

Navy sub incident prompts Russian threat

By **SETH ROBSON**
Stars and Stripes

Russia is prepared to fire on foreign ships and submarines that illegally enter its territorial waters, according to a senior official quoted by an independent Russian news agency.

Any decision to attack would be taken only at the “highest level,” said Stanislav Gadzhimagomedov, deputy head of the main operational department of the General Staff, according to a Monday report by Reuters that cited the Interfax news agency.

The threat follows Russian claims that its forces detected a U.S. Navy Virginia-class submarine operating over the weekend near the Kuril Islands, north of Japan, where the Russian navy was conducting a military exercise.

Moscow said the U.S. submarine departed at high speed after Russian forces ordered it

to surface. The United States denied the incident happened in Russian waters in a Saturday statement that stopped short of outright denying any encounter occurred.

The saber-rattling comes at a time of high tension between the two countries. NATO, including the U.S., is warning that Russia, which has staged more than 100,000 troops near its border with Ukraine, could attack its neighbor within days.

“More chest thumping,” is how Ralph Cossa, president emeritus of the Pacific Forum think tank in Hawaii, described the threat to fire on trespassing vessels.

U.S. forces are “looking every day” at Russia, but they don’t need to trespass to do it, he said in a telephone interview Tuesday.

Cossa said satellites and long-range surveillance tools mean an incident such as the 1960 downing of a U-2 spy plane operated by the CIA over the Soviet Union, wouldn’t hap-

pen today.

The Russians have shown they will fire on inadvertent trespassers, Cossa said. He cited the Sept. 1, 1983, downing by a Sukhoi Su-15 fighter jet of a Korean Airlines passenger plane that strayed into Soviet airspace. All 269 people on board were killed.

Intelligence collectors normally stay 30-50 miles off the coast of countries they are surveilling, Cossa said.

“I don’t think there’s a need to penetrate into people’s territorial waters to see what’s going on,” he said.

The tension with Russia is related to the rise of China, which U.S. officials now talk about as the primary threat, Cossa said.

“That’s got to rub [Russian President Vladimir] Putin the wrong way,” he said. “China threatens U.S. primacy, but it is not an existential threat to the U.S. Russia is. They want respect.”

Carrier sees highs, lows during eight months at sea

By **ALEX WILSON**
Stars and Stripes

The aircraft carrier USS Carl Vinson and its strike group returned Monday to San Diego, its homeport, putting an end to an eight-month deployment filled with success and something short of it.

The ship put the fifth-generation F-35C Lightning II stealth fighter to work aboard a carrier for the first time. It also logged five aircraft mishaps while patrolling the Indo-Pacific region, one involving an F-35 that collided with the flight deck and skidded into the sea.

None of the incidents were fatal, although the \$103 million aircraft’s loss injured seven sailors, according to Navy statements.

The Carl Vinson carried more than 70 advanced aircraft, including the F-35s, but also EA-18G Growlers, CMV-22B Ospreys and E-20 Advanced Hawkeyes, a collection the Navy dubbed “the air wing of the future.”

All the strike group aircraft, Carrier Air Wing 2, flew more than 15,000 flight hours across 7,791 sorties, according to a Tuesday news release from 3rd Fleet. Those includ-

ed 7,702 launches and 7,761 aircraft arrests on the flight deck.

The Carl Vinson’s skipper, Capt. P. Scott Miller, commended the strike group’s more than 7,000 sailors for their efforts during the lengthy deployment, which concluded on Valentine’s Day.

“The tireless dedication and professionalism of our sailors, through a global pandemic, challenging operational tempo and sacrificed time away from family, is truly humbling,” Miller said in the release. “Their efforts have demonstrated flexibility and resiliency and ensured mission success in every task.”

A spokesperson for the 3rd Fleet did not immediately return an email request for comment Tuesday on the deployment.

On Jan. 24 in the South China Sea, an F-35C struck the flight deck on approach, caught fire, skidded across the carrier and plunged into the water, according to a video of the incident posted on social media.

The Navy announced plans to salvage the aircraft and its trove of advanced technology. Three injured sailors were treated in Manila, the Philippines, and released in stable condition; four others were treated

aboard the Carl Vinson.

Before the F-35’s fall, four other mishaps occurred between Nov. 22 and Dec. 31 involving two F/A-18 Super Hornet fighter jets, a CMV-22B Osprey tiltrotor aircraft and an MH-60R Seahawk helicopter.

No sailors were injured in the mishaps. In the case of the Seahawk, the helicopter was lost, Carrier Strike Group 1 spokeswoman Lt. Cmdr. Christina Gibson said in a Tuesday email.

Mishaps aside, the strike group marked a series of accomplishments, according to a Navy news release marking its return to port.

After leaving San Diego on Aug. 2, the strike group steamed more than 80,000 nautical miles over 262 days. It took part in massive drills, including the global Large Scale Exercise 2022, Operation Malabar and ANNUALEX 2021. It sailed alongside allied navies from Australia, Germany, India, New Zealand and Japan.

In June, the Carl Vinson and its escorts drilled 400 miles west of Hawaii with Navy, Marine Corps and Coast Guard units while nearby, the Russian navy practiced missile attacks on a mock carrier strike group.

