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Trump, NATO's Stoltenberg talk terrorism

By JOHN VANDIVER

Stars and Stripes

President Donald Trump spoke with the head of the U.S.-led NATO alliance on Sunday, the same day NATO rolled out an expanded training effort in Iraq to boost a counterterrorism role that the American president has criticized as being inadequate.

NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg and Trump reconfirmed the importance of the alliance "in troubled times," said a summary of the conversation released by the alliance.

The new training effort in Iraq focused on helping build up that country's security forces. The NATO decision to conduct training inside Iraq was approved in July, but its expansion came as Trump has em-

phasized the need for NATO to play a larger role in the battle against terrorism.

NATO has shied away from a formal combat role in Iraq and Syria. It maintained a small training mission in Iraq until the end of 2011, when the team was withdrawn over a disagreement about the legal status of alliance troops in the country.

NATO touted its most recent effort, which involves training 30 Iraqi soldiers in neighboring Jordan in areas such as countering roadside bombs.

"The best weapon we have in the fight against terrorism is to train local forces," Stoltenberg said.

In the phone call, he said NATO's contribution to the fight against terrorism includes surveillance support to U.S. coalition fighting the Islamic State group.

The leaders also discussed the recent uptick in violence in eastern Ukraine.

Stoltenberg and Trump reviewed plans for a major NATO summit in May, which will be held at the alliance's new headquarters building in Brussels. The cost of the gleaming new structure is estimated at \$1.2 billion.

Given Trump's critical words about NATO's relevance, it hadn't been clear if Trump would attend the summit of the alliance's 28 national leaders. On the campaign trail and after his election, Trump has ripped allies, called NATO "obsolete" and cast doubt about U.S. commitment to the military pact.

Trump's criticisms have centered on frustration with allies, most of which spend less than 2 percent of gross domestic product — the benchmark that NATO members are sup-

posed to dedicate to defense. He also has criticized its strategic priorities, saying NATO should focus more on fighting terrorism.

During the past two years, NATO's primary focus has been reinforcing its eastern flank and allied countries along Russia's periphery, which have been anxious about a more assertive Moscow. Trump, however, says he wants to have warmer relations with Russian President Vladimir Putin, a position that has created confusion about how the U.S. will regard its expanding military presence in places such as Poland and the Baltics.

"They reviewed progress on the fight against terrorism and on NATO defense spending, and stressed the need for continued efforts to ensure fair burden sharing among all NATO Allies," NATO said.

Former officials: Trump order will 'endanger troops'

The Washington Post

Former Secretaries of State John Kerry and Madeline Albright, along with other former top national security officials including Leon Panetta, entered the fray over President Donald Trump's travel ban early Monday with an unusual declaration stating that it "undermines" national security and will "endanger U.S. troops in the field."

The six-page joint declaration was addressed to the U.S. Court of Appeals for the 9th Circuit in support of the temporary order blocking implementation of Trump's ban on entry for travelers from seven predominantly Muslim countries. The executive order was blocked by a U.S. District Court judge,

prompting the government to appeal in what is becoming an epic and unprecedented battle over executive power.

The declaration came as the state of Washington, which initially sought the restraining order, formally responded to the administration's appeal. The government's brief was due later Monday.

While the declaration by the former officials is not part of the formal pleading in the case, it is clearly meant to counter the government's argument that continuing to block Trump's executive action will cause great harm to the nation's security.

Numerous "friend of the court" briefs have been filed in the case as well, the latest by 97 major tech companies.

The group implicitly took

strong issue with the Trump administration's claim that a similar approach had been taken by former President Barack Obama during his administration, for whom they all worked.

Others signing the declaration in addition to Kerry, Albright and former secretary of defense and CIA director Panetta, were John McLaughlin, deputy director of the CIA from 2000 to 2004 and acting director in 2004; Lisa Monaco, former assistant to Obama for homeland security and counterterrorism; Michael Morell, a career CIA official who has served as deputy director and acting director; former Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano; and Susan Rice, Obama's ambassador to the

United Nations and national security adviser.

"We all agree that the United States faces real threats" from terrorist networks and that vetting is necessary, they said in the filing.

"We all are nevertheless unaware of any specific threat that would justify the travel ban" established by the executive order. Rather, they said they viewed it as one that "ultimately undermines the national security of the United States rather than making us safer."

Specifically, they said, the order will "endanger U.S. troops in the field" who "fight alongside allies in some of the named countries who put their lives on the line to protect Americans."

UN: Afghanistan sees record number of civilian casualties

BY PHILLIP WALTER
WELLMAN

Stars and Stripes

KABUL, Afghanistan — A record number of civilians were injured or killed in 2016 in the war in Afghanistan, with children hit especially hard, the United Nations said in a report Monday. The U.N. Assistance Mission in Afghanistan documented 11,418 civilian casualties last year, an increase of 3 percent over 2015. Of that number, 3,498 were deaths and 7,920 were injuries.

While civilian deaths dropped by 2 percent from 2015, injuries jumped by 6 percent. The total number of casualties was the highest number since 2009, when the UNAMA began systematic documentation.

The group attributed most of

the civilian deaths and injuries, 61 percent, to anti-government forces. Pro-government forces were said to be responsible for 24 percent of all cases, of which international military forces were accountable for 2 percent.

