

US, NATO plan response to Russia threat

By JOHN VANDIVER
Stars and Stripes

NATO military commanders will draw up plans for the creation of allied battlegroups in central and southeastern Europe, in response to the “new normal” of a persistent Russian threat to the Continent, the alliance’s top official said Wednesday.

Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg said there is no evidence that Moscow has begun pulling forces away from Ukraine’s border, despite Russian claims to the contrary earlier in the week.

“So far, there is no de-escalation,” he said from alliance headquarters in Brussels.

Instead, there are signs that Russia has increased forces around Ukraine and that “more troops are on their way,” Stoltenberg said.

On Wednesday, NATO defense ministers, including U.S. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin, took part in an opening round of talks in Brussels. Russia and its military buildup around Ukraine dominated the agenda.

In a joint statement, they said Russia’s actions pose a “serious threat to Euro-Atlantic security.”

“We are prepared to further strengthen our defensive and deterrent posture to respond to all contingencies,” the ministers said.

NATO members plan to set up multinational battlegroups in Romania and other countries, Stoltenberg said.

“We don’t know what will happen to Ukraine, but the situation has already demonstrated we face a crisis in European security. ... I regret to say this is the new normal in Europe,” Stoltenberg said.

While Stoltenberg did not detail which countries are being considered for the new battlegroups, he did say France has volunteered to lead a force in Romania. He added that commanders will start working on the details and report back within weeks.

Stoltenberg said the new battlegroups could resemble ones in the Baltic states and Poland that were created after Russia’s ini-

tial invasion of Ukraine in 2014.

One of Russia’s complaints, which it has used to justify its placement of 130,000 troops near the borders of Ukraine, is the alliance’s expansion east after the Cold War. In particular, Russia is upset about Ukraine’s aspirations for NATO membership, which comes with a guarantee that an attack on one member requires all the others to collectively assist in defending the attacked country.

But German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, during recent stops in Ukraine and Russia, said Ukraine’s NATO membership ambitions are not on the alliance’s agenda now or for the foreseeable future.

Still, Stoltenberg said that NATO’s open-door policy remains intact and that when it comes to admitting new countries, it’s a matter for the 30 members to decide.

“Russia is not deciding who’s going to be a member of NATO or not,” he said. “And this is a matter of principle that all allies have stated clearly again and again.”

Warships transit Med, Black seas at historic highs

By ALISON BATH
Stars and Stripes

Warships are transiting the Mediterranean Sea and nearby waters in numbers rarely seen in recent decades, adding another dimension to the ongoing tensions between NATO and Russia over Moscow’s military buildup along Ukraine’s borders.

While the focus remains on the 130,000 Russian troops massed along Ukraine’s land borders and whether the Kremlin will make good on its statement that some will withdraw, both the United States and Russia recently announced deployments of multiple ships carrying guided missiles to the region.

The ships are in addition to the U.S., French and Italian carrier strike groups that trained together in the region last week, as well as Ukrainian and Russian vessels operating in the eastern Mediterranean.

It remains unclear whether Russia will use its ships to launch a new invasion of Ukraine, where Russian-backed separatists have been fighting in the east since 2014. For the U.S. and its allies, the ship deployments are

calculated to send a message of support to friendly nations on Russia’s borders, analysts have said.

The USS Harry S. Truman carrier strike group arrived in mid-December as part of a long-planned deployment. Another four destroyers began operating in the European theater in mid-January and early February, the Navy said.

The destroyers — USS The Sullivans, USS Donald Cook, USS Mitscher and USS Gonzalez — were called from their U.S.-based homeports. The U.S. already has four destroyers based in Rota, Spain.

“These additional destroyers are being sent to provide additional flexibility to the European theater,” said Lt. Tyler Barker, a spokesman for U.S. 6th Fleet. “One of the unique values of naval forces is their mobility and ability to deploy for a range of contingencies and operations.”

Shortly before the destroyer deployments, Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin ordered the Truman to remain in the Mediterranean. The carrier strike group had planned to go to the

Middle East, USNI News reported Dec. 28. Although the U.S. rarely announces submarine deployments, it also is common for carrier groups to have undersea support.

While the scale of U.S. ships deployed to 6th Fleet is impressive — including about 12 destroyers and at least one cruiser — it’s not without historical precedent, particularly considering the Cold War, said James R. Holmes, a professor at the Naval War College in Newport, R.I.

But the deployment of the four additional destroyers is unusual over the past 30 years, he said.

“That’s what will cause the political signal to stand out from all the noise,” Holmes said.

The din may get louder.

The Russian Defense Ministry recently announced it would soon send warships — some with Kalibr and hypersonic Oniks cruise missile capabilities — from its Caspian Sea flotilla to the Mediterranean and Black seas “to bolster the contingent of the Russian navy in these regions,” the Russian news agency Tass reported Monday.

Judge temporarily blocks vaccine punishment

By COREY DICKSTEIN
Stars and Stripes

A federal judge in Georgia on Tuesday temporarily blocked the Air Force from punishing an officer who filed a lawsuit in January after she was denied a religion-based exemption from the mandatory coronavirus vaccine.