Russia seeking talks with US, NATO

Associated Press

MOSCOW — Russian President Vladimir Putin said Tuesday he welcomed a security dialogue with the West as his military reported pulling back some of its troops near Ukraine — signals that may indicate the Kremlin has opted for a diplomatic path for now despite Western fears of an imminent Russian invasion of its neighbor.

Putin said he doesn't want war and would rely on negotiations as he presses his demand for the West to halt Ukraine's bid to join NATO. At the same time, he didn't commit to a full pullback of troops, saying Russia's next moves in the standoff will depend on how the situation evolves.

While the overtures soothed global markets that have been on edge amid the worst East-West tensions in decades, Washington and its European allies remained cautious, saying they want to see evidence of a Russian pullback.

The U.S. and NATO have warned that over 130,000 Russian forces massed near Ukraine could invade at any time, and they sent troops and military supplies to shore up NATO members in Eastern Europe. Russia has denied having such plans, demanding that the West keep Ukraine and other ex-Soviet nations out of the alliance, halt weapons deployments near Russian borders, and roll back forces from Eastern Europe. The U.S. and its allies have roundly rejected the demands, but offered Russia to engage in talks on ways to bolster security in Europe.

Speaking after meeting with German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, Putin said the West agreed to discuss a ban on missile deployment to Europe, restrictions on military drills and other confidence-building measures — issues that Moscow had put on the table years ago.

He said Russia is open to discuss “some of those elements,” but added that it would only do that “in complex with the main issues that are of primary importance for us.”

Asked if there could be a war in Europe, Putin said Russia doesn't want it but said Ukraine's bid to join NATO posed a major security threat to his country.

While Scholz reiterated that NATO's eastward expansion “is not on the agenda — everyone knows that very well,” Putin retorted that Moscow will not be assuaged by such assurances.

Scholz also said diplomatic options are “far from exhausted,” and praised the announcement of a troop withdrawal as a “good signal,” adding: “We hope that more will follow.”

The Russian Defense Ministry released images of tanks and howitzers rolling onto railway platforms and more tanks rolling across snowy fields. It did not disclose where or when the images were taken, or where the vehicles were headed, other than “to places of permanent deployment.”

Russian forces continue to threaten Ukraine along the eastern border and from the Black Sea Crimean Peninsula that Moscow

seized from Ukraine in 2014, the year when it also backed a separatist insurgency in the country's east. More Russian troops loom over Ukraine in Belarus, where they were deployed for sweeping joint drills.

A U.S. defense official, who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss internal deliberations, said Pentagon analysts are reviewing the Russian withdrawal claims.

Ukraine expressed skepticism about Russia's statements on the pullback.

“We won't believe when we hear, we'll believe when we see. When we see troops pulling out, we'll believe in de-escalation,” Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba said.

NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg said that “so far, we have not seen ... any signs of reduced Russian military presence on the borders of Ukraine,” adding that the alliance wants to see a “significant and enduring withdrawal of forces, troops, and not least the heavy equipment.”

British Foreign Secretary Liz Truss reiterated the invasion danger still exists. Norwegian Foreign Minister Anniken Huitfeldt issued a similar warning, and Estonia's foreign intelligence agency said the Russian armed forces could launch an operation “from the second half of February.”

Few Russians expect a war, following the Kremlin's dismissal of Western warnings as “hysteria” and “absurdity.”

Ex-Navy nuclear engineer pleads guilty to selling secrets

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — A former Navy nuclear engineer pleaded guilty Monday to trying to pass information about American nuclear-powered warships to a foreign country.

Jonathan Toebbe, 43, pleaded guilty in federal court in Martinsburg, W.Va., to a single count of conspiracy to communicate restricted data. The sentencing range agreed to by lawyers calls for a potential punishment between 12 and 17 years in prison.

Toebbe and his wife, Diana, were arrested last October after prosecutors said he had repeatedly sold information about the submarines to someone he thought was a

representative of a foreign government but who was actually an undercover FBI agent.

Toebbe acknowledged during the plea hearing to conspiring to pass classified information to a foreign government, causing “injury to the United States.”

Diana Toebbe was accused of serving as a lookout at several prearranged “dead-drop” locations at which her husband deposited memory cards containing government secrets, concealing them in objects such as a chewing gum wrapper, a Band-Aid wrapper and a peanut butter sandwich. She has pleaded not guilty and the case against her remains pending.

The country to which Jonathan Toebbe

was looking to sell the information has not been identified in court documents and was not disclosed in court during the plea hearing Monday.

Toebbe, who as part of his job had a top-secret security clearance, agreed as part of the plea deal to help federal officials with locating all classified information in his possession, as well as the roughly \$100,000 in cryptocurrency that was paid to him.

FBI agents who searched the couple's Annapolis, Md., home found a trash bag of shredded documents, thousands of dollars in cash, valid children's passports and a “go-bag” containing a USB flash drive and latex gloves.

DOD: Contractor mergers pose risk to US

Associated Press

The Defense Department on Tuesday released a report that says mergers and consolidation among its contractors pose risks to the U.S. economy and national security.

