

## Macron: Putin says he won't escalate crisis

Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine — French President Emmanuel Macron said Tuesday that Russian President Vladimir Putin told him that Moscow would not further escalate the Ukraine crisis.

Macron also said it would take time to find a diplomatic solution to the rising tensions, which represent the biggest security crisis between Russia and the West since the Cold War.

His remarks on a visit to Kyiv came as the Kremlin denied reports that he and Putin struck a deal on de-escalating the crisis. Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said that “in the current situation, Moscow and Paris can’t be reaching any deals.”

Macron met with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy amid mounting fears of a Russian

invasion.

On Monday, President Joe Biden met in Washington with German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, who also will travel to Kyiv and Moscow on Feb. 14-15.

Biden vowed that the Nord Stream 2 Russia-to-Germany gas pipeline, which has been completed but is not yet operating, will be blocked “if Russia invades, that means tanks and troops crossing the border of Ukraine again.” Halting the pipeline’s operation would hurt Russia economically but also cause supply problems for Germany.

Moscow has massed over 100,000 troops near Ukraine’s borders, but insists it has no plans to attack.

The Kremlin wants guarantees from the West that NATO will not accept Ukraine and other

former Soviet nations as members, that it halt weapon deployments there and roll back its forces from Eastern Europe — demands the U.S. and NATO reject as nonstarters.

At a news conference after meeting Zelenskyy, Macron said Putin told him during their more than five-hour session Monday that “he won’t be initiating an escalation. I think it is important.”

According to the French president, Putin also said there won’t be any Russian “permanent (military) base” or “deployment” in Belarus, where Russia had sent a large number of troops for war games.

Peskov said withdrawing Russian troops from Belarus after the maneuvers was the plan all along.

Zelenskyy said he would welcome concrete steps from Putin

for de-escalation, adding he didn’t “trust words in general.”

Macron also sought to temper expectations.

“Let’s not be naive,” he said. “Since the beginning of the crisis, France hasn’t been inclined to exaggerate, but at the same time, I don’t believe this crisis can be settled in a few hours, through discussions.”

Zelenskyy called his talks with Macron “very fruitful.”

“We have a common view with President Macron on threats and challenges to the security of Ukraine, of the whole of Europe, of the world in general,” Zelenskyy said.

He said France was giving 1.2 billion euros (\$1.3 billion) in financial aid to Ukraine and helping restore infrastructure in the war-ravaged east of the country.

## Ships in Black Sea raise questions about Russian intentions

By ALISON BATH

Stars and Stripes

NAPLES, Italy — Six Russian amphibious assault ships participating in Black Sea drills could play either a decisive or a diversionary role should the Kremlin mount a new invasion of Ukraine, naval analysts said.

On Tuesday, three of the six ships began their transit into the Black Sea in preparation for the drills, the Russian news agency Tass reported. The remaining three ships will follow suit Wednesday, according to Tass, which described the scale of the exercise as “massive.”

There did not appear to be any U.S. or NATO ships in the Black Sea on Tuesday, according to the Istanbul-based ship-watching website [turkishnavy.net](http://turkishnavy.net).

But on Friday, the Navy issued an account order for all active-duty and reserve personnel, de-

pendents and naval civilian employees in Ukraine, Lithuania, Latvia, Poland, Belarus, Moldova, Romania, Slovakia, Hungary, Estonia and Bulgaria.

The six Russian ships, which sailed into the Mediterranean Sea late last month, may be there to scare Ukraine into believing that an amphibious assault is likely, some analysts said.

That could force the Ukrainian military to move troops to protect coastal areas, leaving the country with fewer defenses elsewhere, said Dmitry Gorenburg, a senior research scientist at the Arlington, Va.-based think tank CNA.

It’s also possible the ships are needed to reinforce Russia’s Black Sea Fleet, which has only four operational landing ships, said Gorenburg, whose focus includes Russian naval strategy in the Black Sea. That possibility exists because three of the Black

Sea Fleet’s ships are undergoing repairs, he noted.

“If the Russian military wanted to undertake a larger operation, they would need more ships to carry troops and equipment from Crimea or southern Russia,” Gorenburg said.

He added that the six ships in question are unlikely to be carrying troops or equipment because those already are in place in Russia’s Southern Military District.

A large-scale Russian amphibious assault is unlikely, said Bryan Clark, a fellow and senior director of the Hudson Institute’s Center for Defense Concepts and Technology.

A small, strategic approach, with an estimated six ships and 1,000 troops, likely would be to land away from Ukrainian force concentrations along the coast between Crimea and the Ukrainian city of Odessa, he said.

“Russian troops could seize roads and prevent Ukrainian reinforcements from moving toward Mariupol and the Sea of Azov, which would be one of the first Russian targets in the south,” Clark said. “The amphibious troops could then join up with advancing Russian forces and threaten Odessa.”

But it’s more likely Russia will position its amphibious troops offshore in the Black Sea, to keep Ukrainian forces from heading east in preparation for Russian moves in eastern Ukraine’s Donbas region, Clark said. Separatists backed by Russia have been fighting Ukrainian forces in the Donbas for several years.

The six ships “could be part of an amphibious assault, although it would be small and more useful as a raid or blocking maneuver rather than attacking Ukrainian forces directly from sea,” he said.