U.S. District Court Judge Tillman E. Self III granted a preliminary injunction for the unnamed Air Force Reserve officer in an order published Tuesday that labeled the service's process for granting religion-based coronavirus vaccine exemptions "illusory and insincere."

The judge, who is based in Macon, Ga., ruled the Air Force had likely violated the officer's First Amendment rights when the service denied her initial request for a religion-based waiver and her subsequent appeal of

that decision in December, while service officials as of Feb. 8 approved exemptions for 3,313 airmen for medical or nonreligious administrative reasons.

"It seems illogical to think, let alone argue, that plaintiff's religious-based refusal to take a [coronavirus] vaccine would 'seriously impede' military function when the Air Force has at least 3,300 other service members still on duty who are just as unvaccinated as her," Self wrote in his ruling. "The only difference is that plaintiff is unvaccinated because she followed her religion and the others were granted either a medical or administrative exemption from receiving a [coronavirus] vaccine."

When the unnamed officer, who is based at Robins Air Force Base, Ga., filed her lawsuit on Jan. 6, the Air Force had not granted any religion-based ac-

commodations, but the service has since granted nine. The service has denied 3,665 requests for a religion-based waiver and was still considering 3,288, as of Feb. 8, according to service data.

"The Department of the Air Force is aware of the preliminary injunction and will abide by the court's order until the matter is legally resolved. The Air Force has no other comments about this ongoing litigation," Air Force spokeswoman Ann Stefanek said in a statement.

The Air Force officer's lawsuit describes her as a 25-year veteran who has never faced disciplinary issues during her career. It states she serves in "an administrative position in the Air Force Reserve" that would not "be tasked to deploy" or likely to engage in physically demanding military operations. She is also a civilian employee of the Air Force and works at Rob-

ins Air Force Base in her non-uniformed role.

The officer plans to retire from the Air Force "under protest," if she is not ultimately exempted from the vaccine, which Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin mandated for U.S. troops in August.

The Air Force officer argued in her lawsuit that she cannot take the vaccine because as a Christian she is opposed to abortion as "a grave evil."

All three coronavirus vaccines approved for use in the United States were tested and developed using fetal cell lines, which are laboratory-grown cells derived from abortions performed several decades ago, according to the National Institutes of Health. Several religious authorities, including the Vatican, have said the vaccines were morally acceptable for their congregations.

Navy fires 'talent acquisition' commander after DUI arrest

By ALEX WILSON
Stars and Stripes

The commander of the Navy recruiting group in New Orleans has been relieved of his duties following his arrest in January for allegedly driving under the influence, the Navy announced Tuesday.

Cmdr. Chris Brown, who had led Navy Talent Acquisition Group New Orleans since April 15, was relieved Feb. 10 due to a loss of confidence in his ability to command, according to a news release from Navy Recruiting Command. Capt. Butch Smith, the Region Central commodore, issued the order.

Talent acquisition is another term for Navy recruiting.

"Navy Recruiting Command

takes alcohol-related misconduct very seriously," the release said. "NRC is dedicated to mission accomplishment and protecting the integrity of the recruiting process and trust of the American people."

Brown was arrested and charged with driving while intoxicated and other traffic-related charges on Jan. 23 in St. Tammany Parish, La., 28 miles from New Orleans.

A copy of the police report from the parish office was not immediately available Wednesday.

Brown will be reassigned to Navy Reserve Center New Orleans, while Cmdr. Dave Pavlik, deputy commodore, will assume his duties until a permanent replacement is found.

Aircraft carrier head fired for outbreak warning set to retire

The San Diego Union-Tribune

SAN DIEGO — The former captain of the aircraft carrier USS Theodore Roosevelt — fired from command after sounding the alarm on an out-of-control coronavirus outbreak on board in 2020 — will retire from the Navy next month, the Navy Times newspaper reported Monday.

Capt. Brett Crozier, a 30-year-Navy veteran, was removed from command of the Roosevelt following the leak of a letter he wrote to Pacific Fleet commanders in which he implored the Navy to do more to protect the crew as dozens of sailors began testing positive for COVID-19. The ship was just a couple of months into a scheduled deployment to the Western

Pacific when the outbreak began. It was sidelined in Guam, but sailors were still living in close quarters on board as the virus spread unabated.

Immediately after Crozier's letter was made public, the Navy announced thousands of sailors would move off the ship. The next day, Crozier was fired from command. Video of Crozier's departure from the ship showed hundreds of sailors cheering their captain and chanting his name.

Crozier was initially reassigned to a staff position at Naval Air Forces in San Diego. He later told investigators he understood the risk to his career he took in writing the letter, but did so to avoid a "larger catastrophe."

Biden orders release of Jan. 6 visitor logs

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Joe Biden is ordering the release of Trump White House visitor logs to the House committee investigating the riot of Jan. 6, 2021, once more rejecting former President Donald Trump's claims of executive privilege.

The committee has sought a trove of data from the National Archives, including presidential records that Trump had fought to keep private. The records being released to Congress are visitor logs showing appointment information for individuals who were allowed to enter the White House on the day of the insurrection.