Senior Biden administration officials previewed the report ahead of its release. The report lays out steps to block mergers that run contrary to Defense Department interests and reduce barriers to entry for new contractors. It also seeks to ensure that a company's intellectual property protections are

not anti-competitive.

The report calls on five sectors to develop plans for durable supply chains, a key concern as the coronavirus pandemic disrupted global supply chains for semiconductors and other goods in ways that created shortages and inflation. The sectors are: casting and forgings, missiles and munitions, energy storage and batteries, strategic and critical materials and microelectronics.

The report suggests that mergers have left national security beholden to private com-

panies. There are only five aerospace and defense prime contractors, down from 51 in the 1990s. Just three sources account for 90% of U.S. missiles.

The consolidation can hurt taxpayers because contractors no longer feel competitive pressure to innovate to secure government business.

The report is part of a broader government effort under President Joe Biden to promote competition within the U.S. economy. The ultimate goal of an executive order and a competition council formed by Bi-

den is to raise wages and lower prices.

Antitrust agencies are already taking steps to block mergers deemed harmful to the national interest. The Federal Trade Commission in January sued to stop Lockheed Martin Corp.'s \$4.4 billion bid for Aerojet Rocketdyne Holdings, saying the result would be higher prices for missile components and less competition.

On Sunday, Lockheed Martin announced that it was no longer pursuing the acquisition because of the FTC's actions.

US West megadrought driest in at least 1,200 years

Associated Press

The American West's megadrought deepened so much last year that it is now the driest in at least 1,200 years and is a worst-case climate change scenario playing out live, a new study finds.

A dramatic drying in 2021 — about as dry as 2002 and one of the driest years ever recorded for the region — pushed the 22-year drought past the previous record-holder for megadroughts in the late 1500s and shows no signs of easing in the near future, according to a study Monday in the journal *Nature Climate Change*.

The study calculated that 42% of this megadrought can be attributed to human-caused climate change.

"Climate change is changing the baseline conditions toward a drier, gradually drier state in the West and that means the worst-case scenario keeps getting worse," said study lead author Park Williams, a climate hydro-

logist at UCLA. "This is right in line with what people were thinking of in the 1900s as a worst-case scenario. But today I think we need to be even preparing for conditions in the future that are far worse than this."

Williams studied soil moisture levels in the West — a box that includes California, Wyoming, Utah, Nevada, Arizona, most of Oregon and Idaho, much of New Mexico, western Colorado, northern Mexico and the southwest corners of Montana and Texas — using modern measurements and tree rings for estimates that go back to the year 800. That's about as far back as estimates can reliably go with tree rings.

A few years ago, Williams studied the current drought and said it qualified as a lengthy and deep "megadrought" and that the only worse one was in the 1500s. He figured the current drought wouldn't surpass that one because megadroughts tended to peter out after 20 years. And, he said, 2019 was a wet year so it

looked like the western drought might be coming to an end. But the region dried up in late 2020 and 2021.

All of California was considered in official drought from mid-May until the end of 2021, and at least three-quarters of the state was at the highest two drought levels from June through Christmas, according to the U.S. drought monitor.

"For this drought to have just cranked up back to maximum drought intensity in late 2020 through 2021 is a quite emphatic statement by this 2000s drought saying that we're nowhere close to the end," Williams said. This drought is now 5% drier than the old record from the 1500s, he said.

The drought monitor says 55% of the U.S. West is in drought with 13% experiencing the two highest drought levels.

Eventually, this megadrought will end by sheer luck of a few good rainy years, Williams said. But then another one will start.

Lawyers: Sexual abuse suit against Prince Andrew settled

Associated Press

NEW YORK — A tentative settlement has been reached in a lawsuit accusing Prince Andrew of sexually abusing Virginia Giuffre when she was 17 years old, in which the prince will make a substantial donation to the charity of his accuser and says he never intended to malign her character, ac-

ording to a court filing Tuesday.

Attorney David Boies, who represents Giuffre, said in a filing in Manhattan federal court that lawyers on both sides were informing the judge that a settlement in principle has been reached and they'll request a dismissal of the lawsuit within a month.

Meanwhile, the letter said, the judge should suspend all deadlines and hold the action in abeyance.

Giuffre sued Andrew in August. The American accused the British royal of sexually abusing her when she was 17 while she traveled with financier Jeffrey Epstein.

Andrew has strenuously de-

nied Giuffre's allegations and attempted to get the lawsuit tossed. Attached to the letter by Boies was a statement that read, in part: "Prince Andrew has never intended to malign Ms. Giuffre's character, and he accepts that she has suffered both as an established victim of abuse and as a result of unfair public attacks.

Judge to dismiss Palin's libel suit

Associated Press

NEW YORK — A judge said Monday he'll dismiss a libel lawsuit that former Alaska Gov. Sarah Palin filed against The New York Times, claiming the newspaper damaged her reputation with an editorial falsely linking her campaign rhetoric to a mass shooting.

U.S. District Judge Jed Rakoff made the ruling with a jury still deliberating at a New York City trial where the former Alaska governor and vice presidential candidate testified last week. The judge said Palin had failed to show that The Times had acted out of malice, something required in libel lawsuits involving public figures.