# US military saw Kabul evacuation roadblocks

*The Washington Post*

Senior White House and State Department officials failed to grasp the Taliban's steady advance on Afghanistan's capital and resisted efforts by U.S. military leaders to prepare the evacuation of embassy personnel and Afghan allies weeks before Kabul's fall, placing American troops ordered to carry out the withdrawal in greater danger, according to sworn testimony from multiple commanders involved in the operation.

An Army investigative report, numbering 2,000 pages and released to *The Washington Post* through a Freedom of Information Act request, details the life-or-death decisions made daily by U.S. soldiers and Marines sent to secure Hamid Karzai International Airport as thousands converged on the airfield in a frantic bid to escape.

Beyond the bleak, blunt assessments of top military commanders, the documents contain previously unreported disclosures about the violence American personnel experienced, including one exchange of gunfire that left two Taliban fighters dead after they allegedly menaced a group of U.S. Marines and Afghan civilians, and a separate incident in which U.S. troops killed a member of an elite Afghan strike unit and wounded six others after they fired on the Americans.

The investigation was launched in response to an Aug. 26 suicide bombing just outside the airport that killed an estimated 170 Afghan civilians and 13 U.S. service members.

But it is much broader, providing perhaps the fullest official account yet of the evacuation operation, which spanned 17 nightmarish days and has become one of the Biden administration's defining moments — drawing scrutiny from Republicans and Dem-

ocrats for the haphazard nature in which the United States ended its longest war.

Military personnel would have been "much better prepared to conduct a more orderly" evacuation, Navy Rear Adm. Peter Vasely, the top U.S. commander on the ground during the operation, told Army investigators, "if policymakers had paid attention to the indicators of what was happening on the ground." He did not identify any administration officials by name, but said inattention to the Taliban's determination to complete a swift and total military takeover undermined commanders' ability to ready their forces.

Vasely could not be reached for comment.

The report includes witness statements from dozens of people interviewed after an Islamic State-Khorasan operative detonated a suicide vest at the airport's Abbey Gate. Senior defense officials announced Friday that the investigation had determined that a single bomb packed with ball bearings caused "disturbing lethality" in the tightly packed outdoor corridor leading to the airfield.

The operation evacuated 124,000 people before concluding Aug. 31. It required U.S. commanders to strike an unusual security pact with the Taliban and rapidly deploy nearly 6,000 troops to assist a skeleton force of about 600 left behind under Vasely's command to protect U.S. Embassy personnel.

U.S. officials have lauded the effort, but critics have said that although U.S. troops performed heroically, the evacuation was flawed and incomplete, leaving behind hundreds of Americans and thousands of Afghans who supported the war effort and were promised a way out.

John Kirby, the Pentagon's chief spokesman, said in re-

sponse to questions about the report that while the airlift was a "historic achievement," Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin has acknowledged it was "not perfect."

"We are committed to, and are intensely engaged in, an ongoing review of our efforts during the evacuation, the assessments and strategy during the conflict, and the planning in the months before the end of the war," Kirby said. "We will take those lessons learned, and apply them, as we always do, clearly and professionally."

Marine Gen. Kenneth "Frank" McKenzie, chief of U.S. Central Command, said in an interview Tuesday that he was "not surprised" commanders had different opinions about how the evacuation could have gone better.

"But remember," McKenzie said, "what did happen is we came together and executed a plan. There are profound frustrations; commanders, particularly subordinate commanders, they see very clearly the advantages of other courses of action. However, we had a decision, and we had an allocation of forces. You proceed based on that."

Military officials told investigators that although the evacuation was in many ways cobbled together on the fly, planning within the Defense Department began months earlier. Initial discussions presumed the possible use of Bagram Airfield, a sprawling U.S. military installation 30 miles north of Kabul, and assistance from Afghan government forces to help secure the path there, Marine Corps Brig. Gen. Farrell Sullivan, who was involved in planning and oversaw the Marines sent into the capital, told investigators. Those plans evolved from incorporating both airfields to "just HKIA," the Marine general said, using the military's shorthand for Hamid Karzai International Airport.

Disagreement between U.S. military officials and American diplomats in Kabul about when to press forward with an evacuation appears to have gone back months. Vasely, who took command as the top officer in Afghanistan in July, said he was told by the departing four-star commander, Army Gen. Austin "Scott" Miller, that there would be opposition among senior officials at the embassy to shrinking its footprint in Kabul. Ross Wilson, the acting U.S. ambassador to Afghanistan, was focused on maintaining a diplomatic presence there, Vasely said.

Wilson did not respond to requests for comment.

By mid-July, Sullivan, the senior Marine officer involved in planning the evacuation, wanted to stage supplies to host 5,000 evacuees at the airport, but his effort was complicated because he was not permitted to discuss the possibility of a full-scale evacuation with anyone other than British officials, he told investigators. Other U.S. military leaders, whose names were redacted from the report, said there were fears among administration officials that if the U.S., by raising alarm, inspired other governments to quickly leave Afghanistan, it would accelerate the central government's demise.

A spokesman for Sullivan referred questions to McKenzie.

The mission eventually hit a rhythm in which thousands of people were screened and allowed to enter the airport each day to board outbound flights. But it remained dangerous.

Sullivan suggested that those tense final days of the war in Afghanistan would have a lasting impact on those exposed to danger.