In a letter sent Monday to the National Archives, White House counsel Dana Remus said Biden had considered Trump's claim that because he was president at the time of the at-

tack on the U.S. Capitol, the records should remain private, but decided that it was "not in the best interest of the United States" to do so.

She also noted that as a matter of policy, the Biden administration "voluntarily discloses such visitor logs on a monthly basis," as did the Obama administration, and that the majority of the entries over which Trump asserted the claim would be publicly released under the current policy.

A Trump spokesman did not immediately respond to a request for comment on the decision.

The Presidential Records Act mandates that records made by a sitting president and his staff be preserved in the National Archives, and an outgoing president is responsible for turning over documents to the agency when leaving office. Trump tried but failed to

withhold White House documents from the House committee in a dispute that was decided by the Supreme Court.

Biden has already made clear that he is not invoking executive privilege concerning the congressional investigation unless he absolutely must. Biden has waived that privilege for much other information requested by the committee, which is going through the material and obtaining documents and testimony from witnesses, including some uncooperative ones.

The committee is focused on Trump's actions from Jan. 6, when he waited hours to tell his supporters to stop the violence and leave the Capitol. Investigators are also interested in the organization and financing of a Washington rally the morning of the riot, when Trump told supporters to "fight like hell."

GOP-led Ariz. Senate passes 15-week abortion ban

Associated Press

PHOENIX — Republicans who control the Arizona Senate voted Tuesday to outlaw abortion after 15 weeks of pregnancy, moving to put a new ban in place ahead of a highly anticipated U.S. Supreme Court decision that could bring seismic changes to abortion availability in the United States.

The vote came over objections from minority Democrats who said the measure was unconstitutional under the landmark *Roe v. Wade* and other Supreme Court decisions the high court could overturn. They also said any ban would disproportionately impact poor and minority women who won't be able to travel to Democratic states without strict abortion laws.

But Sen. Nancy Barto, the Republican sponsor of the bill, said she hopes the high court upholds a Mississippi law banning abortion after

15 weeks it is now weighing.

"The state has an obligation to protect life, and that is what this bill is about," Barto said during debate. "A 15-week-old baby in the womb has a fully formed nose, lips, eyelids, they suck their thumbs. They feel pain. That's what this bill is about."

Arizona already has some of the nation's most restrictive abortion laws, including one that would automatically outlaw it if the high court fully overturns *Roe*, the nearly five-decade-old ruling that enshrined a nationwide right to abortion.

Republicans hope to put the 15-week ban in place so it takes effect quickly if the Supreme Court further limits abortion rights but stops short of fully overturning *Roe*. The measure closely mirrors the Mississippi law.

Under current abortion rulings, abortion is legal until the point a fetus can survive outside

the womb, which is usually around 24 weeks.

Democratic Sen. Martin Quezada pushed Barto on the state of the law today, with *Roe* and a series of follow-up decisions enshrining a woman's right to abortion.

"I understand the hopes of what the Supreme Court will do from your side of the aisle," Quezada said. "But as it stands today, right now, is this law constitutional or not?"

"I believe it is. I believe it is," Barto said. "I believe our Constitution stands clearly for life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness and the first part of that is life."

Quezada, who represents parts of Glendale, said that's just wrong.

"If we are waiting to see what the Supreme Court does, let's wait to see what the Supreme Court actually does before we start trying to change these laws," he said. "Otherwise, you're spinning our wheels right now."

Sailor is found with possible bomb-making materials

The San Diego Union-Tribune

SAN DIEGO — The main entrance to North Island Naval Air Station on Coronado shut down for several hours Tuesday after a driver was found with possible bomb-making materials, a base spokesperson said.

The incident started at about 9 a.m. when a driver approached the gate and was stopped at the request of Naval Criminal Investigative Service officials, Naval Base Coronado spokesman Kevin Dixon said.

Security officers noticed possible bomb-making materials in the vehicle, but the materials were not assembled into any kind of device, Dixon said. NCIS took the sailor driving the vehicle in for questioning.

Traffic was stopped, and the inbound gate on Third Street and outbound gate at McCain Boulevard were closed. Buildings nearest to the area were evacuated, and people in those a bit farther away were ordered to shelter in place.

People were also told to stay away from the main gate and Building 335. The Commissary, Exchange and Visitor Center were also closed.

Shortly after 2 p.m., base officials posted a notice on Facebook that the gates had reopened, shelter-in-place orders had been lifted and normal operations had resumed.

The commercial vehicle inspection lane and the ID lab in the Visitors Center, however, still remained closed.

Case raising concerns over US refugee system

The Washington Post

WASHINGTON — Anisa Mohamud's father told her that anywhere she felt safe was home, and she felt safe in Wisconsin. Armed militias had brutally attacked her family in Somalia, spurring the survivors to flee to different countries. From a tiny apartment in Madison, Mohamud and her sister have worked feverishly so their relatives could join them.

Her father died waiting. Her mother and younger brother were one flight away when President Donald Trump issued an order blocking refugees from Somalia and other predominantly Muslim nations he considered security risks. President Joe Biden called the bans "un-American" and the Mohamuds rejoiced when he rescinded them.

