courthouse on Thursday. Deputy Clerk Ashlyn Griffin says Farmer rolled a four and Linebaugh rolled a six.

Farmer had intended to vote in last week’s runoff election after returning from a work-related trip to Florida, but he and his wife landed in Memphis, Tenn., only an hour before polls closed. Memphis is about 80 miles from Hoxie. Farmer’s wife had voted early.

Farmer and Linebaugh each received 223 votes in the runoff election.

### Grand marshal’s sex convictions draw ire

**MS** SARDIS — Some people are complaining after the local chamber of commerce chose a sex offender as the grand marshal of the town Christmas parade.

WMC-TV reported Michael Saripkin presided over the Sardis Christmas parade Tuesday.

Saripkin was convicted in Tennessee of sexual battery in 1990 and statutory rape in 1997. In 2013, he was convicted in Mississippi of inappropriately touching a child. Store owner Carolyn Whaley said she knew of Saripkin’s past but didn’t object to the honor. She said Saripkin has donated money to civic causes and encouraged businesses to move to Sardis.

Officials with the city of Sardis and the chamber of commerce couldn’t be reached for comment.

From wire reports

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Reporting  
World, National  
and Military News

# QB Watson, Texans rally to beat Jets

Associated Press

EAST RUTHERFORD, N.J. — The Houston Texans were trailing late and facing a second straight loss after a nine-game winning streak.

Deshaun Watson wasn't having it.

The cool-headed, playmaking quarterback threw a 14-yard touchdown pass to DeAndre Hopkins with 2:15 left, lifting the Texans to a 29-22 victory over Sam Darnold and the New York Jets on Saturday.

"It doesn't surprise me that he's able to stay controlled in those situations," Hopkins said about Watson. "He's done that

before in big games in his career. On the sideline, everyone was composed."

And no one was more in control than Watson.

"The game is never over for me," he said. "The plays are never over sometimes. I just go out there with the ball in my hands, put the load on my shoulders and lead the team to victory. I've been doing that my whole life and I have to continue to do that at this level.

"Every game comes down to a final drive. You've got to be able to block out all the noise, lock in and try to lead the team to victory."

# Browns keep playoff hopes alive with victory over Broncos

Associated Press

DENVER — Whether it was "The Fumble" or "The Drive" in the playoffs in the 1980s or the 11 consecutive times Denver had dumped Cleveland, the Broncos always served as the Browns' biggest bugaboo.

With John Elway watching from his suite at Mile High Stadium, Baker Mayfield capitalized on Denver's depleted cornerback corps and dubious coaching decisions in leading the Browns past the Broncos 17-16 on Saturday night.

Mayfield's 2-yard TD toss to Antonio Callaway with just under 12 minutes left provided the winning margin for the Browns (6-7-1), who kept alive their slim hopes of ending the NFL's longest playoff drought.

The Browns still have a shot at their first winning season since 2007 and even their first playoff berth since 2002, thanks to their first win over Denver (6-8) since 1990.

"I think the tough environment, winning on the road's the most important thing," Mayfield said. "If we don't take care of business tonight — and obviously we have to move on and take care of business next week — none of that matters.

"So, being able to win on the road is something we've got to take pride in."

Combined with their win at Cincinnati last month, the Browns have multiple road victories for the first time since 2014.

Callaway's touchdown made it 17-13 and came with safety Justin Simmons in coverage because the Broncos were down five cornerbacks.

**Injuries:** Langley went out in the first half and Roby in the second. Combined with Taylor's ejection — he was signed after Harris fractured his right fibula two weeks ago — and the Broncos were left scrambling in their secondary.

## Bowls roundup

# Rivers runs wild in Vegas Bowl

Associated Press

LAS VEGAS — Ronnie Rivers rushed for 212 yards and two touchdowns, Anthoula "Tank" Kelly had a 70-yard interception return for a touchdown and No. 19 Fresno State beat Arizona State 31-20 in the Las Vegas Bowl on Saturday.

Marcus McMaryion rushed for a touchdown and was 15-for-29 passing for 176 yards to help the Bulldogs (12-2) set a school record for wins in a season. He also threw two interceptions.