"I am not particularly soft, as adversity comes with our duties," he said, "but this was an extremely challenging situation."

# Spending bill requires emptying fuel tanks

By **WYATT OLSON**  
*Stars and Stripes*

A stopgap spending bill now before Congress includes a requirement that the Defense Department comply with a Hawaii state order to drain the Navy's Red Hill fuel storage facility and provides \$100 million to begin doing so.

The fuel tanks are the source

of petroleum contamination discovered late last year in housing on and near Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam that sickened many residents and displaced thousands from their homes.

Sen. Brian Schatz, D-Hawaii, who sits on the Senate Appropriations Committee, inserted the funding provision in a three-week spending bill aimed at

avoiding a government shutdown, according to a news release from his office.

"This bill funds defueling, and it establishes Congress's position on Red Hill: the DoD must defuel and follow the state's order immediately," Schatz said in the release. "We still have more work to do, but we are making good progress to protect our wa-

ter and get this right."

The funding provision would also require Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin to submit a report to the House and Senate appropriations committees within 60 days detailing disbursements from the appropriation. Similar updates would be required every 30 days after the initial report.

## UN: 'Terrorist groups' enjoy freedom in Afghanistan

*Associated Press*

UNITED NATIONS — Al-Qaida's past ties to the recently empowered Taliban have the potential of making Afghanistan a safe haven for extremists, and "terrorist groups enjoy greater freedom there than at any time in recent history," U.N. experts said in a report circulated Monday.

In the wide-ranging report, the experts also said extremists linked to both al-Qaida and Islamic State are successfully advancing in Africa, especially in the turbulent Sahel. And they said ISIS continues to operate "as an entrenched rural insurgency" in Iraq and Syria, where its so-called caliphate ruled a significant swath of the two countries from 2014-17 when it was defeated by Iraqi forces and a U.S.-led coalition.

In what it called "a bright spot" in Southeast Asia, the panel of experts said both Indonesia and the Philippines reported "significant gains" in disrupting ISIS and al-Qaida-affiliated "terrorism" and "some optimism" that their operational capability "may be significantly degraded."

The report to the U.N. Security Council by the panel of experts monitoring sanctions against al-Qaida and ISIS called the Taliban's return to power on Aug. 15 amid the chaotic final withdrawal of U.S. and NATO troops after 20 years the most significant event of the last six months of 2021.

The Taliban first ruled Afghanistan from 1996-2001 and were ousted for harboring al-Qaida and Osama bin Laden for masterminding the 9/11 terrorist attacks in the United States in 2001. In a February 2020 deal that spelled out the terms of the U.S. troop withdrawal, the Taliban had promised to fight terrorism and deny terrorist groups a safe haven in Afghanistan.

But the panel of experts said "there are no recent signs that the Taliban has taken steps to limit the activities of foreign terrorist fighters in the country." On the contrary, it said, terrorist groups are enjoying "greater freedom," though member states "have not reported significant new movements of foreign terrorist fighters to Afghanistan."

The experts noted that al-Qaida released a

statement congratulating the Taliban on their victory on Aug. 31, but since then it has maintained "a strategic silence, likely an effort not to compromise Taliban efforts to gain international recognition and legitimacy."

As for ISIS, the panel said that while it controls limited territory in Afghanistan, "it has demonstrated a continuing ability to mount sophisticated attacks, adding to the complexity of the security situation in Afghanistan." As an example, it cited the complex attack at Kabul airport on Aug. 26 in which more than 180 people were killed.

Member states said ISIS' strength in Afghanistan has risen from an estimated 2,200 to near 4,000 following the release of several thousand prisoners, according to the panel, which said one country estimated that half were foreign fighters.

The experts said the Taliban view ISIS "as its primary kinetic threat," that seeks to be the "chief rejectionist force in Afghanistan with a wider regional agenda threatening neighboring Central and South Asian countries."

## Navy fires Seabees battalion leaders amid command probe

By **COREY DICKSTEIN**  
*Stars and Stripes*

The Navy fired the top three leaders of its Amphibious Construction Battalion 2 last week amid an investigation, service officials said Monday.

Rear Adm. John V. Menoni, the commander of Expeditionary Strike Group 2, relieved Capt. Jeffrey Lengkeek, the battalion's commander, Cmdr. Michael Jarosz, its executive officer, and Command Master

Chief Matthew Turner, its top enlisted leader, over a "loss of confidence in their abilities to effectively perform their leadership roles," according to a Navy statement.

The firings come amid a formal command investigation, said Lt. Cmdr. Paul Newell, a spokesman for Expeditionary Strike Group 2.

Newell declined further comment about the investigation, but he said the Navy does

not "intend to take further disciplinary" action against the leaders.

Since July 2020, Lengkeek and Jarosz had served as the Seabee battalion's top officers based at Joint Expeditionary Base Little Creek, Va. Turner had been the unit's top enlisted sailor since July 2019.

The former battalion leaders will be temporarily assigned to Menoni's staff, according to the Navy.

They have been replaced at ACB 2 by Capt. Brian C. Finman, Cmdr. Henry P. Pierce IV and Master Chief Todd Mangin, who will hold those positions until a new permanent command triad is put in place, the Navy said.