Rakoff said he let jury deliberations continue in case his decision is reversed on appeal.

Palin sued The Times in 2017, claiming the newspaper had damaged her career as a political commentator and consultant with the editorial about gun control published after U.S. Rep. Steve Scalise, a Louisiana Republican, was wounded when a man with a history of anti-GOP activity opened fire on a congressional baseball team practice in Washington.

In the editorial, The Times wrote that before the 2011 mass shooting in Arizona that severely wounded former U.S. Rep. Gabby Giffords and killed six others, Palin's political action committee had contributed to an atmosphere of violence by circulating a map of electoral districts that put Giffords and 19 other Democrats under stylized crosshairs.

The Times acknowledged that then-editorial page editor James Bennet had inserted wording that wrongly described both the map, and any link to the shooting. But the newspaper's lawyers said he made an "honest mistake" that was never intended to harm Palin.

To prove malice, Palin's lawyers had to show that Bennet knew the wording was false or he knew that there was "a high probability" that it was false, the judge said.

ADL: Conspiracy theorists fuel increase in extremist killings

Associated Press

Newer strains of far-right movements fueled by conspiracy theories, misogyny and anti-vaccine proponents contributed to a modest rise in killings by domestic extremists in the United States last year, according to a report released Tuesday by a Jewish civil rights group.

Killings by domestic extremists increased from 23 in 2020 to at least 29 last year, with right-wing extremists killing 26 of those people in 2021, the Anti-Defamation League said in a report first provided to The Associated Press.

The ADL's report says white supremacists, antigovernment sovereign citizens and other adherents of long-standing movements were responsible for most of the 19 deadly attacks it counted in 2021. The New York City-based organization's list also included killings linked to newer right-wing movements that spread online during the coronavirus pandemic and former President Donald Trump's presidency.

The ADL concluded that roughly half of the 2021 killings didn't have a clear ideological motive, fitting a pattern that stretches back at least a decade.

The group's tally included a shooting rampage in Denver by Lyndon James McLeod, who killed five people in December before a police officer fatally shot him. McLeod was involved in the "manosphere," a toxic masculinity subculture, and harbored revenge fantasies against most of his victims, the ADL report notes.

Right-wing conspiracy theorists killed five people last year in two incidents involving "troubled perpetrators," the ADL report says.

In August, California surfing school owner

Matthew Taylor Coleman was charged with killing his two young children with a spear gun in Mexico. Coleman told an FBI agent that he was "enlightened" by conspiracy theories, including QAnon, and believed his wife had passed "serpent DNA" on to his children, according to a court affidavit.

A Maryland man, Jeffrey Allen Burnham, was charged with killing his brother, his sister-in-law and a family friend in September. Charging documents said Burnham confronted his brother, a pharmacist, because he believed he was poisoning people with COVID-19 vaccines.

"Prior to the coronavirus, the anti-vaccine movement in the United States did not have a particular ideological leaning and contained both left-leaning and right-leaning activists," the ADL report says. "However, the politicization of the coronavirus and other factors have created many new anti-vaccine conspiracy adherents and given the anti-vaccine movement a distinctly right-wing tone it did not previously have."

The QAnon conspiracy theory has been linked to other acts of real-world violence, including last year's riot at the U.S. Capitol. In June, a federal intelligence report warned that QAnon adherents could target Democrats and other political opponents for more violence.

The ADL distinguishes between killings that it considers to be driven by ideology and those that it found to be non-ideological or lacking a clear motive. Its report says the numbers for each category have been close to even over the past 10 years. The ADL concluded that 14 of the 29 extremist killings in 2021 were apparently motivated at least in part by ideology.

Ky. activist accused of shooting at mayoral candidate

Associated Press

LOUISVILLE, Ky. — A candidate for Louisville's metro council stands charged with attempted murder, accused of opening fire on a mayoral candidate whose shirt was grazed by a bullet in his campaign headquarters, police said Tuesday.

Quintez Brown, 21, also faces four counts of wanton endangerment, Louisville police spokesman Aaron Ellis said.

Brown, who is running as an independent,

was arrested Monday after witnesses said he shot multiple rounds at the headquarters of Democrat Craig Greenberg, who told reporters he was "shaken but safe" after the attack. Greenberg said he was at his campaign office with four colleagues when a man appeared in the doorway with a weapon.

"When we greeted him, he pulled out a gun, aimed directly at me and began shooting," Greenberg said.

One staffer shut the door, which they barri-

caded using "tables and desks," and the suspect fled, he said.

Police have said the motive remains under investigation. The suspect appears to have acted alone, they said.

Brown, a civil rights activist, is a former intern and editorial columnist for The Courier Journal, the Louisville newspaper reported.

Police apprehended the suspect near the campaign headquarters, Louisville Metro Police Chief Erika Shields said.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Thief breaks through wall to take Pokémon goods

MN MINNEAPOLIS — The owners of a business in Forest Lake said a thief broke into their game shop and stole Pokémon merchandise they estimate was worth \$250,000.

The Star Tribune reported the thief avoided the store's extensive security system by breaking into a vacant business next door and then busting through the wall to enter the gaming store's storage areas.