The UNAMA expressed concern over what it found to be a 24 percent increase in child casualties. A total of 3,512 were recorded last year, including 923 deaths.

“Children have been killed, blinded, crippled — or inadvertently caused the death of their friends — while playing with unexploded ordnance that is negligently left behind by parties to the conflict,” Zeid Ra’ad Al-Husseini, U.N. high commissioner for human rights, said in the report.

“The consequences of each

act of violence ripple through families and entire communities that are left broken, unable to sustain themselves and largely failing to obtain any semblance of justice or reparation,” he said.

The UNAMA recorded a record number of casualties from ground engagements, suicide and complex attacks, explosive remnants of war and aerial operations last year, which contributed to the 3 percent overall casualty increase.

Tadamichi Yamamoto, the special representative in Afghanistan for the U.N. secretary-general, said the conflict was destroying lives “in every corner of Afghanistan.”

Since 2009, 24,841 civilians have been killed and 45,347 injured in the war in Afghanistan.

Lawmaker hopeful about military boost

BY TRAVIS J. TRITTEN

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The chairman of the House Armed Services Committee said Monday the Republican effort to reform entitlement programs could create an opportunity for higher military spending.

Rep. Mac Thornberry, R-Texas, said the effort by House Republicans to cut the costs of Medicare and Medicaid, repeal the Affordable Care Act and reform the tax code could potentially open up more money for defense spending.

Thornberry and Sen. John McCain, R-Ariz., who is chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, have proposed a \$640 billion base defense budget for 2018 — up from the \$543 billion base budget planned for this year.

It remains uncertain how Congress might cobble together such an increase. Defense spending is capped by federal law at \$549 billion, not including overseas war spending, unless lawmakers reach an agreement to raise the limit.

Congress has a lot of budget work ahead. It must still finalize spending for this year; deal with an expected request for supplemental military funding from the Trump administration next month; and debate the ambitious slate of reforms proposed by Republicans, who now control the White House and both chambers of Congress.

Changes to the entitlement programs are likely to face ferocious opposition from Democrats.

Thornberry said there is widespread support among lawmakers for big boosts in military spending. The House and Senate Armed Services committees have warned that defense spending must increase by billions of dollars because falling budgets since the end of the ground wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have reduced the military’s ability to train, fight wars and maintain its equipment.

Anti-Assad forces turn on each other

Associated Press

BEIRUT — Syria’s ragtag rebel groups and insurgents trying to oust President Bashar Assad have turned their guns on each other in some of the worst infighting yet, with al-Qaida-linked fighters battling other factions in a split between supporters and opponents of the Russia-led push for a new peace process.

The clashes have led to the formation of two new coalitions but have also raised the specter of more fractures among rebel factions.

At the root of the infighting is a call that came at the end of the peace talks last month in the Kazakh capital of Astana. Russia, Turkey and Iran urged Syria’s rebels to dissociate themselves from al-Qaida’s affiliate in Syria, now known as the Fatah al-Sham Front.

The Astana meeting was designed to pave the way for talks to be held in Geneva in late February, but it also marked a new push in efforts to resolve Syria’s conflict, with Russia and Iran, Assad’s main supporters, and Turkey, the rebels’ chief backer, pledging to put their influence.

The Fatah al-Sham Front, previously called the Nusra Front, has been excluded from all negotiations and cease-fires, along with the Islamic State group.

For the rebels, however, the exclusion of al-Qaida’s affiliate is a sore point as many groups have close links with it on the ground.

On Jan. 23, Fatah al-Sham fighters surrounded the offices in Idlib province belonging to one of the rebel groups that had sent representatives to Astana, the U.S.-backed Jaish al-Mujadeen, and hours later, forced its fighters to surrender.

Al-Qaida’s affiliate in Syria, which lost many senior leaders in targeted assassinations in recent months, had accused Jaish al-Mujadeen of giving the U.S.-led coalition intelligence on the location of their commanders and top figures.

The Idlib attack was not the first assault by al-Qaida’s fighters, but the Jan. 23 fighting escalated to include other groups, leading to clashes between Fatah al-Sham and more moderate factions.

To seek protection from Fatah al-Sham, many small groups turned to ultraconservative Ahrar al-Sham, one of Syria’s most powerful insurgent groups and a former ally of al-Qaida.

The rebel infighting and reshuffling of alliances could facilitate a break between Fatah al-Sham and moderate groups, making it easier for the international community to single out the al-Qaida affiliate for attack.

Aging HMS Ocean still useful

By CHRIS CHURCH
Stars and Stripes

ABOARD HMS OCEAN — The flagship of the British navy, the HMS Ocean, is still proving itself a capable platform even though it's slated to be retired in 2018.

Since late November, the nearly 20-year-old helicopter carrier and assault ship has served as the flotilla leader for U.S. Naval Forces Central Command's Task Force 50. The task force is normally led by a U.S. aircraft carrier and commanded by the strike group's commander.

Because the Ocean is not capable of airstrike operations, it has not been involved in Operation Inherent Resolve, the U.S.-led coalition to defeat the Islamic State group in Iraq and Syria.

But it has played an integral role in maintaining security and ensuring the free flow of commerce throughout the Middle East, the HMS Ocean's commanding officer, Capt. Robert G. Pedre, said.