The service said none of the unit's ongoing or upcoming missions or training were expected to be impacted by the unscheduled command change.

# Court sides with GOP in Ala. map case

*Associated Press*

WASHINGTON — The U.S. Supreme Court put on hold a lower court ruling that Alabama must draw new congressional districts before the 2022 elections to increase Black voting power. The high court order boosts Republican chances to hold six of the state's seven seats in the House of Representatives.

The court's action, by a 5-4 vote announced Monday, means the upcoming elections will be conducted under a map drawn by Alabama's Republican-controlled legislature that contains one majority-Black district, represented by a Black Democrat, in a state in which more than a quarter of the population is Black.

A three-judge lower court, including two judges appointed by former President Donald Trump, had ruled that the state had

likely violated the federal Voting Rights Act by diluting the political power of Black voters by not creating a second district in which they made up a majority, or close to it.

Justices Brett Kavanaugh and Samuel Alito, part of the conservative majority, said the lower court's order for a new map came too close to the 2022 election cycle.

Chief Justice John Roberts joined his three more liberal colleagues in dissent.

The justices will at some later date decide whether the map produced by the state violates the landmark voting rights law, a case that could call into question "decades of this Court's precedent about Section 2 of the VRA," Justice Elena Kagan wrote in dissent.

That decision presumably will govern elections in 2024 through the end of the decade in Alabama and could affect minority political representation elsewhere in the

country, too.

Alabama lawmakers redrew the state's congressional districts following the results of the 2020 census. Several groups of voters sued, arguing that the new maps diluted the voting power of Black residents.

In a unanimous ruling in late January, the three judges said that the groups were likely to succeed in showing that the state had violated the Voting Rights Act.

As a result, the panel ordered lawmakers to redraw the districts so Black voters would be a majority, or close to it, in two districts, not one.

The ruling ran more than 200 pages. The panel wrote that "we do not regard the question ... as a close one."

Alabama asked the Supreme Court to put the ruling on hold while it appeals and the justices agreed.

## Biden's top scientist resigns over his treatment of staff

*Associated Press*

WASHINGTON — President Joe Biden's top science adviser Eric Lander resigned, hours after the White House confirmed that an internal investigation found credible evidence that he mistreated his staff, marking the first Cabinet-level departure of the Biden administration.

An internal review last year, prompted by a workplace complaint, found evidence that Lander, the director of the Office of Science and Technology Policy and science adviser to Biden, bullied staffers and treated them

disrespectfully.

The White House rebuked Lander over his interactions with his staff, but initially signaled Monday that he would be allowed to remain on the job, despite Biden's Inauguration Day assertion that he expected "honesty and decency" from all who worked for his administration and would fire anyone who shows disrespect to others "on the spot."

But later Monday evening, press secretary Jen Psaki said Biden had accepted Lander's resignation with "gratitude for his

work at OSTP on the pandemic, the Cancer Moonshot, climate change, and other key priorities."

Lander, in his resignation letter, said, "I am devastated that I caused hurt to past and present colleagues by the way in which I have spoken to them."

"I believe it is not possible to continue effectively in my role, and the work of this office is far too important to be hindered," he added.

The White House said Biden did not request Lander's resignation.

## Report: US needs new plan, Cabinet head for opioids

*Associated Press*

WASHINGTON — The United States needs a nimble, multipronged strategy and Cabinet-level leadership to counter its festering overdose epidemic, a bipartisan congressional commission advised.

With vastly powerful synthetic drugs like fentanyl driving record overdose deaths, the scourge of opioids awaits after the COVID-19 pandemic finally recedes, a shift that public health experts expect in the months ahead.

"This is one of our most pressing national security, law enforcement and public health challenges, and we must do more as a nation and a government to protect our most precious resource — American lives," the

Commission on Combating Synthetic Opioid Trafficking said in a 70-page report released Tuesday to Congress, President Joe Biden and the American people.

The report envisions a dynamic strategy. It would rely on law enforcement and diplomacy to shut down sources of chemicals used to make synthetic opioids. It would offer treatment and support for people who become addicted, creating pathways that can lead back to productive lives. And it would invest in research to better understand addiction's grip on the human brain and to develop treatments for opioid use disorder.

The global coronavirus pandemic has overshadowed the American opioid epi-

demic for the last two years, but recent news that overdose deaths surpassed 100,000 in one year caught the public's attention. Politically, federal legislation to address the opioid crisis won support across the partisan divide during both the Obama and Trump administrations.

Rep. David Trone, D-Md., a co-chair of the panel that produced the report, said he believes that support is still there, and that the issue appeals to Biden's pragmatic side.

"The president has been crystal clear," Trone said. "These are two major issues in America: addiction and mental health."

The U.S. government's record is also clear. It has been waging a losing "war on drugs" for decades.

## AMERICAN ROUNDUP

### Man steals car; train crashes it into house

**FL** PORT ST. LUCIE — A Florida man said he jumped from a stolen car seconds before it was hit by a train and sent flying into a nearby home. The sleeping residents were unharmed and the man was later arrested, authorities said.

Police said the man claimed he stole the car in a “good faith effort” to search for his own vehicle after leaving a bar in Martin County, around 50 miles north of West Palm Beach. Instead, he got stuck on the railroad tracks in the path of an oncoming train.