But months later, U.S. officials rejected the Mohamuds again — and would not say why, docu-

ments provided by their lawyers show. Federal officials declined to comment, citing privacy rules, and said they are committed to welcoming more refugees after a "rigorous vetting."

"I'm just shocked from what's going on," Mohamud, 31, a naturalized U.S. citizen who works as a caregiver for the sick and elderly in their homes, said in a telephone interview. "I don't know why. ... We are not bad people. And we don't deserve this."

The Mohamuds' case is raising concerns about the pace of the U.S. refugee system months after Biden boosted the refugee admissions cap to 125,000 people, a repudiation of the low ceilings under Trump. But less than 4,500 refugees have arrived since the fiscal year began Oct. 1, worrying advocates that the Trump administration's "extreme vetting" policies remain in place. Trump has

said he strengthened vetting to protect national security, but critics have said vetting is already stringent and his system shrank the program instead.

The Mohamuds are among a select group of 300 refugees who were in the advanced stages of processing when Trump issued a new refugee policy in October 2017 that barred people from Somalia and 10 other nations he considered "high risk" from traveling to the United States. Advocacy groups sued and a 2020 federal court settlement in Seattle required the government to prioritize their cases, returning them to the front of the line.

But refugees' lawyers have said the outcome so far is a prime example of their broader concerns about the humanitarian program under Biden. Two years after the court settlement, lawyers have said, case processing is

slow and shrouded in mystery. One group they are tracking was deemed "ready for departure" to the U.S. when Trump's ban stopped them, and lawyers said they seemed most likely to have been admitted under Biden. But 53 of more than 100 refugees in that group have been rejected under Biden. Advocates have said they don't know why.

The statistics are based on the lawyers' analysis of reports the Justice Department is required to provide every 90 days, under the court settlement.

The Justice Department, which represents the government in court, did not dispute the lawyers' figures. One official, who spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss the litigation, said the settlement required the government to "prioritize" the cases but did not guarantee either a speedy decision or an approval.

Sandy Hook families settle with gun maker for \$73M

Associated Press

HARTFORD, Conn. — The families of nine victims of the Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting announced Tuesday they have agreed to a \$73 million settlement of a lawsuit against the maker of the rifle used to kill 20 first graders and six educators in 2012.

The case was watched by gun control advocates, gun rights supporters and manufacturers, because of its potential to provide a road map for victims of other shootings to sue firearm makers.

The families and a survivor of the shooting sued Remington in 2015, saying the company should have never sold such a dangerous weapon to the public. They said their focus was on preventing future mass shootings by forcing gun companies to be more responsible with their products.

At a news conference, some of the parents behind the lawsuit de-

scribed a bittersweet victory.

"Nothing will bring Dylan back," said Nicole Hockley, whose 6-year-old son was killed in the shooting. "My hope for this lawsuit," she said, "is that by facing and finally being penalized for the impact of their work, gun companies along with the insurance and banking industries that enable them will be forced to make their practices safer than they've ever been, which will save lives and stop more shootings."

Gun rights groups said the settlement will have little effect on rifle sales and gun makers, who continue to be shielded from liability in most cases under federal law. The civil court case in Connecticut focused on how the firearm used by the Newtown shooter — a Bushmaster XM15-E2S rifle — was marketed, alleging it targeted younger, at-risk males in advertising and product placement in violent video games.

Voters recall 3 members of San Francisco school board

Associated Press

SAN FRANCISCO — San Francisco residents recalled three members of the city's school board Tuesday for what critics called misplaced priorities and putting progressive politics over the needs of children during the pandemic.

Voters overwhelmingly approved the recall in a special election, according to tallies by the San Francisco Department of Elections.

"The voters of this city have delivered a clear message that the school board must focus on the essentials of delivering a well-run school system above all else," Mayor London Breed said in a statement.

Breed will now appoint board replacements to serve until another election in November.

The school board has seven members, all Democrats, but only three were eligible to be re-

called: school board President Gabriela López, Vice President Faauuga Moliga and Commissioner Alison Collins.

Opponents called the recall a waste of time and money, as the district faces a \$125 million budget deficit and seeks a replacement for retiring Superintendent Vincent Matthews.

Parents in the politically liberal city launched the recall effort in January 2021 out of frustration over the slow reopening of district schools, while the board pursued the renaming of 44 school sites and the elimination of competitive admissions at the elite Lowell High School.

The mayor praised the parents, saying they "were fighting for what matters most — their children."

Collins, Lopez and Moliga said they prioritized racial equity because that was what they were elected to do.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Man accused of stealing \$25K dinosaur claw

AZ TUCSON — A man was arrested for allegedly stealing a fossilized dinosaur claw valued at \$25,000 from a vendor in Tucson last month and then trying to resell it, according to authorities.

Tucson police said the claw was stolen Jan. 30 from a vendor at the city's annual Gem and Mineral Show.

They said Christopher Thomas, 39, allegedly tried to sell the claw Feb. 8 to another vendor, who recognized the item and alerted police.