Security footage showed the intruder crawling through the hole, noticing the camera and then covering it up with tape, leaving fingerprints in the process. The thief removed two rooms' worth of inventory without entering the main store, which would have triggered an alarm.

Twin brothers Eric and Mike Johnson are co-owners of Punch-Out Gaming. Eric Johnson said the thief focused on Pokémon, leaving behind a brand-new Xbox One gaming system as well as their bank cash bag.

Man holds off rebuilding home officers blew up

ME BANGOR — A Maine man who was shot twice and whose home was destroyed by a police bomb is forgoing, for the time being, his plan to rebuild at the scene of the standoff.

Michael Grendell, 65, won a \$400,000 settlement after suing members of the Maine State Police and one member of the state attorney general's office.

Grendell said he was in the

midst of a mental health crisis on June 28, 2018, when police arrived at his home after a neighbor reported that Grendell shot at him the day before in Dixmont.

Officers shot Grendell after the 20-hour standoff when they drew him out of the house by detonating an explosive.

Grendell, who was shot in the face and torso, spent several months in the hospital, according to the lawsuit.

Records indicate he purchased a home last year in Bangor, and it's unclear what will happen to the property in Dixmont. He still owns the Dixmont property, the town clerk told The Associated Press.

Smithsonian to show 120 female scientist statues

DC WASHINGTON — The Smithsonian will commemorate Women's History Month in March by displaying 120 life-size neon orange statues depicting women who have excelled in the fields of science and technology.

The 3D-printed statues will be displayed in the Smithsonian Gardens and in select museums in the Smithsonian network from March 5-27.

The statues will depict women who have excelled in STEM fields: science, technology, engineering and math. These range from Jessica Esquivel, one of only 150 Black women with a doctorate in physics in the country, to Karina Popovich, a college student who produced over 82,000 pieces of 3D-printed PPE for health care workers in the early days of the pandemic.

Each statue will feature a QR

code that links to the personal story of the depicted woman.

Sheriff: Bus driver drove students while drunk

FL PALM COAST — A school bus driver is accused of being intoxicated when he drove dozens of students home from their Florida middle school, sheriff's officials said.

A co-worker smelled alcohol on the 60-year-old bus driver when he arrived to work for his afternoon shift, according to the Flagler County Sheriff's Office. The co-worker reported it to his supervisors, but the driver had already taken a bus that was not even assigned to him.

He picked up 40 students at Buddy Taylor Middle School and began dropping them off at their bus stops, officials said.

His supervisor eventually found him along the bus route and got him to stop, the report said. As he got off the bus, the driver fell to the ground, complaining that he couldn't breathe. Paramedics took him to a hospital.

The sheriff's office was notified and sent deputies to the hospital. The driver then attempted to run, but he was taken into custody moments later, the report said.

City probes swastikas found at multiple spots

DE WILMINGTON — Police in Delaware's biggest city are investigating the vandalism of multiple locations with spray-painted swastikas.

The News Journal in Wilmington reported that The Co-

lumbus Inn in Wilmington's Wawaset neighborhood, a billboard on nearby Union Street and Brandywine Counseling and Community Services are among the spots that were vandalized.

Police are investigating. They believe the vandalism took place late Friday night.

Some of the swastikas were backward. According to the Anti-Defamation League, when the swastika's arms are backward, it's often the sign of a young person attempting to do "shock" graffiti, rather than a white supremacist.

City restores cemetery where slaves were buried

GA SMYRNA — An Atlanta area city has restored a slave cemetery that had become nearly invisible after years of neglect.

Smyrna plans to hold a dedication ceremony Feb. 20 for the renewed Mount Zion Cemetery, WSB-TV reported.

The city spent \$100,000 to clear trees, build a fence and wall, improve landscaping and restore headstones after taking over the site in 2019, Smyrna councilman Travis Lindley told the news station.

"It was in a complete state of disrepair. You wouldn't even recognize it," Lindley said. "This (cemetery) was covered in probably 8 to 10 feet of brush. There was some very large oak trees that died. One of them had fallen over."

The church was founded after the Civil War by former slaves. Slaves and their descendants are buried there.

— From wire reports



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Valieva in first place in figure skating

Associated Press

BEIJING — Kamila Valieva skated off the Olympic ice with the lead in the women's short program and tears in her eyes.

They were not tears of joy.

The enormous pressure and scrutiny on the 15-year-old Russian dynamo, who is at the center of the latest Olympic doping scandal, appeared to finally get to her Tuesday night. Despite an incredible performance by the standards of just about anyone else, Valieva could hardly hold it together while she awaited her scores.

She wound up earning 82.16 points, more than eight off her own world record, but more than enough to top teammates Anna Shcherbakova and Alexandra Trusova as they go for a Russian sweep of the podium.

Valieva did not speak afterward, walking through the mix zone of reporters in stoic silence. The Russian Olympic Committee also declined to bring her to the news conference, which is required only for medal rounds, and when asked about the scandal, Shcherbakova said: "I will not say anything about this situation."

"Whether it is fair, I am not

quite sure," said Japan's Kaori Sakamoto, who sits in third place. "I would like to refrain from answering that question. Right now I would just like to focus on my own performance."