Eno Benjamin rushed for 118 yards a one touchdown for the Sun Devils (7-6) in their third straight bowl loss. Manny Wilkins threw for 129 yards, with a 3-yard scoring pass to Kyle Williams and two interceptions.

Rivers put Fresno State back in front 24-20 with a 68-yard touchdown run up the middle in the third quarter and had a 5-yard scoring run in the fourth quarter to seal Fresno State's second win over a Pac-12 opponent this season.

Wilkins sustained an apparent knee injury on the final pass of his college career, which was intercepted by Juju Hughes.

### New Mexico Bowl

**Utah State 52, North Texas 13:** At Albuquerque, N.M., Jordan Love threw for 359 yards and four touchdowns and Jalen Greene had six catches for 151 yards and a score to help Utah State rout North Texas.

Interim coach Frank Maile directed the Aggies (11-2) after Matt Wells left to take the Texas Tech job.

Love completed 21 of 43 passes with one interception. D.J. William had two interceptions, helping Utah State ground high-flying North Texas (9-4).

### Cure Bowl

**Tulane 41, Louisiana-Lafayette 24:** At Orlando, Fla., Darius Bradwell rushed for a career-best 150 yards and two

touchdowns to lead Tulane to its first postseason victory in 16 years.

Justin McMillan improved to 5-1 as the Green Wave's starting quarterback, tossing a first-quarter TD pass to Terren Encalade and running for a late score while accounting for 217 yards total offense — 145 passing and 72 rushing.

Bradwell scored on runs of 15 and 4 yards while setting bowl records for rushing attempts (35) and yards for Tulane (7-6), which won a bowl game for the first time since the 2002 Hawaii Bowl.

The Green Wave also got a rushing TD from Amare Jones and outgained the Ragin' Cajuns 337 yards to 84 on the ground.

### Camellia Bowl

**Georgia Southern 23, Eastern Michigan 21:** At Montgomery, Ala., Tyler Bass kicked a 40-yard field goal as time expired to lift Georgia Southern past Eastern Michigan in the Camellia Bowl.

Shai Werts kept the winning drive alive with a 29-yard scramble on fourth-and-10. Bass came on for his third field goal after Wesley Fields' two runs pushed Georgia Southern (10-3) 7 yards closer.

### New Orleans Bowl

**Appalachian State 45, Middle Tennessee 13:** Appalachian State receiver Malik Williams passed for two touchdowns on trick plays, quarterback Zac Thomas caught a scoring pass and threw for three more, and the Mountaineers routed Middle Tennessee.

### Celebration Bowl

**North Carolina A&T 24, Alcorn State 22:** At Atlanta, Lamar Raynard passed for 292 yards and two touchdowns and Malik Wilson returned a kickoff for the game-sealing touchdown.

## College basketball roundup

# No. 12 Heels rock No. 4 Zags

Associated Press

CHAPEL HILL, N.C. — Cameron Johnson had 25 points and six three-pointers while No. 12 North Carolina shot 55 percent to beat fourth-ranked Gonzaga 103-90 on Saturday night.

Luke Maye added 20 points and 16 rebounds for the Tar Heels, who led by 14 at halftime and never let the Zags closer than eight after the break. The marquee nonconference game featured two of the nation's best offensive teams who lived up to those reputations, yet it was the Tar Heels' work on the boards that proved just as important.

**No. 1 Kansas 74, No. 17 Villanova 71:** Lagerald Vick had never watched last season's game, so he poured in 29 points, Dedric Lawson added 28 points and 12 rebounds, and both helped the Jayhawks make just enough free throws in the closing minutes to hold off the Wildcats.

**No. 2 Tennessee 102, Memphis 92:** Admiral Schofield scored 20 of his 29 points in the second half and added 11 rebounds as Tennessee snapped a three-game skid.

The Volunteers (8-1) avoided any letdown after a weeklong layoff for finals since upsetting then-No. 1 ranked Gonzaga last weekend in Phoenix. Grant Williams added 19 points for Tennessee.

**Old Dominion 68, No. 25 Syracuse 62:** B.J. Stith scored all of his 18 points in the second half, and the Monarchs overcame an 11-point second-half deficit to win at Syracuse.