Thomas is facing a felony charge of trafficking stolen property, police said.

Boat launched by students lands in Norway

NH RYE — A small boat launched in October 2020 by some New Hampshire middle school students that contained photos, fall leaves, acorns and state quarters was found 462 days later — by a sixth grader in Norway.

The 6-foot-long Rye Riptides, equipped with a tracking device that went silent for parts of the journey, was found Feb. 1 in Smøla, a small island near Dyrnes, Norway, the Portsmouth Herald reported.

It had lost its hull and keel on the 8,300-mile journey and was covered in gooseneck barnacles, but the deck and cargo hold were still intact. The student who found it, Karel Nuncic, took the boat to his school, and he and his classmates opened it. The school in Norway plans a call with the Rye Junior High students soon.

Maine-Nova Scotia ferry service to begin in May

ME BAR HARBOR — A Canadian company that's bringing ferry service back to Bar Harbor has set a start date of May 19 for restoration of service between Maine and Nova Scotia.

Service with a high-speed catamaran called The Cat will start at four days per week before increasing to seven days per week in late June, Bay Ferries said. Service will conclude in October.

Bay Ferries operated ferry service from Bar Harbor to Yarmouth, Nova Scotia, for more than a decade before moving to Portland and ending service in 2009. Bay Ferries tried to return for the 2019 season but failed to get the ferry terminal renovated and approved in time. Then the pandemic scuttled service in 2020 and 2021.

Mayor quits over shanties, prostitution comment

OH HUDSON — The mayor who suggested that allowing ice fishing shanties on a lake could lead to prostitution resigned after days of being mocked and drawing national attention to the city.

Hudson Mayor Craig Shubert said in his resignation letter that his comments at a City Council meeting had been misinterpreted.

"Does someone come back next year and say, 'I want an ice shanty on Hudson Springs Park for x amount of time?'" Shubert said during the discussion about whether to permit people to fish on the frozen city lake. "And if you then allow ice fishing with shanties, then that leads to an-

other problem — prostitution."

Shubert said his comment about ice shanties and prostitution stemmed from his experience as a television news reporter covering law enforcement agencies that have arrested people for prostitution in shanties.

Utility linemen rescue macaw stuck in tree

VT BRATTLEBORO — Utility crews in Vermont performed an unusual rescue when they helped a frightened macaw down from a tree.

The colorful macaw, named Kaiba, had been outside with his owner in Brattleboro when another bird flew by and spooked him. Kaiba flew high into a tree and refused to budge.

Owner Thea Everest told WCAX-TV that Kaiba is a rescue whose previous owners had shorn his wings.

Everest, a Massachusetts resident who had taken Kaiba to visit her father in Vermont that day, contacted Green Mountain Power to see if any linemen could help.

After arriving at the home, linemen Chris Gouger and Nick Bills initially weren't sure whether their bucket truck could reach the bird. But it did, and Kaiba was soon safely reunited with Everest.

State official accused of faking pregnancies

GA ATLANTA — A state official is accused of faking multiple pregnancies and using at least one of those ruses to get out of work and be paid for the time off.

A Fulton County grand jury

indicted Robin Folsom, 43, former director of external affairs for the Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency, on three felony counts of making false statements. She's also charged with one count of identity fraud, also a felony.

In October 2020, Folsom told human resources officials that she was pregnant, and then announced that she had given birth in May 2021, according to the state Office of the Inspector General. A man claiming to be the child's father later emailed the agency, claiming that Folsom needed several weeks of rest after the birth. The agency approved about seven weeks of paid leave.

A co-worker shared with investigators a belief that Folsom wore a fake pregnancy stomach. Ultimately, a review of medical and insurance records found no sign that Folsom delivered a child.

She had earlier reported the birth of a child in July 2020, and claimed she was again pregnant in August 2021, authorities said.

Hiker with impaled foot rescued from mountain

NC LINVILLE — Rescuers helped retrieve an injured hiker whose foot had been impaled on a tent stake from the top of a North Carolina mountain.

Burke County Search and Rescue said in a Facebook post that they received a report of an injured hiker on top of Shortoff Mountain.

The rescuers were able to reach the hiker, when they discovered the hiker's foot had been impaled.

— From wire reports

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Slovakia ousts US men's hockey team

Associated Press

BEIJING — Minutes after failing to score in the shootout as the Americans' last chance to stay alive at the Olympics, captain Andy Miele took off his gloves to wipe the tears coming out of his eyes.

"I'm just sad it's over," he said.

With one bad bounce in the final minute of regulation that became the tying goal and an unsuccessful shootout, the United States is out of the men's hockey tournament at the Beijing Games after a shocking 3-2 loss to Slovakia in the quarterfinals Wednesday. The previously unbeaten U.S. team that earned the top seed in the knockout round and looked poised for a deep run instead was dealt the same result as the 2018 group in the last Olympics without NHL players.

"This one's going to sting for a little bit," veteran defenseman Steven Kampfer said. "I thought we were the better team for a majority of the game. You

come up a little bit short."