After the crash, the man tried to steal a forklift from a nearby fruit stand, which he also vandalized, the sheriff’s office said. He was arrested after flagging down responding deputies “to let them know he was still looking for his car,” the statement said.

The 38-year-old man is facing charges of grand theft and criminal mischief, authorities said; additional charges are expected.

### Woman falls to death off mast of historic ship

**TX** GALVESTON — A woman fell to her death from a mast on a historic ship that’s featured at a Texas museum after her safety harness somehow came unclipped, police said.

The 58-year-old woman died after falling from a mast on the tall ship *Elissa*, which is berthed at Galveston’s seaport museum, the Galveston County Daily News reported.

“We’re not sure exactly what happened that she wasn’t double-clipped in,” Port of Galveston Police Chief Kenneth Brown said. “When she went to move from one location to another, she apparently slipped and fell.”

### Crossing guard credited with saving student

**MD** NORTH EAST — A Maryland police officer is being credited with saving a middle school student from being hit by a car, officials said.

Cpl. Annette Goodyear of the North East Police Department was directing traffic at a crosswalk when the North East Middle School student entered the intersection. The officer then realized that an approaching car was not going to be able to stop in time and reacted quickly by pushing the student out of the way. The officer herself was struck by the car.

Cecil County Executive Danielle Hernberger said she has spoken with the town’s mayor and they are working on commendations for Goodyear.

Cpl. John Fakner of the North East Police Department said Goodyear was taken to the hospital with minor injuries and was later released.

### 2022 Burger Battle nets \$667K for restaurants

**SD** SIOUX FALLS — The 2022 Burger Battle generated some serious cash for Sioux Falls restaurants.

A new report from Downtown Sioux Falls Inc., showed restaurants sold more than 44,000 burgers during the monthlong

promotion in January, generating \$667,231 in revenue. That’s up 42% from the 2021 Burger Battle, which saw 31,000 burgers sold, the Argus Leader reported.

Downtown Sioux Falls Inc. estimates the total economic impact of the 2022 promotion on the community at about \$1.3 million.

### 2 arrested after kids sickened from fumes

**IN** MUNCIE — Two Oklahoma residents were arrested after their two children became seriously ill from carbon monoxide fumes while sitting in a car outside a Walmart in Muncie, Ind.

Police said the car’s engine had been left running with the children, ages 2 and 8, inside the vehicle while the parents were inside the store. Investigators discovered the car’s exhaust system was malfunctioning, resulting in a carbon monoxide level that was dangerously high, The Star Press reported

Antonio Kendrell Davis, 41, and Brittany Chris Rogers, 26, were arrested on preliminary counts of neglect of a dependent. They also face preliminary counts of theft, apparently based on allegations they stole merchandise while at Walmart.

### Sheriff’s deputy rescues pup from burning SUV

**CO** CASTLE ROCK — A sheriff’s deputy is being praised for smashing the windows of a burning SUV and rescuing a frightened dog in a neighborhood south of Denver.

Douglas County Deputy Michael Gregorek’s body camera

video showed him arriving on the scene as smoke poured from the driver’s side window of the SUV. The owner frantically yelled that his dog Hank was somewhere inside the locked vehicle.

Gregorek used his retractable baton to smash a side window and then the rear window before pulling Hank out and carrying him to a nearby snowbank.

“I just went in there and grabbed on. And his body had already kind of started to tense up, so I knew he was really in a bad way. ... Nothing else really mattered at that point other than getting Hank out of the car,” Gregorek said in an interview released by the sheriff’s department.

### Browntail moth pests get their own month

**ME** PORTLAND — Maine’s Browntail moth nuisance has risen to the level that state forestry officials feel the pest deserves its own month.

Browntail moths are the source of an ongoing outbreak in Maine that has bugged the state since 2015. The moth caterpillars have toxic hairs that cause an itchy rash in humans.

The Maine Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry said February of this year is Browntail Moth Awareness Month. The state is using the month to encourage residents to use the moth’s dormant season to help slow their spread.

Forestry officials have said winter is the best time to clip and destroy Browntail moth winter webs.

— From wire reports

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# Gu wins freestyle skiing big air gold

Associated Press

BEIJING — Eileen Gu amassed an army of cynics when she spurned Team USA to represent China at the Beijing Games.

Moments after the biggest run of her life, the 18-year-old freestyle skiing prodigy was asked about her status as a U.S. citizen, her feelings on Peng Shuai and the incessant hate she's received on social media.

"If people don't believe me, if people don't like me, then that's their loss," Gu said. "They're never going to win the Olympics."

Gu did just that, earning the first of what she and her many fans in Beijing hope could be three gold medals by cranking out the first 1620 of her career in her final turn, stunning Tess Ledeux of France to win the Olympic debut of women's freeski big air.

The American-born Gu had

never landed the double cork 1620 — a move in which skiers spin  $4\frac{1}{2}$  times while rotating twice off-axis while 20-some feet in the air. Not in practice. Not in competition.

Only with the weight of her adopted homeland right there on her shoulders.

"I want all the girls to break their boundaries," she said in Chinese, via interpreter. "I want them to think if Eileen can do it, I can do it."

A flood of interest in Gu's win briefly crashed the popular Chinese social media site Weibo, according to online technology and sports news sites in China. A crowd of spectators gathered spontaneously in front of a big TV screen in Wangfujing, a famed shopping district in central Beijing, on Tuesday morning.