Shcherbakova, the reigning world champion, was second with 80.60 points after a clean program. Sakamoto's score of 79.89 points broke up the "Quad Squad" with Trusova, who fell on her opening triple axel, in fourth with 74.60.

"I think that everything was like always, like every competition," Shcherbakova said. "I didn't feel anything different from other competitions, and it was really controlled (and) focused."

The trio of Russian women, all coached by the embattled Eteri Tutberidze, are trying to deliver the second podium sweep in Olympic figure skating and the first in the women's competition. The free skate is Thursday night.

For the last week, Valieva's positive drug test from an event in December has shrouded the competition in controversy.

The test was flagged by a laboratory in Sweden for a banned

heart medication but only emerged last week, after her two brilliant performances in the team competition helped win gold for the Russia Olympic Committee.

The Court of Arbitration for Sport ruled that Valieva should be allowed to compete while anti-doping officials conduct a full investigation — in part because she is a minor and is subject to different rules from an adult athlete.

Lawyers for Valieva also "brought some doubts about her guilt," veteran IOC member Denis Oswald said Tuesday. Russian lawyers speculated that the sample may have been contaminated by medicine her grandfather was taking.

In her only comments since the drug test surfaced, Valieva told Russian state broadcaster Channel One on Monday night that "these days have been very difficult for me. I'm happy but I'm tired emotionally."

Valieva said the entire process had taught her that adult life "can be unfair to some extent."

Others pointed out that the real unfairness came in Valieva

performing despite a positive test for a banned substance.

"I can only speak for myself and that I advocate for clean sporting," said Mariah Bell, who along with U.S. teammates Alysa Liu and Karen Chen advanced to the free skate. "That's the whole idea of the Olympics and our careers, in general."

Valieva and her teammates had plenty of support from the carefully curated crowd inside Capital Indoor Stadium. There were even several fans waving Russian flags, which the team can't use at Olympics as punishment from the country's state-sponsored doping scheme at the 2014 Sochi Games.

There also were plenty of fans that sat stoically in the stands when Valieva's name was announced.

Regardless of what happens Thursday night, there won't be a podium presentation or medal ceremony if Valieva finishes in the top three. The International Olympic Committee, concerned that she could still be banned after a full investigation, said it would instead "organize dignified medal ceremonies" in the future.

US women struggle on ice; top American in eighth

Associated Press

BEIJING — Three U.S. women advanced to the free skate but struggled to break into medal contention in an event that has been overshadowed by the latest Russian doping scandal.

The dominant Russians had three of the top four spots, and Alysa Liu was the only American breaking into the top 10, in eighth.

"I don't know how anybody else skated. I only know how I skated. Again, it's disappointing. I hope that they skated well. And if not, then I guess we're in

the same boat," said Karen Chen, who came in 13th. "We've just got a focus on delivering a more solid long program."

Liu skated a more conservative program, downgrading her planned triple axel into a double in order to land it cleanly.

Though Liu was all smiles during the program, she said it was a struggle to switch to a new coach late in the season. She shouted out her former coach for helping her with her choreography.

"The change was really recent so it was a hard change, of course, for me," Liu said. "I'm

just really glad I get to show his choreography. Hopefully I did it justice."

Fellow American Mariah Bell, in 11th, also had a shaky performance. Both she and Chen fell. All three U.S. skaters now advance to the free skate on Thursday, when the medals will be decided.

"I have very mixed emotions about it. I'm bummed with the mistake on that element," Bell said. "I think it cost me quite a bit of points, but I'm happy with how I came back with everything else. And ultimately, I just really enjoyed skating on Olym-

pic ice."

Chen's tumble left her sobbing after she exited the rink, an upsetting turn after an uneven team event showing and a disappointing appearance at the 2018 Pyeongchang Winter Games.

"I'm super disappointed about my skate. I know I'm capable of much better than that. And to not deliver that is, again, just, like, very disappointing," Chen said. "I can't find a better word to describe how I'm feeling right now. I definitely just have to put that behind me and focus on the long program."

Shiffrin, 18th in downhill, plans 6 races

Associated Press

BEIJING — Mikaela Shiffrin threw her head back and laughed at the thought of entering the maximum Alpine skiing events possible at the Beijing Olympics — six — which she confirmed Tuesday she's intending to do.

She jokingly called it “a really bad idea.”

After coming in 18th in the downhill, about 2½ seconds behind gold medalist Corinne Suter of Switzerland, Shiffrin looked ahead to participating in the combined race on Thursday and the team event that wraps up the Alpine schedule on Satur-

day.

Her Olympics so far: She didn't finish the giant slalom or the slalom and was ninth in the super-G, before being the second-fastest American in the downhill, one spot behind Keely Cashman.

Shiffrin's two career Winter Games golds were in the slalom in 2014 and the giant slalom in 2018; she also earned a silver in the combined four years ago and could contend again.

That discipline adds the times from one downhill run and one slalom run.

She is far less experienced in the downhill, and she talked

about Tuesday's race as if it constituted a form of preparation, calling it “another run under my belt for the coming days.”