"You shouldn't underestimate the utility of maritime power and having warships operating globally ... and also in terms of our ability to respond to an unforeseen crisis should one occur," Pedre said. "I generally think the nations surrounding

the Gulf draw genuine strength from the knowledge that there are coalition maritime forces operating in this area of operations."

Most recently, the 22,000-metric-ton vessel served as a command-and-control platform to bring together a multinational task group for exercise Unified Trident, which ran from Jan. 31 to Thursday and involved the British, Australian and French navies, along with the U.S. Navy and Coast Guard. British navy Commodore Andrew Burns, the commander of NAVCENT's Task Force 50, led the exercise from the ship.

In the past, U.S. Navy and Marine forces and those from partner nations Qatar and the United Arab Emirates have operated from the Ocean's flight deck, Pedre said. The Ocean began its deployment in September as part of the British navy's inaugural Joint Expeditionary Force Maritime Task Group. It crossed into the Middle East in October.

The Ocean conducted bilateral exercises or visited every Gulf Cooperation Council country during this deployment, Pedre said.

"In terms of the opportunity to build partnership, it's been instrumental having [the Ocean] in the area," he said. "But also in terms of our readi-

ness for contingency. Our ability to evacuate personnel in a crisis situation — I've got four landing craft — and the ability to embark up to, depending on the aircraft type, some 18 helicopters really brings huge capability."

The ship has operated with 12 different planes, including a number of surveillance aircraft. Because of its flexibility and its long range — it can travel about 2,500 miles a week and can cover more than 8,000 miles on a single fueling — the ship can serve as a platform for a wide range of activities, including noncombatant evacuation operations, humanitarian disaster and relief operations, countering illicit trafficking, and wartime operations, Pedre said.

The HMS Ocean can embark 40 vehicles and 480 marine commandos if they are needed for amphibious operations. "I think the key point is we provide a huge reassurance," Pedre said.

The Ocean's retirement plan has been met with some criticism in the United Kingdom, as it will leave service a couple of years before the first of two new aircraft carriers, the HMS Queen Elizabeth, will likely become operational. Another concern is that it received a massive \$80 million refitting just two years ago.

1st big step for runway at Schwab

By MATTHEW M. BURKE
AND CHIYOMI SUMIDA
Stars and Stripes

CAMP FOSTER, Okinawa — Concrete blocks are being dropped into the waters off Camp Schwab, the first major step in building a runway that will facilitate the relocation of Marine forces within Okinawa.

The Okinawa Defense Bureau is placing the 228 blocks — each weighing between 11 and 14 tons — at the bottom of Oura Bay at Henoko so a protective film can be installed to prevent ocean contamination during landfill work, a bureau spokesman said.

Okinawa Gov. Takeshi Onaga, who returned Sunday from a trip to Washington to lobby the Trump administration against relocating Marine Corps Air Station Futenma to the island's remote north, immediately called for suspension of the work.

Onaga, who was elected on an anti-base platform in 2014, has vowed to halt the relocation to the northern recesses of Nago and to expel the Marines' controversial tilt-rotor MV-22 Osprey. While their movement is small, Onaga and the protesters have popular support.

Okinawa Marine's son arrested

CAMP FOSTER, Okinawa — The teenage son of an Okinawa-based Marine was arrested late last week after being accused of robbing an off-base store with a toy gun.

About 5:25 a.m. Friday, the 18-year-old suspect entered the kitchen of an Uruma store that sells prepared meals, flashed the toy gun and made off with about \$100, Okinawa prefectural police said.

Police would not release the suspect's name because he is considered a minor under Japanese law.

An officer spotted the suspect about a mile from the store, but he fled, police said. Naval Criminal Investigative Service agents took the teen into custody that night at the family's Camp McTureous home. He was handed over to Okinawa police about 11:10 p.m.

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PACAF suicide concerns addressed

By LEON COOK
Stars and Stripes

YOKOTA AIR BASE, Japan — The Air Force should embed counselors within units and assign more mental health providers to overseas bases with little access to off-base care, Pacific Air Forces officials said after reviewing a spate of suicides by airmen in the region.

The service also must add recreational options to reduce stress placed on shift workers who rarely leave bases as a result of odd working hours and the 1 a.m. curfew on servicemembers in Japan, officials told Yokota residents late last week.

The results came after multiple deaths, including three from Yokota's maintenance group, prompted PACAF to send a team

tasked with reviewing problems faced by airmen to Pacific bases.

Military and family-life counselors, who help military families with relationships, stress management, grief, and family and other issues, are popular with airmen and should be embedded, the team recommended.

"We have two mental health providers on our base, while [Joint Base] Andrews has nine," Col. Kenneth Moss, the 374th Airlift Wing commander, said during Thursday's meeting. "It's a much bigger base, so of course it has more, but if you walk out the gate there are probably 700 providers in town. We don't have that option here."

The team also recommended that military treatment facilities hire marriage and family therapists.

Romanian PM may fire justice minister over graft decree

Associated Press

BUCHAREST, Romania — Romania's prime minister said Monday he may fire the justice minister for mishandling a contentious decree that has sparked the country's largest anti-government protests since communism ended.

Premier Sorin Grindeanu said the emergency decree to decriminalize some official misconduct approved by his Cabinet last week had "led to division" among Romanians. Grindeanu suggested Justice Minister Florin Iordache may lose his job over the move within days.