Capacity was limited at 5,000-seat Big Air Shougang — a shuttered steel mill that Beij-

ing has converted into an eerie-yet-serene park, culture hub and sports center. The reaction still told the story.

The "Snow Princess" was ready for her crown.

Gu, whose mother is Chinese, estimates she's spent at least a quarter of her life in China. Her origin story, as she tells it, begins with the time she pitched the idea for China's first slopestyle ski event at age 9 — and won.

Since choosing to side with China in 2019, she has said repeatedly that her goal is to encourage girls and women to take up winter sports — aligning with China's pledge to inspire 300 million to hit the ice or snow.

It's a status not unlike the public mantle Peng has held for years.

Peng, a three-time Olympic tennis player, sat in the stands with IOC President Thomas

Bach as Gu cemented her gold. Peng made the rare public appearance a day after saying in a controlled interview that the sexual assault allegations she made against a former high-ranking member of China's ruling Communist Party were "an enormous misunderstanding."

Her responses — delivered in front of a Chinese Olympic official — left unanswered questions about her well-being and what exactly happened.

Asked if she shared international concern about Peng's safety, Gu skirted around the topic, saying she was "really happy" Peng attended and honored that a star from a major sport like tennis came to see "niche sports like freeskiing."

"I'm really grateful that she's, yeah, happy and healthy and out here doing her thing again," Gu said.

## Like mother like son: Cochran-Siegle medals

Associated Press

BEIJING — As Ryan Cochran-Siegle set off at around noon Tuesday for a super-G run that would earn a silver at the Beijing Games — the first Olympic Alpine medal for a U.S. man since 2014 — it was around 11 p.m. Monday night back home in Starksboro, Vt. (pop. 1,756).

So his mother, Barbara Ann Cochran, grabbed a laptop and settled into bed in her pajamas to keep tabs on how the boy she put on skis at age 2 would fare.

Mom, you see, came from the "Skiing Cochrans" family of Olympians, and was the slalom champion at the 1972 Sapporo Games. She knows all about what it takes to succeed on this stage, all about what goes through a racer's mind at the start, middle and end of a high-

velocity trek down the glassy side of a mountain with history in the offing.

"As a ski racer, you work up the levels and you become better, rankings-wise. Then you achieve a World Cup podium. And your first win," he said, referring to key results that arrived in December 2020. "I realized that, mentally, I had the right stuff. It was just a matter of having my body 100%."

His shoulders knocking aside gates, Cochran-Siegle finished in 1 minute, 19.98 seconds, just 0.04 behind Matthias Mayer, who earned his third career Olympic gold medal for Austria, second in a row in super-G.

"Smooth and clean, which is the name of the game for him," said Forest Carey, head men's coach for the U.S. ski team.

## Chen delivers record short program in pursuit of gold

Associated Press

BEIJING — Nathan Chen had just shattered the world record for a figure skating short program, even throwing a defiant fist in a rare display of emotion, when he was asked how he'd spend the next 48 hours before his long-awaited Olympic coronation.

"I've been here a while," the 22-year-old American star replied with a shrug Tuesday. "I've got some clothes to wash. Some other things to clean around my room. Just ordinary chores, really. Nothing crazy."

He left the crazy — the downright stunning — on the ice of Beijing's historic Capital Indoor Stadium.

Wearing a confident smirk, Chen avenged his poor short program from four years ago at

the Pyeongchang Games in the biggest way possible. He opened with a perfect quad flip, breezed through his often-vexing triple axel, then drilled his quad flip-triple toe loop combination before skating to a stop and delivering a right haymaker at the air.

His score was 113.97 points, nearly two more than the previous world record set by rival Yuzuru Hanyu, and six points clear of second-place Yuma Kagiyama headed into Thursday's free skate.

"I was just elated," said Chen, who helped the United States win team silver earlier this week. "At the last Olympics, both of the short programs didn't go the way I wanted. To finally get an opportunity to skate the programs I wanted feels really good."

# Canada downs US in women's hockey

Associated Press

BEIJING — It was going to take more than a one-goal deficit to rattle Brienne Jenner and the Canadians in their long-running cross-border rivalry against the Americans, which resumed Tuesday at the Beijing Olympics.

Rather than wilt, Canada responded by scoring three times over a span of 5 minutes, 25 seconds to secure a 4-2 win over the defending champion United States, claiming the women's hockey tournament's top seed entering the playoff round.

"Hockey's a game of momentum shifts, so to come out and have a strong shift regardless of if we score or not after they do, it's huge," Jenner said. "They're a good hockey team, they're going to make plays, but I think we answered really well tonight."

U.S. coach Joel Johnson said his team needs to be more resilient when the tide begins shifting.

"I thought it was the difference in the game," Johnson said

of Canada's second-period surge. "I thought we carried all the momentum, and all of a sudden we just kind of forgot our situation a bit."

There's no reason for disappointment to set in for the Americans, or for the Canadians to spend too much time celebrating. Barring a major upset, the two global hockey powers are expected to meet again in the gold-medal final next week.