Eight years after T.J. Oshie earned the "T.J. Sochi" nickname for his shootout heroics against Russia, there was no such magic this time around. Brendan Brisson, Sean Farrell, Matt Knies, Nathan Smith and Miele all came up empty in the shootout.

The U.S. also went 0-for-5 in the shootout loss to the Czech Republic in Pyeongchang four years ago.

"It's a tough situation with the game riding on you," Miele said. "I wanted to score, I didn't and it stinks. I don't know what else to say."

Strauss Mann allowed only one goal on five shots by Slovakia, with Peter Cehlárik beating him with a move he practiced in warmup and expected to catch the goaltender by surprise. On the bench during the shootout, 17-year-old Slovakia forward Juraj Slafkovsky told Cehlárik he believed he would score when it was his turn.

"Don't worry," Cehlárik told

him in Slovak. "Backhand, forehand and I will score."

After goalie Patrik Rybar denied Miele for his final save of the 38 he made in regulation, overtime and the shootout, assistant Jan Pardavy embraced Slovakia coach Craig Ramsay and Slovakia celebrated its first trip to the semifinals since 2010.

"It's a thrill," said Ramsay, who played 14 NHL seasons and spent more than two decades in the league as an assistant. "Even when it went in, when Cehlárik scored and Pardo almost broke me in half, I still said: 'Did we win? Have we won this thing?' Because you lose track at five shootouts. It was so exciting. I know what they're feeling and I'm feeling it."

The Americans felt a mix of sadness, regret and acceptance at the random bounces that can decide a hockey game. They were the only team to win all three group stage games in regulation, trailed for just 11 minutes the entire tournament and still saw their medal dreams

dashed.

"We were actually joking we still haven't lost a game, really — we lost a shootout," coach David Quinn said. "That's the frustrating part."

Slovakia will face Finland in one semifinal Friday after the Finns took care of business against Switzerland with a 5-1 victory. The Finns won the teams' first meeting in the preliminary round 6-2, though Slovakia looks like a different team now.

The Russians advanced to the semifinals by beating Denmark 3-1 on goals by captain Vadim Shipachyov and former NHL defensemen Slava Voynov and Nikita Nesterov. Unlike the U.S., the defending champion Russians got the job done on the power play, with Voynov scoring with 4:14 left to seal it.

Canada exited the tournament hours after the U.S. with a 2-0 loss to Sweden. It's the first time since 2006 neither the U.S. nor Canada made the final four at the Olympics.

Hall, Goepper use different tricks to go 1-2 in slopestyle

Associated Press

ZHANGJIAKOU, China — The medals were great. Every bit as important to American slopestyle skiers Alex Hall and Nick Goepper: They did it their way.

Hall and Goepper took a gamble on different with a pair of high-stakes runs Wednesday over a course that was built for taking chances.

Hall won Olympic gold. Goepper took silver. And they reminded the world that the most beautiful feature about all the bumps and jumps at the snow park is the freedom that comes in trying new things.

"I was stoked," Hall said. "I wanted to come out here and show the world what I do as a skier, and show the creativity, and thinking outside the box."

For Hall, the 23-year-old who was born in Alaska and grew up in Switzerland, "outside the box" looked like two tricks that nobody else much thought about at the super-sized Secret Garden slopestyle course. It's a

layout filled with options for those who take the time to look around.

One trick was called a "switch-cork-7 to butter-switch-5 Japan."

Where most skiers — and snowboarders before them — would take one of the side ramps to approach the massive kicker leading into the second jump, Hall chose the smoother runway that splits the middle of the approach.

He did two jumps there. First, he skimmed the top of the jump while spinning 720 degrees, then he jumped again and threw a 540-degree spin while reaching backward with his right hand and grabbing his left ski.

It's as complicated as it sounds. One key detail: He never got more than 3 feet off the ground.

It was a trick he first dreamed up at an event called "knuckle huck" — a free-form contest run off the knuckle of a jump at the Winter X Games. The only rule at that one:

Do something cool. At one moment in knuckle huck earlier this year, one rider laid on the jump and used his feet to brace his snowboard above his head, then his buddy approached him and threw a trick off the makeshift platform.

Hall's final jump was unique, too. Where most riders were going huge off the ramp before the finish area — jumps with 1620 degrees of spin or more — Hall tried what's called "right double 10 pretzel one."

It involved 900 degrees of spin one way, then, as the G-forces were taking over, Hall stopped the spin in midair and spun 180 degrees the other way. Vertebrae be damned, he nailed that trick. His skis slammed down ramrod straight on the snow and he skied in backward to the finish.

"Definitely scary," Hall said.

The judges appreciated the chances Hall took. His 90.01 in the first of his three runs held up, and Hall won by more than 3.5 points.

Young has 41 for Hawks in win over Cavs

Associated Press

ATLANTA — Trae Young scored 41 points, Danilo Gallinari added 25 and the Atlanta Hawks held off the Cleveland Cavaliers 124-116 on Tuesday night.

Cleveland, sitting in third place in the Eastern Conference, lost consecutive games for the first time since Dec. 31. Atlanta is 10th in the East and had dropped two straight and five of seven.