"In the next two days, I won't (fire him)," the prime minister said, noting that the government could be toppled if a motion of no-confidence to be debated this week passes in Parliament.

Social Democratic chairman Liviu Dragnea earlier said he supported the government, but by evening he said he would back the premier if Grindeanu decides to sack the justice minister.

There were signs Monday that the government may not push ahead immediately with the measure to ease anti-corruption laws. Mass demonstrations have been held in Bucharest and other cities since

the ordinance was introduced on Tuesday and approved early Wednesday.

Unrest continued Monday evening, with hundreds of government supporters gathering outside the presidential palace in the Romanian capital blaming President Klaus Iohannis for the crisis. The president has strongly opposed the ordinance.

Elsewhere, protesters began gathering outside the government offices for the seventh consecutive evening in Victory Square, the site of the biggest protests Romania has had since communism was overthrown in 1989.

On Sunday, the government backed down following six days of street protests from the ordinance that would have decriminalized abuse in office by officials if the amount involved was less than about \$48,500. It plans to introduce another version of the law in Parliament, where it has a majority.

The Constitutional Court is expected to rule on the constitutionality of the decriminalizing proposal later this week.

Dragnea, the major power broker in the government, is banned from being prime minister because of conviction in April 2016 for vote rigging.

EU envoys back keeping sanctions against Russia

Associated Press

BRUSSELS — The European Union's top diplomats vowed Monday to uphold sanctions against Russia for destabilizing conflict-torn Ukraine despite confusion over how President Donald Trump plans to manage his relations with Moscow.

Determined to wait no longer for a clear message from Washington, EU foreign ministers said their economic sanctions must remain in place until Russian President Vladimir Putin respects his promise to work for a cease-fire in eastern Ukraine and to ensure that heavy weapons are withdrawn from border areas.

EU foreign policy chief Federica Mogherini underlined that the EU will never recognize Russia's 2014 annexation of the Crimean Peninsula, and insisted all sides must respect the Minsk peace agreement aimed at ending the fighting in eastern Ukraine between government forces and Russia-backed separatists.

"I cannot say where the U.S. administration stands on this, but I can say where the Europeans stand on this," Mogherini

said.

Fighting has escalated during the past week in eastern Ukraine, killing at least 36 people, including civilians, and wounding dozens. More than 9,800 people have died since the war began in 2014.

The EU imposed a series of rolling sanctions against Russia in July 2014. They include economic and diplomatic measures, like the cancellation of top meetings, and travel bans and asset freezes on people linked to the annexation of Crimea or accused of interfering with Ukraine's territorial integrity.

Some of those measures were renewed in December until July 31.

EU member countries were rattled by Trump's generally benevolent view of Putin during the election. Trump repeatedly has praised Putin and has signaled that U.S.-Russia relations could be in for a makeover under his leadership, even after U.S. intelligence agencies concluded that Russia meddled in the 2016 U.S. presidential campaign to help Trump defeat Democrat Hillary Clinton.

Iran shows patience on new US sanctions — for now

Bloomberg

Since the U.S. imposed new sanctions on Iran over a ballistic missile test Friday, Iran's conservative media has railed against the government for being too soft, the military has tested another projectile and officials have generally thumbed their noses at a White House warning that they were now "on notice."

What hasn't happened, how-

ever, is as important: No official has threatened to abandon the nuclear deal signed in 2015 under the previous U.S. administration of President Barack Obama.

On Monday, Iran's Foreign Ministry described some recent U.S. statements as "antagonistic" and having "a threatening tone," but it also advised against rushing to conclusions about the government of President Donald Trump.

Iran seeks "a better evaluation of the new U.S. administration," ministry spokesman Bahram Qassem said in Tehran. "We still need to wait and not make hasty comments."

That's in part because the new sanctions are largely symbolic and in line with Obama's policy. It's also a sign of how many reasons Iran has to stick with the so-called Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action and ensure that if it must collapse,

Washington — not Tehran — takes the blame.

"For the moment, they have support of the international community and they see continuation of the JCPOA as a strength," said Aniseh Bassiri Tabrizi, research fellow at the Royal United Services Institute in London. "The best position for the Iranians is exactly where they are."

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Police: Truck hauling a lot of pot carjacked

CA POMONA — Authorities arrested three men they say carjacked a big-rig hauling half a ton of marijuana and led them to a pot-growing operation at a Pomona home.

Authorities said the whole thing may have been a drug deal gone wrong.

The Riverside Press-Enterprise reported the truck was stolen Friday in Pomona. A short time later, a police helicopter spotted people unloading the trailer and throwing large bags into the backyard of a home.

Officers arrived and found that the trailer and the bags contained about 1,200 pounds of marijuana. Some 240 pot plants were found growing inside the home.

Three men were arrested in connection with the carjacking and pot possession. The two victims also were arrested on suspicion of possessing marijuana for sale.

Ice climber rescued after fall from cliff

NH FRANCONIA — The New Hampshire Fish and Game Department said an ice climber had to be rescued after falling 50 to 60 feet on Cannon Cliff.

Conservation officers said it took more than an hour to reach the climber and then 2½ hours to get him down challenging terrain to a snowmobile.

Officials said Nick Pearson, 47, of Amherst, N.H., told them that his ice axes gave way Saturday, causing a long tumble that eventually was arrested by safety gear. He was taken to Littleton Regional Hospital for

evaluation of a leg injury.