Canada (4-0) and the U.S. (3-1) are the tournament's top seeds and combined to outscore each of their first three opponents by a margin of 47-5. Canada faces Sweden (2-2) in the quarterfinals after the Swedes advanced with a 3-1 win over Denmark. Also on Tuesday, Japan beat the Czech Republic 3-2 in a shootout, and Finland beat the Russians 5-0.

In a fierce rivalry dating to before the women's first Olympic tournament at the 1998 Nagano Games — won by the Americans — the U.S. and Can-

ada put on an entertaining show Tuesday in Beijing in a fast-paced outing in which the teams traded leads.

Jenner, who scored twice, sparked the run by one-timing in Sarah Nurse's backhand pass into the slot to tie the game at 2 with eight minutes left and 26 seconds after Alex Carpenter scored for the U.S.

Jamie Lee Rattray scored for Canada 2:25 later by converting Natalie Spooner's pass into the slot. Marie-Philip Poulin — nicknamed Canada's Captain Clutch after scoring gold-medal clinching goals in 2010 and '14 — capped the run by scoring on a penalty shot while in the midst of killing a penalty.

"She comes up clutch for us day in and day out," goalie Ann-Renee Desbiens said. "When it matters, that's when she's at our best."

The Canadians overcame an exceptionally slow start in an outing where they were outshot 53-27.

Much of the credit goes to

Desbiens, who stopped 51 shots, including breakaway chances by Grace Zumwinkle and Abbey Murphy to keep the game scoreless in the opening 10 minutes.

"Yeah, busy day, but that's a fun type of day," said Desbiens, who made her third start of the tournament. "I think it just shows how resilient we are, how we can't just change our focus and then don't let momentum swing for too long."

Dani Cameranesi also scored for the Americans and Maddie Rooney stopped 23 shots in her second start of the tournament. The most experienced of America's goaltending trio, she backstopped the U.S. in the gold medal-winning game four years ago.

The concerns are on offense for a U.S. team that converted just one of six power-play opportunities and continues having difficulty finishing. On Saturday, the Americans outshot the Russian team 62-12 in a 5-0 win.

## Marner's late goals lift Maple Leafs over Hurricanes

Associated Press

TORONTO — Mitch Marner scored the tying goal late in the third period and then got the winner 2:51 into overtime to give the Toronto Maple Leafs a 4-3 victory over the Carolina Hurricanes on Monday night.

Auston Matthews also scored twice, and John Tavares and Morgan Rielly each had two assists to help Toronto get its sixth straight win. Petr Mrazek stopped 28 shots to improve to 6-2-0 this season.

Marner also had an assist, giving him 10 goals and nine assists during an eight-game goal- and point-scoring streak.

His late-game heroics helped the Maple Leafs recover after giving up the lead in

the third period.

"It was a bit of a crazy game there with the lead being taken away from us and then coming back to tie the game," he said. "I think just the work ethic and battle we had tonight is something we talked about wanting to do more of in the second half, and tonight was a good night to start that."

Tony DeAngelo had a goal and an assist, and Nino Niederreiter and Derek Stepan also scored for the Hurricanes, who lost for the second time in nine games (7-1-1) and are 16-3-2 in their last 21. Frederik Andersen had 28 saves.

"It was a good game," Carolina coach Rod Brind'Amour said. "I thought we played well. I'm not disappointed at

all in our effort. ... I felt we created a lot of offense. Especially in the second period where we had four or five breakaways, 2-on-1s. We just didn't cash in."

In the extra period, Marner ended it when he slammed in the rebound of a shot by Rielly for his 16th of the season. The celebration was tempered because of a scary incident for Matthews late in regulation.

With 41.7 seconds remaining in the third period, Matthews got tangled up with Niederreiter. As a result, Matthews lost his balance and crashed into the end boards. He held his head and stayed down for a minute before he skated to the Toronto dressing room without any help. He did not return.

Maple Leafs coach Sheldon Keefe did not provide an update on Matthews' status after the game, saying the center was still "being assessed." Matthews was scheduled to have Tuesday off after his busy All-Star weekend in Las Vegas.

**Senators 4, Devils 1:** Nick Paul and Connor Brown each had a goal and an assist, Matt Murray stopped 32 shots, and host Ottawa beat New Jersey.

Nick Holden and Adam Gaudette also scored for the Senators, who won for the second time in three games.

Nico Hischier scored for the Devils, and Nico Daws finished with 20 saves. New Jersey has lost seven straight — all in regulation — and 10 of its last 11.

# Booker scores 38, Suns hold off Bulls

Associated Press

CHICAGO — Devin Booker scored 38 points and the NBA-leading Phoenix Suns hung on to beat the Chicago Bulls 127-124 on Monday night.

The Suns led by 27 in the third quarter and withstood a push down the stretch to win for the 13th time in 14 games. They improved to 43-10 overall and a league-best 21-5 on the road.

Booker hit the 30-point mark for the third time in four games. The All-Star made 14 of 23 shots, including five three-pointers.

“Just playing within the offense,” Booker said. “I understand that’s how our team is built, there are going to be opportunities to score at all times. I’ve been in this system for a minute now. There’s no reason to force anything. We have too many talented players out there.”

Chris Paul added 19 points and 11 assists for Phoenix. JaVale McGee finished with 16 points and eight rebounds, and Mikal Bridges scored 15.