Darius Garland finished with 30 points, Evan Mobley had 21 points and Kevin Love 20 for the Cavaliers, who had held opponents under 100 points 23 times this season but struggled to contain Young's frantic pace.

Suns 103, Clippers 96: Devin Booker scored 26 points, Chris Paul added 17 points and 14 assists, and the All-Star duo led host Phoenix to another win.

The Suns have won six straight games and 17 of their past 18 dating back to Jan. 11. They also pushed their NBA-best record to 47-10 with one game remaining before the All-Star break. Mikal Bridges added 19 points and nine rebounds — including a crucial three-pointer in the final minute — while Deandre Ayton had 12 points and 12 rebounds.

Los Angeles was coming off an impressive win against Golden State and put up a great fight against Phoenix in a back-and-

forth second half that kept the outcome uncertain until the final minute. The Clippers fell to 29-31 for the season.

Mavericks 107, Heat 99: Luka Doncic scored 21 points and Dallas won at Miami.

Jalen Brunson and Maxi Kleber each finished with 19 points and Dorian Finney-Smith had 14 points for the Mavericks, who have won 17 of 23 since Jan. 1 and snapped the Heat's five-game winning streak.

Recently acquired Davis Bertans had 12 points for Dallas in his debut. Bertans and Spencer Dinwiddie were acquired from Washington for Kristaps Porzingis on Feb. 12. Dinwiddie finished with four points.

Bucks 128, Pacers 119: Giannis Antetokounmpo scored a season-high 50 points, two off his career best, and pulled down 14 rebounds to lead host Milwaukee past Indiana.

The Bucks swept the four-game season series from the Pacers and have won eight straight against their Central Division foe.

Antetokounmpo, who didn't play in Milwaukee's loss to Portland on Monday night because of a sore left ankle, showed no ill effects as he racked up 12 first-quarter points that included a pair of thunderous dunks and a three-pointer.

Grizzlies 121, Pelicans 109: Tyus Jones scored a career-high 27 points to go with eight assists while filling in for All-Star Ja

Morant, and Memphis won at New Orleans for its sixth straight victory and ninth in 10 games.

Jaren Jackson added 23 points and ex-Pelican Steven Adams had 14 points and 13 rebounds for the Grizzlies, who led for nearly the entire game and by double digits for more than half of it.

Celtics 135, 76ers 87: Jaylen Brown scored 26 of his 29 points in the first half, and Boston won its ninth in a row by rolling at Philadelphia.

Jayson Tatum added 28 points, 12 rebounds and six assists for the Celtics, who have closed ground in the Eastern Conference with their stellar play of late. Boston entered sixth in the East, 4½ games back of first-place Miami. It has won 11 of 12.

The margin of victory was the largest by the Celtics over the 76ers in a rivalry that has been played 457 times. Boston's previous biggest win was a 124-87 drubbing of Philadelphia on Dec. 20, 1987.

Timberwolves 126, Hornets 120 (OT): Karl-Anthony Towns had 39 points and 15 rebounds, D'Angelo Russell added 18 points and 11 assists, and host Minnesota came back to beat Charlotte in overtime.

The Timberwolves came back from a 13-point deficit in the fourth, but Miles Bridges tied the game for the Hornets with a three-pointer and free throw in the final minute.

No. 10 Villanova, Gillespie eke past No. 8 Providence

Associated Press

PROVIDENCE, R.I. — Collin Gillespie had five three-pointers and a career-high 33 points, including a key three with 23 seconds left, and 10th-ranked Villanova held on to beat eighth-ranked Providence 89-84 on Tuesday night.

Justin Moore added 19 points for the Wildcats (20-6, 13-3 Big East), who went 11-for-23 from beyond the arc and won their fourth straight.

The loss snapped the eight-game winning streak by the conference-leading Friars (21-3, 11-2). It was their first home conference loss of the season.

No. 16 Tennessee 76, No. 4 Kentucky 63: Santiago Vescovi scored 18 points and Chandler

Kennedy added 17 to lead the host Vols.

Zakai Zeigler and John Fulkerson each added 14 points as Tennessee (19-6, 10-3 Southeastern Conference) ran its home record to 14-0 this season with its eighth straight SEC victory.

No. 9 Duke 76, Wake Forest 74: Mark Williams dunked Paolo Banchero's missed driving layup with 0.4 seconds left to help the host Blue Devils win, capping a wild game in which Hall of Fame coach Mike Krzyzewski did not coach after halftime because the team said he was "not feeling well."

Alondes Williams had 16 points and 10 rebounds for Duke (22-4, 12-3 Atlantic Coast Conference). Wendell Moore Jr.

had 16 points, six rebounds and five assists.

No. 15 Wisconsin 74, Indiana 69: Johnny Davis scored 30 points, including the final 13 for the visiting Badgers, who boosted their Big Ten title chances with a comeback victory.

Davis was 10-for-15 from the field, 10-for-14 at the free-throw line and had 12 rebounds. Brad Davison added 21 points and seven boards for Wisconsin (20-5, 11-4).

No. 18 Ohio State 70, Minnesota 45: E.J. Liddell had 16 points and 10 rebounds, leading the host Buckeyes.