Xavier Green had 15 points and Marquis Godwin added 11 for Old Dominion (8-3), which trailed by 13 points late in the first half and by 11 early in the second before rallying for its sixth straight victory.

**No. 5 Michigan 70, Western Michigan 62:** Charles Matthews made a layup just before halftime to give the host Wolverines their first lead, and the smooth-shooting guard

matched a season high with 25 points.

Michigan (11-0) is off to its best start since it was 16-0 six seasons ago.

**No. 7 Nevada 72, South Dakota State 68:** Jordan Caroline scored 21 points and the Wolf Pack mounted yet another comeback win.

**No. 25 Indiana 71, Butler 68:** Rob Phinisee hit a deep, buzzer-beating three-pointer, and Juwan Morgan scored a career-high 35 points to give the Hoosiers a victory in the Crossroads Classic in Indianapolis.

**No. 8 Auburn 75, UAB 71 (OT):** Jared Harper scored 23 of visiting Tigers' last 30 points in the Mike Slive Invitational in Birmingham.

In front of a crowd of 15,856, the budding in-state rivals raced to the overtime finish via the three-point arc. After Harper scored 12 of Auburn's last 15, UAB's Jeremiah Bell hit a pair of triples in the final 40 seconds, including a contested shot with 10 seconds left to send the contest to overtime.

**No. 11 Texas Tech 82, Abilene Christian 48:** Jarrett Culver scored a career-high 30 points, Matt Mooney added 14 and the host Red Raiders (10-0) raced past Abilene Christian in the final game at sold-out Lubbock Municipal Coliseum.

The last time Tech started a season with at least 10 consecutive wins was 1929-30.

**No. 13 Virginia Tech 73, Washington 61:** Nikell Alexander-Walker scored 24 points to lead the Hokies (9-1) in the Air Force Reserve Boardwalk Classic in Atlantic City.

Justin Thomas, Kerry Blackshear and Ahmed Hill each added 10 points for the Virginia Tech, which won its fourth straight. The Hokies led by 18 points at halftime.

**No. 14 Buffalo 73, Southern Illinois 65:** Nick Perkins had 20 points and 11 rebounds, and the Bulls improved to 10-0, their best start since 1930-31, when they finished 15-0. CJ Massinburg scored 14 points, Davonta

Jordan had 11 and Buffalo won its 17th consecutive home game dating to last season.

Sean Lloyd Jr. had 14 points for the Salukis (7-5) in their second straight loss.

**No. 15 Ohio State 73, Bucknell 71:** Kaleb Wesson had a career-high 20 points and the host Buckeyes held off a comeback bid. from the Bison

**No. 18 Mississippi State 70, Cincinnati 59:** Quindary Weatherspoon and Lamar Peters scored 14 points each, Reggie Perry and Tyson Carter both added 12, and the host Bulldogs beat the Bearcats.

**No. 19 Kentucky 88, Utah 61:** Freshman Keldon Johnson scored 24 points, including five three-pointers in the first half, and the host Wildcats (8-2) made a season-high 12 three-pointers, including six from Johnson.

Both Gach led the Utes (4-5) with 22 points, followed by Jayce Johnson with 11.

**No. 20 Arizona State 76, Georgia 74:** Remy Martin scored 21 points, Romello White added 16 and the Sun Devils (8-1) rallied from an 18-point deficit to win on the road.

Martin gave Arizona State its first lead of the game with a baseline jumper to make it 71-70 with 2:43 remaining.

Rayshaun Hammonds and Tyree Crump each scored 19 points for the Bulldogs (5-4).

**No. 22 Iowa 77, Northern Iowa 54:** Tyler Cook had 17 points and 13 rebounds, Luka Garza scored 17, and the host Hawkeyes cruised past the Panthers for their second straight win.

**No. 23 Furman 93, UNC Wilmington 50:** Clay Mounce tied his career high with 26 points and had 10 rebounds as the host Paladins improved to 12-0.

Furman long ago surpassed its best previous start to a season (5-0) and has won 19 of its past 20 games.