“It's just important to be able to compartmentalize the downhill run — fully focus on the downhill run — and then start the slalom portion of the day as if it's a new day. And that's really hard to do,” the 26-year-old from Colorado said. “Combined days are long and the events could not be more opposite. It's like doing two different sports in one single day, so that's the biggest challenge: Try to execute a downhill and then just let the downhill go and execute the slalom.”

When she is at her very best, she is among the most versatile ski racers there are.

But Shiffrin has not produced her very best in Beijing.

“I mean, right now, nothing is guaranteed. And that's the No. 1 lesson that I think many people learn at the Olympic Games — that there is no guarantee for anything. Not for performance or results,” she said. “But I think every day that I get on this track and I'm able to take a run, and just do a solid run top to bottom, it gives me the chance to be a little bit more calm in my mind. I tend to think way too much and that makes it hard to ski freely.”

Mantia snags first medal

Associated Press

BEIJING — Joey Mantia is finally taking home his first medal in his third Olympics.

The 36-year-old American, along with Casey Dawson and Emery Lehman, earned the bronze in team pursuit on Tuesday. It was the second speedskating medal for the United States in Beijing. Erin Jackson won gold in the 500 meters.

“I feel like the weight has been lifted in a sense,” Mantia said. “Now I can just kind of breathe.”

It was the Americans' first medal in men's speedskating since the 2010 Vancouver Games.

Mantia had been a favorite for gold in his first race in Beijing but finished sixth in the 1,500.

“The Olympics is such an amplifier, so when you're on, it amplifies that and when you're not quite on, it amplifies that,” he said. “It creates this big gap between who's on and who's not.”

The U.S. men were gold-medal favorites in team pursuit after setting the world record of 3 minutes, 34.47 seconds in a World Cup race in Salt Lake City in December.

Mantia sat out the semifinal,

when Ethan Cepuran joined Dawson and Lehman in posting the second-best time. But the Russians skated an Olympic record of 3:36.61 to advance to the final.

That left Mantia, Dawson and Lehman facing veteran Sven Kramer and the Netherlands in the B final. The U.S. won in 3:38.80, nearly 3 seconds ahead of the Dutch.

Dawson was late arriving to his first Olympics after testing positive for COVID-19. When he did show up after a series of negative tests, his skates and gear did not. He competed in his first event on borrowed blades before getting his own back.

“I didn't know I was going to get here in the first place and now I'm walking away with an Olympic medal,” Dawson said. “It's an amazing experience I've had so far.”

Mantia still has the 1,000 remaining in Beijing — where he admits he'd need the race of his life to make the podium — and the mass start.

“I still feel confident in the mass start that anything can happen,” he said. “I'm definitely capable of coming away with a gold medal.”

U.S., Canada meet again for women's hockey gold

Associated Press

BEIJING — American assistant captain Hilary Knight calls it “a beautiful rivalry.” Canadian captain Marie-Philip Poulin sums it up as “very fun.”

Don't be fooled by the pleasantries.

One of international sports' fiercest and longest-running grudge matches will play out for the second time at the Beijing Olympics, with the meeting Thursday between the United States and Canada determining who goes home with gold.

“These are the the games that we live for,” U.S. captain Kendall Coyne Schofield said following a 4-1 semifinal win over Finland. “Everyone's been so resilient through the pandemic with the ups and downs, the cancellations, postponements and finding ways to train, and it's for this moment. We're going to empty the tanks, and this is what we came here to do.”

The U.S. is the defending Olympic champion after rallying to beat Canada 3-2 in a shootout at the 2018 Pyeongchang Games.

The Canadians are consid-

ered the favorites this time after steamrolling to a 6-0 record and outscoring opponents 54-8, including a 4-2 win over the U.S. in group play.

Canada also had the edge over its cross-border rivals since Poulin scored the gold-medal-winning goal in a 3-2 overtime win over the U.S. at the world championships in August to end the Americans' streak of five tournament titles. Canada is 5-1-1 in the past seven meetings against the U.S. since.

Overall at the Olympics, which added women's hockey in 1988, Canada is 6-3 against the U.S., with four gold medals to the Americans' two.

Success aside, the lingering memory of 2018 stings.

“In all honesty, it was very anticlimactic for us to lose in a shootout, because it didn't feel as if you lost a game,” said Canada forward Sarah Nurse, who leads the tournament with 16 points on four goals and 12 assists. “It almost felt like unfinished business. So going into this gold medal game, regardless of who we play, we're here to finish business and win a hockey game.”

DeRozan scores 40 as Bulls top Spurs

Associated Press

CHICAGO— Taking a deeper look at quite possibly the best stretch of his career, DeMar DeRozan described a conversation he had with boxer Floyd Mayweather a few years ago.

DeRozan said Mayweather told him he used the first couple rounds of a fight to learn more about his opponent.

"I'm not (a) knockout puncher. I want to wear you down because I know I can go the length," DeRozan said, "however long I need to go."

No kidding.

DeRozan scored 19 of his 40 points in the fourth quarter and the Chicago Bulls beat the San Antonio Spurs 120-109 on Monday night for their fourth straight victory.

It was DeRozan's seventh consecutive game with at least 30 points, extending his career high. The All-Star is the first player with such a streak for the Bulls since Michael Jordan during the 1996-97 season.

DeRozan leads the NBA with 431 fourth-quarter points.