DeMar DeRozan had 38 points for the Bulls after scoring a season-high 45 in Sunday’s loss to Philadelphia. Zach LaVine added 32 points after missing two games because of back spasms.

Chicago lost for the third time in four

games.

**Warriors 110, Thunder 98:** Klay Thompson scored 21 points and Golden State won at Oklahoma City for its ninth straight victory.

After the Thunder rallied late in the fourth quarter to cut their deficit to five, Thompson hit two three-pointers — including one with just over a minute remaining — to put the Warriors up nine.

Stephen Curry added 18 points, 10 assists and nine rebounds for Golden State, which shot 50% from the field.

Lu Dort scored 26 points and Darius Bazley matched a season high with 20 for Oklahoma City. Josh Giddey added 16 points, 11 rebounds and seven assists.

**Heat 121, Wizards 100:** Bam Adebayo scored 21 points and Jimmy Butler had 19 as Eastern Conference-leading Miami cruised to a win at Washington.

The Heat (35-20) never trailed and won their third straight, improving to 3-2 on a six-game road trip.

Corey Kispert equaled his career high with 20 points for the Wizards (24-29), who lost for the ninth time in 11 games. They are a season-low five games under .500 after opening 10-3.

Miami shot 18-for-32 (56.3%) from three-point range while Washington was

just 7-for-31 (22.6%).

**Raptors 116, Hornets 101:** Pascal Siakam had 24 points, 11 rebounds and eight assists as visiting Toronto defeated Charlotte for its sixth straight win.

Gary Trent Jr. scored 24 points, and Fred VanVleet and OG Anunoby each had 20 for the Raptors, who began a stretch of eight of nine games on the road. Scottie Barnes added 15 as Toronto’s starters accounted for all but 13 of the team’s points.

Miles Bridges scored 25 to lead the Hornets, who lost their fifth consecutive game. LaMelo Ball, named as an All-Star Game replacement a few hours before tip-off, finished with 15 points and nine assists.

**Jazz 113, Knicks 104:** Donovan Mitchell had 32 points, seven rebounds and six assists to lead host Utah over New York.

Mitchell also made four steals to help rally the Jazz to their third consecutive victory. Bojan Bogdanovic finished with 20 points. Mike Conley had 18 points and seven assists, and Jordan Clarkson scored 16.

Julius Randle scored 30 points to pace the Knicks. Mitchell Robinson added a season-high 19 points and a career-best 21 rebounds. R.J. Barrett had 23 points, seven rebounds and six assists, but New York lost its third straight.

# Beekman’s late three sends Virginia past No. 7 Duke

Associated Press

DURHAM, N.C. — Reece Beekman hit a three-pointer with 1.1 seconds remaining, leading Virginia to a 69-68 victory over No. 7 Duke on Monday night.

It was just the second three-pointer in 12 attempts for the Cavaliers.

Jayden Gardner scored 17 points, Kadin Shedrick posted a career-high 16 points, and Armaan Franklin added 11. Virginia (15-9, 9-5 Atlantic Coast Conference) has won three games in a row.

Foul-plagued Mark Williams scored 16 points and Trevor Keels got all 12 of his points in the second half for Duke (19-4, 9-3), which had a three-game winning streak halted.

Duke’s Paolo Banchemo was

held to a season-low nine points and his desperation three hit the side of the backboard to end the game.

**No. 4 Arizona 91, Arizona State 79:** Azuolas Tubelis had 19 points and 11 rebounds, Benedict Mathurin added 18 points and the host Wildcats pulled away in the second half in a win over the rival Sun Devils.

Arizona (20-2, 10-1 Pac-12) has won four games in a row and nine of its last 10. The Wildcats swept the regular-season series with their in-state rival after their 67-56 win at home on Jan. 29.

Arizona got big minutes from bench players Oumar Ballo and Pelle Larsson. Ballo finished with 13 points and 10 rebounds, while Larsson added 14 points

on 5-for-5 shooting, including 3-for-3 on three-pointers.

Jay Heath and Marreon Jackson led Arizona State (7-14, 3-8) with 16 points each.

**No. 20 Texas 79, No. 8 Kansas 76:** Timmy Allen scored 24 points and his long jumper from just beyond the free-throw line with 21 seconds left put the host Longhorns ahead before Marcus Carr’s free throws sealed a win over the Jayhawks.

Texas, one of the best defensive teams in the country, had to withstand a blistering shooting half from the top-scoring team in the Big 12.

Tre Mitchell scored 17 and Carr finished with 10 points for the Longhorns (18-6, 7-4 Big 12).

Jalen Wilson scored 18 to lead Kansas (19-4, 8-2), which remains in first place in the Big 12.

Agbagi, the leading scorer in the Big 12, finished with 11 points, nearly 10 points below his average.

**Navy 68, Lafayette 44:** John Carter Jr. had 14 points as the host Midshipmen easily defeated the Leopards.

Greg Summers had 11 points, seven rebounds and six assists for Navy (16-8, 9-4 Patriot League). Tyler Nelson added 11 points. Richard Njoku had 10 points.

Lafayette totaled 14 second-half points, a season low for the team.

Neal Quinn had 14 points and seven rebounds for the Leopards (7-15, 4-7).

The Midshipmen improve to 2-0 against the Leopards for the season. Navy defeated Lafayette 69-55 on Jan. 10.