**No. 25 Kansas State 71, Georgia State 59:** Barry Brown had 21 points to lead the host Wildcats.

## Alvarez gets third belt with TKO of Fielding

BY BARRY WILNER

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Canelo Alvarez threw a Garden party Saturday night. A short and powerful fiesta.

Alvarez landed dozens of body punches, knocking down Rocky Fielding four times and stopping him in the third round to earn his third weight class title, taking the WBA super middleweight belt.

Coming off his close decision against Gennady Golovkin three months ago to take the WBA and WBC middleweight titles, Alvarez could hear chants of "Canelo! Canelo!" long before he entered the Madison Square Garden ring for the first time. Throughout a lengthy undercard, it was clear who the sellout crowd of 20,112 came to see and cheer.

He delivered with power and precision, landing 73 punches, 35 to the body.

"That was the plan in the gym, to hit the body and then move up, and that's the result," Alvarez said through an interpreter. "You see the result here."

Only eight other Mexican fighters have held three division titles. And Alvarez, 28, says he is headed back to the 160-pound class he rules, with possibly a third go with Golovkin in 2019. The next fight, opponent unknown, is set for Las Vegas in early May.

"Canelo will fight whoever is the best, no doubt about it," said his promoter, Oscar De La Hoya.

If this was a one-off at 168 pounds, it was quite a show in his debut at Madison Square Garden.

Fielding, 31, won the WBA crown in July when he knocked out Tyron Zeuge in Germany in the fifth round. But the Englishman had never faced anyone close to Canelo's class, and it showed.

## NBA roundup

## James, Ball propel Lakers past Hornets

Associated Press

CHARLOTTE, N.C. — LeBron James and Lonzo Ball gave the Lakers multiple triple-doubles in a game for just the second time, and Los Angeles routed the Charlotte Hornets 128-100 on Saturday night for its third win in four games.

James had 24 points, 12 rebounds and 11 assists, while Ball had 16 points, 10 rebounds and 10 assists. Magic Johnson and Kareem Abdul-Jabbar are the only other Lakers to accomplish that feat in the same game, doing so on Jan. 22, 1982.

James continued his dominance over Charlotte, improving to 27-1 in his last 28 games.

He was unstoppable throughout on penetration, helping the Lakers outscore the Hornets 40-17 in the third quarter and build a 30-point lead with his second triple-double of the season and 75th of his career. He did not play in the fourth quarter with the game out of reach.

**Pistons 113, Celtics 104:** Blake Griffin scored 27 points and Andre Drummond added 19 points and 20 rebounds to help Detroit beat visiting Boston, snapping the Celtics' eight-game winning streak.

The Pistons also ended their own six-game skid with a solid 48-minute effort. Detroit took control with a 13-0 run in the third quarter and played well at the start of the fourth as well.

Kyrie Irving led Boston with 26 points.

Both teams shot over 60 percent from the field in the first quarter, and the game was still tight at halftime, with the Pistons up 57-56. Drummond punctuated his team's 13-point run in the third with a dunk that put Detroit ahead 76-66.

**Rockets 105, Grizzlies 97:** James Harden had 32 points, 12 rebounds and 10 assists for his second consecutive triple-double, and Houston held off a

fourth-quarter burst to win at Memphis.

Harden, who had 50 points in a triple-double in the Rockets' victory over the Lakers on Thursday, was 9 of 14 from the field, including 3 of 7 from outside the arc as the Rockets won their third straight.

**Thunder 110, Clippers 104:** Paul George scored 33 points to help host Oklahoma City beat Los Angeles. It was the fourth time in seven games George scored at least 30 points.

Russell Westbrook had 13 points, 12 assists, nine rebounds and six steals for the Thunder. Jerami Grant scored 18 points and Steven Adams added 16 for Oklahoma City, which bounced back from a 109-98 loss at Denver on Friday night.

**Bulls 98, Spurs 93:** Kris Dunn scored 24 points, Lauri Markkanen added 23 and Chicago rallied from a 21-point deficit in the second half to win at San Antonio.

The rally snapped the Bulls' three-game skid and ended the Spurs' four-game winning streak. LaMarcus Aldridge had 29 points and 12 rebounds for San Antonio, which dominated the first half.