"It's not only the scoring piece, which is absolutely in-

credible what he does, the other piece of it is just his basketball IQ, his experience, how savvy he is," Chicago coach Billy Donovan said.

Nikola Vucevic had 25 points and 16 rebounds for the Bulls.

Trail Blazers 122, Bucks 107: Anfernee Simons scored 31 points and visiting Portland capitalized on Giannis Antetokounmpo's absence, beating Milwaukee for its third straight victory.

Antetokounmpo didn't play for the Bucks due to a sore left ankle. Milwaukee coach Mike Budenholzer said before the game he believes it's a short-term issue.

Nets 109, Kings 85: Seth Curry scored 23 points in his Brooklyn debut and the host Nets downed Sacramento to snap their 11-game losing streak.

Curry was one of five players who finished in double figures for Brooklyn. Bruce Brown set season highs with 19 points, six assists and five steals. LaMarcus Aldridge finished with 19 points, Cam Thomas added 14 off the bench and Andre Drummond contributed 11.

Jazz 135, Rockets 101: Donovan Mitchell scored 30 points, Bojan Bogdanovic added 22 and Rudy Gobert returned for streaking Utah in a win over visiting Houston.

Before he was ejected for picking up his second technical foul with 6:33 to play, Gobert had 14 points and seven rebounds. The Jazz were plus-19 in his 22 minutes on the court.

Clippers 119, Warriors 104: Terance Mann scored a season-high 25 points, including 14 in the decisive third quarter, and host Los Angeles defeated Golden State.

Stephen Curry scored 33 for the Warriors. The All-Star guard hit his first six shots and had 26 points in the first half on 9-of-11 shooting before going cold in the second. Curry was 2 of 7 from the field after halftime.

Pelicans 120, Raptors 90: CJ McCollum scored 23 points and host New Orleans shot a season-best 58.4% to defeat Toronto.

Fred VanVleet scored 20 points and Pascal Siakam added 18 for the Raptors, who have lost two straight following an eight-

game winning streak.

Wizards 103, Pistons 94: Kyle Kuzma scored 17 of his 23 points in the third quarter and Deni Avdija had 12 points and a career-high 15 rebounds as host Washington handed Detroit its eighth straight loss.

Washington (26-30) won for the third time in 12 games. Detroit, held scoreless for more than four minutes late in the fourth quarter, is 4-25 on the road.

Thunder 127, Knicks 123 (OT): Josh Giddey had a triple-double of 28 points, 12 assists and 11 rebounds, and Oklahoma City rallied from an 11-point deficit in the second half to win at New York in overtime.

Julius Randle had a triple-double of 30 points, 13 rebounds and 10 assists for the struggling Knicks, who have lost nine of 11.

Nuggets 121, Magic 111: Nikola Jokic scored 26 points to lead six players in double figures for host Denver.

Franz Wagner had 26 points to lead Orlando, which has lost three straight—all by double digits. Wendell Carter Jr. scored 25.

Boldy's hat trick powers Wild past Red Wings

Associated Press

ST. PAUL, Minn. — Rookie Matt Boldy had his first career hat trick and added an assist to lead the Minnesota Wild to a 7-4 win over the Detroit Red Wings on Monday night.

Kirill Kaprizov had two goals, Joel Eriksson Ek and Ryan Hartman also scored, and Mats Zuccarello added three assists for Minnesota, which rallied from a two-goal deficit early in the first period. The Wild are 11-1-1 since Jan. 6 and have won six in a row at home.

Kaapo Kahkonen made 30 saves for Minnesota.

The spotlight was once again on the 20-year-old Boldy, who has made quite an impact through 13 career games by posting seven goals and six assists.

"It was awesome," Boldy said. "It was

obviously nice to get the goals, but I think just the reaction from the fans and everyone, teammates and stuff. It was really special, for sure."

Maple Leafs 6, Kraken 2: Mitch Marner had a goal and two assists, Michael Bunting added a goal and an assist, and Toronto snapped a two-game losing streak with a win at Seattle.

Marner became the second player from the 2015 draft to reach 400 career points, joining Connor McDavid.

David Kampf scored a short-handed goal, Ondrej Kase scored on a power play, and Alexander Kerfoot and Jake Muzzin added goals. Auston Matthews had a pair of assists for the Maple Leafs, and Jack Campbell made 23 saves.

Blackhawks 3, Jets 1: Alex DeBrincat scored his 28th goal midway through the

third period and Chicago won at Winnipeg.

DeBrincat beat Jets goalie Connor Hellebuyck with a high shot at 9:42 to break a 1-all tie. Patrick Kane had a goal and an assist, and Brandon Hagel added an empty-netter.

Marc-Andre Fleury made 31 saves for the Blackhawks (18-24-7), who have won twice in their last six games (2-4-0).

Oilers 3, Sharks 0: Stuart Skinner made 20 saves in his first career shutout and Edmonton won at San Jose.

Connor McDavid, Darnell Nurse and Warren Foegele scored. Evan Bouchard had two assists.

Former Shark Evander Kane returned to San Jose for the first time with the Oilers and was booed every time he touched the puck. He did not have a point, but took four shots on goal.