The 4,080-foot peak has a large cliff face that's popular among rock and ice climbers.

Student suspended for photo with fake rifle

ID NAMPA — A southwestern Idaho high school student was suspended for three days after sending a photo of the school resource officer dressed in street clothes and walking into the school while holding a fake rifle.

The Idaho Press-Tribune reported in a story on Friday that the student at Columbia High School sent the image as a text message with the words "We boutta die."

Nampa School District spokeswoman Allison Westfall said the student admitted sharing the image as a joke and knew the person photographed was the school's resource officer and there was no danger to students. She said the student has apologized.

Authorities said the fake rifle was going to be used in a law enforcement class.

Coast Guard rescues 3 fishermen from boat

OR WARRENTON — The U.S. Coast Guard rescued three commercial fishermen Sunday morning at the mouth of the Columbia River after their vessel started taking on water.

Coast Guard officials said the captain of the fishing vessel Coastal Reign reported taking on water at 3:20 a.m. after striking a submerged object.

A helicopter and a 47-foot rescue vessel were dispatched with the helicopter arriving first followed shortly afterward by the boat crew.

The Coast Guard passed a dewatering pump to Coastal Reign and put a crewmember aboard the vessel to set it up. Officials said that after water was pumped from the vessel, it was towed to a safe mooring at Skipanon Marina in Warrenton, Ore., about 4:40 a.m.

6-foot arm on buses gets drivers' attention

ME POLAND — The regional school district based in Poland has a possible antidote to drivers who refuse to stop for school buses' red flashing lights.

The Sun Journal reported that RSU 16 has outfitted each of three buses with a metal arm that swings 6 feet into the road when the driver turns on flashing reds.

Bus drivers say drivers are illegally passing buses because they're distracted, ignorant of the law or just don't care. Debra Plowman, of the Maine Department of Education, said the safety problem has become a "national issue."

John Hawley, RSU 16 operations manager, said the newly equipped buses are getting drivers' attention. He said the 6-foot-long, metal arms cost \$1,200 per bus. Despite the cost, officials are considering equipping more buses with them.

Judge says no sex for man convicted of rape

ID TWIN FALLS — A south-central Idaho judge ordered a 19-year-old man not to have sex with anyone before he's married as part of his sentencing for statutory rape of a 14-year-old girl.

The Times-News reported in a story on Sunday that Cody Duane Scott Herrera of Twin

Falls received the sentence in 5th District Court.

Judge Randy Stoker sentenced Herrera to five to 15 years in prison but suspended the sentence for a one-year rider program.

If the unmarried Herrera completes the program, he'll be released on probation, which requires celibacy unless he weds.

Stoker said the probation condition is needed because Herrera told investigators he has had 34 sexual partners.

Herrera in March pleaded guilty to statutory rape of the 14-year-old girl.

Suspected thief shot by Wal-Mart customer

FL ORLANDO — Police said a customer at a Wal-Mart store in Florida fatally shot a man who was among a group suspected of stealing two carts full of merchandise.

The Orange County Sheriff's Office said in a statement that the shooting occurred Saturday after suspects left the store with stolen items.

Sheriff's Capt. A.L. Nieves said the men were loading the merchandise into a car when a worker and a customer who came to the employee's aid confronted them.

Nieves said the customer was armed and fired at a suspect, who he thought was going for a weapon. Nieves did not identify anyone involved.

The suspect later died at a hospital after deputies found him at a gas station.

The shooting is under investigation, and the remaining robbery suspects remain at large.

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Patriots rally to stun Falcons in OT

Associated Press

HOUSTON — Tom Brady, Bill Belichick and the rest of the New England Patriots have long resisted ranking victories, refusing to label any one season, or title, sweeter than another.

It's time to put that to rest.

This Super Bowl was lost.

New England trailed by 25 points and Brady had a case of happy feet and a wobbly arm that made him look every bit of his 39 years. Before Lady Gaga had even dropped from the sky for Sunday's half-time show, the pregame anointment of Brady as the greatest to ever play was being rightfully ripped on social media that, along with the scoreboard, had all but handed Atlanta this game.

Then came the best comeback ever.

No team had ever made up more than a 10-point deficit to win a Super Bowl. Brady led the Patriots on five straight scoring drives that equaled 31 straight points. The last touchdown wrapped up a 34-28 victory, yet felt inevitable and anticlimactic despite coming in the first overtime in the Super Bowl's 51-year history.

"Tom has had a lot of great ones. Tonight was one of them," Belichick said, underselling the obvious.

Though New England still trailed by eight, this game felt more-or-less over when receiver Julian Edelman somehow wrapped up a pass that was first deflected by Atlanta cornerback Robert Alford, then

bounced off Alford's knee and his thigh. Edelman trapped the ball against Alford's foot, then got both hands underneath the pigskin. The catch was upheld on review. It was good for 23 yards and a first down at the Atlanta 41 with 2:03 left.

It matched, or exceeded, what David Tyree of the Giants did nine years previously, when his football-on-the-helmet catch led to the end of New England's quest for an undefeated season in the Super Bowl.

"I knew I caught it," Edelman said.