**Magic 96, Jazz 89:** Evan Fournier scored 24 points, Terrence Ross came off the bench to add 10 of his 19 in the fourth quarter, and Orlando rallied from an 11-point deficit to beat Utah and sweep its two-game homestand in Mexico City.

Ross shot 8 of 9 from the field and Nikola Vucevic added 15 points and a season-high 19 rebounds for the Magic (13-15), who beat the Chicago Bulls 97-91 on Thursday.

**Suns 107, Timberwolves 99:** Devin Booker returned from a six-game absence to score 28 points and Phoenix beat visiting Minnesota, giving the Suns a two-game winning streak for the first time in almost a year.

## NHL roundup

## Kessel lifts Penguins past Kings in overtime

Associated Press

PITTSBURGH — Phil Kessel scored a power-play goal at 3:59 of overtime to give the Pittsburgh Penguins a 4-3 victory over the Los Angeles Kings on Saturday night.

Evgeni Malkin pushed a loose puck from the slot to Kessel, and he finished near the side of the net for the Penguins' fifth victory in seven games.

Tanner Pearson scored against his former team, and Matt Cullen and Bryan Rust also had goals for the Penguins. Matt Murray made 38 saves for his first victory since Oct. 25 at Calgary.

**Capitals 4, Sabres 3 (SO):** Alex Ovechkin scored his NHL-leading 29th goal of the season to extend his points streak to a career-best 14 games and had the shootout winner for host Washington.

Ovechkin has 17 goals and six points during his points streak and has scored in six in a row. The Stanley Cup champion Capitals have won five in a row.

**Panthers 4, Maple Leafs 3 (OT):** Aleksander Barkov scored at 3:24 of overtime to complete his first NHL hat trick and lift Florida past visiting Toronto.

Barkov slipped the puck past goalie Frederik Andersen from the right side of the crease.

**Flames 2, Wild 1:** Matthew Tkachuk scored the go-ahead goal midway through the third period for Calgary, and David Rittich made 34 saves at Minnesota.

Mark Giordano scored short-handed in the first period for the Pacific Division-leading Flames. They are 11-2-1 in their last 14 games, with 10 wins in regulation, and lead the NHL with 50 third-period goals. Jordan Greenway scored for the Wild.

**Ducks 2, Blue Jackets 1 (OT):** Daniel Sprong scored 1:19 into overtime to lift Anaheim at Columbus.

Adam Henrique won a faceoff in the Ducks' offensive zone, and Sprong beat Sergei Bobrovsky with his second goal of the night.

**Canadiens 5, Senators 2:** Shea Weber scored the tie-breaking goal in Montreal's four-goal third period and the Canadiens beat visiting Ottawa for the third time in 12 days.

Jesper Kotkaniemi and Matthew Peca each had a goal and an assist, and Paul Byron and Jonathan Drouin also scored for Montreal. Carey Price stopped 16 shots to win his fifth straight.

Colin White and Mikkel Boedker scored for the Senators.

**Avalanche 6, Stars 4:** Gabriel Landeskog scored twice, including the winner with 3:20 remaining, Mikko Rantanen added two more on the power play and host Colorado recovered after blowing a three-goal lead.

Esa Lindell and Tyler Seguin brought Dallas back by scoring 44 seconds apart in the middle period. Seguin added another in the third and Jamie Benn tied it with 4:36 left.

**Islanders 4, Red Wings 3 (SO):** Mathew Barzal scored on a power play in the third period and had the only goal in the shootout to lift New York past visiting Detroit.

**Predators 2, Devils 1 (SO):** Ryan Johansen scored the winning goal in the sixth round of the shootout to lift Nashville past visiting New Jersey.

Frederick Gaudreau scored in regulation and Juuse Saros made 33 saves through overtime to help the Predators win their third straight.

**Canucks 5, Flyers 1:** Brock Boeser had a goal and an assist to lead host Vancouver.

Chris Tanev, Loui Eriksson, Josh Leivo and Markus Granlund also scored for the Canucks, and Troy Stecher had two assists.