The catch highlighted New England's 91-yard, game-tying drive and extinguished whatever fight was left in an Atlanta defense that looked unbeatable for 2½ quarters — never more than when Alford intercepted Brady and took it 82 yards for a score that made it 21-0 late in the second quarter.

"Why didn't he Highstep that Thang," tweeted the former Falcon, Deion Sanders. Indeed, it felt like prime time for a celebration in Atlanta, a city with a long history of sports mediocrity and collapses, but nothing quite like this.

"No panic," Patriots wide receiver Matthew Slater explained. "We practiced in pads on Super Bowl week. We are squatting 80 percent of our maxes on Super Bowl week. We worked for this. Our bodies and minds were ready, and we just kept believing in one another."

And believing in Brady.

After the game, the NFL distributed a list of new Super Bowl records that took up nearly three-quarters of a page. There were 24 in all, the majority related in one way or another to the quarterback: Yards passing (446), pass attempts (62), completions (43), MVP awards (4), career wins (5, tied with Charles Haley, but now ahead of quarterbacks Terry Bradshaw and Joe Montana).

"He's laser-focused, and the entire time, there wasn't a time where we looked at Tom like he knew this thing was over," Patriots receiver Chris Hogan said. "There wasn't a doubt in my mind. We have one of the best quarterbacks that ever played the game."

Another record belonged to running back James White — New England's latest go-to guy on its long list of interchangeable parts. White's three touchdowns and one two-point conversion equaled 20 points. That knocked Denver's Terrell Davis and about half of the 1980s and '90s San Francisco 49ers out of the record books.

Those Niners made a habit of putting on clinics in pinpoint perfection that made opposing defenses look invisible in a series of pick-your-score blowouts.

In capturing title No. 5, the Patriots were perfect by necessity.

"When you fall behind by a lot in a game like this, you have to make a lot of great plays and have a lot of things go right," offensive coordinator Josh McDaniels said.

Brady captures record fourth Super Bowl MVP

Associated Press

HOUSTON — The greatest quarterback in NFL history led the biggest Super Bowl comeback to be the MVP on Sunday night.

Tom Brady rallied New England from a 25-point third-quarter deficit for a 34-28 win over the Atlanta Falcons in the first overtime game in Super Bowl history to earn his fifth Super Bowl title and fourth MVP trophy.

"They're all sweet," he said. "They're all different and this was just an incredible team and I'm just happy to be a part of it," he said.

Brady threw touchdown passes of 5 and 6 yards in the second half and tied things at 28-28 when he connected with

Danny Amendola on a two-point conversion with 57 seconds left.

He then directed the drive in overtime which ended with a 2-yard run by James White to make the Patriots the first team to win a Super Bowl after trailing by more than 10 points.

"We all brought each other back," he said. "We never felt out of it. It was a tough battle."

His performance certainly wasn't without its struggles. His incredible second half and overtime came after a first half where the Patriots managed just three points and he threw an interception which Robert Alford returned 82 yards for a touchdown. He was hurried and harassed for much of the game. The Falcons sacked him

five times and hit him on eight other occasions.

He noted the beating he took when he was trying to recount the details of the comeback and couldn't remember what the score was at one point in the rally.

"There was a lot of [stuff] that happened tonight," he said. "I got hit pretty hard."

His 466 yards passing are a Super Bowl record, surpassing the 414 yards Kurt Warner had 17 years ago. He also set a record for most passes completed in a Super Bowl with 43 and most attempts with 62.

He is the first to play in seven Super Bowls and the victory ties him with Charles Haley for most Super Bowl rings.

After all Brady has done in

his career, was this his finest moment?

"Tom's had a lot of great ones," coach Bill Belichick said. "But, yeah tonight was one of them."

It's a triumphant end to a difficult season for Brady, who missed the first four games because of his "Deflategate" suspension and dealt with his mother Galynn Brady suffering through an undisclosed illness. The Super Bowl was the first game she's attended all season.

"They're all happy," he said fighting back tears. "It's nice to have everybody here and it's going to be a great celebration tonight."

Brady also collected the MVP trophy in 2001, 2003 and 2014.

White breaks through on Super stage

Associated Press

HOUSTON — James White sure waited a long time to get his first rushing touchdown of the season.

It came with 57 seconds left in the fourth quarter of the Super Bowl Sunday, leading to a 2-point conversion for the Patriots to tie the game at 28-28, forcing the first overtime in the history of the big game.

He didn't wait very long to get his next rushing score. It came about four minutes into overtime and won the Super Bowl for New England 34-28 over the Atlanta Falcons.

"Felt like everything went in slow motion," White said. "That's dream about as a kid, ball in my hands with the game on the line, I've got to find the end zone."

White, who didn't have a

rushing touchdown all season, immediately popped up and sprinted around the end zone before being tackled by teammate LeGarrette Blount.

"All the hard work you put in all season long just for that moment, just trying to get a victory for my teammates, is really amazing" said White, who had no idea he was the only player in the NFL's 51 Super Bowls to score a touchdown on the game's final play.

The third-year running back from Wisconsin also had a TD reception and a 2-point conversion as the Patriots rallied from 28-3 down.

White, who had one rushing attempt for no gain and four catches in New England's two AFC playoff games, also finished with a Super Bowl-record 14 catches for 110 yards. His 5-yard TD catch in the third

quarter started the rally, cutting the lead to 28-9.

The Patriots often get performances from little-known players in big games. In the AFC championship, receiver Chris Hogan surprised the Steelers with 180 yards receiving.

White's 20 points were a Super Bowl record, and included his run for a 2-point conversion that got the Patriots within one score after Brady's 6-yard TD pass to Danny Amendola, who then caught the overtime-forcing 2-point conversion after White's touchdown.

"James White is just — he's everything you want in a teammate and football player. Dependable, consistent, durable, the best attitude," Brady said. "He brings it every day and we just kept going to him so I think that speaks for itself."

Brady set a Super Bowl re-

cord with 466 yards passing and the Patriots had the biggest comeback ever to win the NFL's signature game. If not for that performance, White would have been a strong contender for MVP.

Asked if he expected to be such a big part of the game plan, White responded, "I just wanted to be a viable option for my team."

"The ball came my way. Blocking, running, I just wanted to do whatever it takes to get a victory," he said. "It's a Super Bowl, you've got to lay it all on the line."

The game-ending run was a toss right, with White finding a crease and pushing forward. And he knew right away he was in the end zone.

"It really hasn't set in," he said. "It's surreal right now."

New site not a problem for No. 12 Tar Heels

Associated Press

GREENSBORO, N.C. — North Carolina still looked at home Sunday, even as it played what was supposed to be an Atlantic Coast Conference home game roughly 50 miles from its arena.

Justin Jackson scored 16 points to help No. 12 UNC beat No. 20 Notre Dame 83-76 on Sunday in a game postponed a day and relocated from Chapel Hill to Greensboro due to a water shortage.

"It's a different environment and a different situation than you'll probably ever have to really do," Jackson said. "But I thought we really grinded it out even on a night when we didn't shoot the ball too great."

The postponement came Friday after the water system supplying the UNC campus and surrounding area instructed its 20,000 customers not to drink or use the water due to critically low supplies, brought on by a water-main break and the shutdown of a treatment plant.

But the Tar Heels (21-4, 9-2 ACC) still had a loud home-state crowd filled with blue behind them in a venue where they've played 143 times — most coming during the 26 ACC Tournaments hosted here.

The Tar Heels spent Friday night in Durham — home to rival Duke — and then

stayed in Greensboro on Saturday night.

"It just threw us off, having the extra day to practice," junior Joel Berry II said of the team's routine. "We watched so much film, the same film, the last two days. I'm just tired of watching it."

The Fighting Irish (17-7, 6-5) trailed by 15 midway through the second half before climbing back to within 75-73 with 3:47 left on V.J. Beachem's three-pointer from the corner.

The Greensboro Coliseum had hosted a country music concert Saturday night, giving arena officials a short turnaround to have the building ready for tipoff. Still, the game had a familiar feel despite its unexpected location, down to the fact that Notre Dame beat UNC here nearly two years ago to win the ACC Tournament for its first basketball championship in any league.

No. 10 Wisconsin 65, Indiana 60: Ethan Happ scored 20 points, Nigel Hayes added 15 and 10 rebounds, and host Wisconsin out-muscled Indiana to hold on for a win.

Happ was 8-for-10 from the field to help the Badgers (20-3, 9-1 Big Ten) win their seventh straight game. Maryland's loss to Purdue on Saturday allowed Wisconsin to take a one-game lead in the conference.

The 6-foot-8 Hayes joined the 6-foot-10 Happ to give Indiana problems in the paint.

But the Badgers were plagued by mistakes or missed foul shots after building a 12-point lead midway through the first half.

Indiana (15-9, 5-6) stayed within a couple possessions of the lead for most of the rest of the way. Josh Newkirk's two foul shots with 28.6 seconds left got Indiana within 60-57, but Wisconsin went 5-for-6 from the foul line from that point to seal the win.

No. 15 Florida 109, Clemson 61: Dwayne Bacon tied a career high with 29 points as Florida State rolled to a victory.

The sophomore guard, who has scored in double figures in 34 straight games, was 10-for-14 from the field, including 6-for-9 on three-pointers. He had 18 points in the first half as the Seminoles built a 51-25 lead at halftime.

It is the first time FSU (20-4, 8-3 Atlantic Coast Conference) has reached the century mark in an ACC game since a 111-109 loss in double overtime to Georgia Tech on Feb. 11, 1999. The 48-point margin also marks its biggest win in conference history, surpassing the 36-point victory over Virginia in 1994.

Braian Angola-Rodas added 12 points and Terance Mann 11 for the Seminoles, who were 17-for-30 on three-pointers and had all 13 players get in the scoring column.

Celtics top Clippers in Pierce's farewell

Associated Press

BOSTON — Isaiah Thomas bumped into Paul Pierce tooling around Boston on Saturday night and then stole the spotlight from the former Celtics captain on Sunday.

With the crowd uncertain whether to cheer loudest for the Celtics or for Pierce — or for the Patriots in the Super Bowl — Thomas scored 28 points to lead Boston to its seventh straight victory, a 107-102 win over the Los Angeles Clippers in Pierce's final game in the Garden.

Thomas backed off Pierce in the final seconds, with the game out of reach, to let the 2008 NBA Finals MVP sink one more basket on the parquet floor he called home for 15 seasons.

"I wanted him to shoot and make it," Thomas said. "That would have been the perfect way to go out. He did it the right way."

Playing his last game in Boston, and making his first appearance for the Clippers since New Year's Eve, Pierce started and played the first five minutes before heading to the bench. Although the crowd chanted his name in the final minutes — egged on by the Celtics cheerleaders and even Thomas himself — Pierce didn't get back off the bench until there were 19 seconds left.

With the fans already standing, he sank a three-pointer for his only points of the game.

"I'm glad I was able to cap it off," Pierce said. "At least I can say I put one last bucket in."

Al Horford had 13 points and a season-high 15 rebounds for the Celtics, who brought Pierce to tears with a first-quarter highlight video. Thomas had eight assists but saw his four-game streak of 35-point games snapped.

Blake Griffin and Jamal Crawford scored 23 apiece, and DeAndre Jordan had 16 rebounds for Los Angeles, which lost for the sixth time in eight games despite cutting a 12-point lead to 103-99 in the final minute.

As the crowd was filtering out to get home in time for the Super Bowl, Pierce walked back onto the parquet floor, dropped to his knees and kissed the leprechaun at center court.

"I knew I wanted to give Lucky one last kiss," said Pierce, who will retire after the season. "Lucky's been through it all with me, the ups and downs. He helped me out on a couple of occasions."

Thunder 105, Trail Blazers 99: Russell Westbrook scored 19 of his 42 points in the fourth quarter, powering host Oklahoma City to the victory.

Westbrook also had eight assists and four rebounds in his eighth 40-point performance of the season. Victor Oladipo added 24 points and 13 boards, helping Oklahoma City (30-22) move within a half-game

of idle Memphis for sixth in the Western Conference.

Damian Lillard had 29 points and seven rebounds for Portland (22-30), which has dropped three of four. C.J. McCollum added 19 points and eight boards.

Westbrook punctuated his big day with a three-pointer with 1:18 remaining, lifting Oklahoma City to a 100-93 lead. He capped it off by hitting five free throws in the final minute as the crowd chanted "MVP! MVP!"

Raptors 103, Nets 95: Kyle Lowry played through illness and injury to finish with 15 points, 11 rebounds and 11 assists for his ninth career triple-double, leading Toronto to the road win.

Playing again without leading scorer DeMar DeRozan, the slumping Raptors ended a two-game losing streak and won for just the third time in 11 games. Jonas Valanciunas had a game-high 22 points. Already feeling ill, Lowry needed four stitches after cutting his right forearm on a camera mounted to the basket stanchion. But he played 40 minutes without much backup support, with Fred VanVleet shooting 2-for-10 from the field and Cory Joseph not playing at all.

Brook Lopez scored 20 for the Nets, who have lost nine in a row overall and 12 straight at home, where they haven't won in 2017.

Grubauer, Caps halt Kings' streak at five

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Philipp Grubauer starts rarely enough that he doesn't want to show his face when he loses. He can show it plenty until his next chance.

Grubauer stopped a season-high 38 shots to shut out the Los Angeles Kings as the Washington Capitals ended Peter Budaj's shutout streak in a 5-0 rout Sunday. Washington snapped Los Angeles' winning streak at five and Budaj's shutout streak at 147:21 in winning its third game in a row.

Despite being outshot 38-20, the Capitals were opportunistic in shelling Budaj, limiting quality chances and relying on Grubauer to make the routine saves.

"He doesn't get in there all the time, but when he does he's

just been really good," said Brett Connolly, who scored his 10th goal of the season. "There was a couple times we turned the puck over and they had a good chance in front and he was there to bail us out."

Grubauer denied Marian Gaborik from close range in the second period but didn't have to make too many 10-bell saves for his third shutout of the season. Coach Barry Trotz liked the team defense in front of Grubauer, who compared the new NHL-mandated slimmer goalie pants to "European skinny jeans."

"The guys did an amazing job keeping (shots) to the outside today," Grubauer said. "I don't think we gave up too many Grade-A chances."

The Kings did. They left Lars Eller, Marcus

Johansson and Justin Williams wide open on their goals, and Connolly was in all alone on a semi-breakaway to score his. T.J. Oshie's goal popped the cap off Budaj's water bottle, sending water flying and adding insult to injury.

Budaj, who leads the NHL with seven shutouts, was pulled after allowing four goals on 15 shots in two periods. He had stopped all 39 shots in his past two starts, but this loss was more on the Kings' defensive miscues than their goaltender.

Oilers 1, Canadiens 0 (SO): Leon Draisaitl scored the only goal in a shootout as Edmonton stopped a three-game slide.

Cam Talbot had 22 saves as the Oilers (29-18-8) salvaged the finale of a three-game trip in which they scored only one regulation goal.

The Canadiens (30-16-8) dropped to 1-3-1 in their last five games. The Atlantic Division leaders were coming off a 3-2 loss to Washington on Saturday.

Edmonton star Connor McDavid, playing in his 100th NHL game, had a breakaway in overtime, but he was denied by Al Montoya.

Rangers 4, Flames 3: Calgary veteran Kris Versteeg got ejected after losing his jersey during a fight and waved to jeering fans at Madison Square Garden as he skated off in the Flames' loss.

Chris Kreider and Jesper Fast scored 3:12 apart in the middle of the third period to help the Rangers win for the fifth time in seven games overall and improve to 5-0-1 in their last six against Calgary.