Malaki Branham added 11 points on 4-for-7 shooting for Ohio State (16-6, 9-4 Big Ten).

Penn State 62, No. 19 Michigan State 58: Seth Lundy hit a

go-ahead three-pointer with 1:37 remaining and finished with 17 points as the host Nittany Lions surprised the Spartans.

No. 20 Texas 80, Oklahoma 78 (OT): Timmy Allen and Andrew Jones each scored 20 points to help the visiting Longhorns top the Sooners.

New Mexico 75, No. 22 Wyoming 66: Jaelen House scored 34 points and the host Lobos played stingy defense to beat the Cowboys.

No. 23 Arkansas 76, Missouri 57: Stanley Umude scored 23 points to lead the Razorbacks to a road win.

UNLV 78, Air Force 44: Guard Bryce Hamilton had 24 points to lead the host Rebels to a win.

'Mr. National' Zimmerman retires at 37

Associated Press

Known to many as Mr. National, Ryan Zimmerman was there for it all with the baseball club in D.C.

The first draft pick in Washington Nationals history, and the public face of the franchise, he lived through 100-loss seasons, playoff heartache and, finally, a World Series championship. And now, at age 37, he's ready to move on.

In many ways an old-school player, Zimmerman announced his retirement via the new-school method of a Twitter post on Tuesday, ending a decorated playing career in which he became the Nationals' leader in most major hitting categories and boosted his only major league team to its only title.

"When we first met, I was a 20-year-old kid fresh out of the University of Virginia," he wrote in his open letter, addressed to the city of Washington. "I had no idea how unbelievable the next 17 years of my life were going to be."

Zimmerman was picked

fourth overall in the June 2005 draft during the Nationals' first season in the nation's capital after moving from Montreal. He made his major league debut that September and hit .397 in 20 games, giving a glimpse of what was to come.

"Ryan will forever be Mr. National. From the walk-off home runs, to carrying the World Series trophy down Constitution Avenue, to the final day of the 2021 regular season when our fans gave him an ovation that none of us will soon forget, Ryan gave us all 17 years of amazing memories," team owner Mark Lerner said in a statement.

Popular and productive, Zimmerman was a two-time All-Star, won a Gold Glove at third base and helped the Nationals reach the postseason five times, capped by their run to the 2019 championship.

In the NL wild card game that year, Zimmerman's two-out, pinch-hit single off Milwaukee relief ace Josh Hader keyed a three-run rally in the eighth inning for a 4-3 victory. He later hit

the first World Series homer in franchise history, connecting against Houston ace Gerrit Cole in the opener. Washington went on to win in seven games.

He set Nationals career records for RBIs (1,061), home runs (284), hits (1,846) and games (1,799).

He batted .277 in 16 seasons with a career .341 on-base percentage and .475 slugging percentage. He also connected for 11 walk-off homers, the seventh-highest total ever — those include a game-ending shot with two outs in the bottom of the ninth inning against the NL East rival Atlanta Braves on March 30, 2008, to win the regular season debut of Nationals Park, the team's new stadium.

Zimmerman became the Nationals' third baseman in 2006 and stayed there full-time through 2013. After spending time in the outfield and infield in 2014, he took over at first base in 2015.

Zimmerman opted to sit out the pandemic-delayed 2020 season because of COVID-19 con-

cerns.

"I have a 3-week-old baby. My mother has multiple sclerosis and is super high-risk," Zimmerman wrote in a story for The Associated Press a month before the season finally began in late July.

Zimmerman returned last year and hit .243 with 14 home runs and 46 RBIs in 110 games. His wife, Heather, gave birth to the couple's fourth child last month.

"Although my baseball career has come to an end, my family and I will continue to be heavily involved in the DMV community," Zimmerman wrote in his retirement announcement.

"You have given so much to us over the past 17 years; it is now time for us to give back to you. We look forward to continuing many of our community programs and starting new ones in the future. Our kids will be raised here, as this is now our home, and we couldn't be more excited. So this is not a goodbye but more of a 'see you around,'" he said.

Crosby scores 500th NHL goal to lift Pens over Flyers

Associated Press

PITTSBURGH — Sidney Crosby scored his 500th goal and Pittsburgh teammate Kris Letang capped a late rally to send the Penguins past the Philadelphia Flyers 5-4 in overtime Tuesday night.

Crosby became the 46th player in NHL history to reach the milestone when he beat Carter Hart from the goal line on the power play at 16:34 of the first period to give the Penguins a 2-1 lead. Crosby's teammates poured over the boards in a raucous celebration after the 34-year-old joined Hall of Famer Mario Lemieux as the only Pittsburgh players with 500 career goals.

Jake Guentzel and Chad

Ruhwedel scored 18 seconds apart in the third period to erase a two-goal deficit, and Letang's wrist shot by Hart 31 seconds into OT gave the Penguins their fourth straight win.

Dominik Simon also scored for Pittsburgh, and Casey Desjardins stopped 23 shots as Pittsburgh stayed atop the Metropolitan Division by sending the last-place Flyers to their third consecutive loss.

Capitals 4, Predators 1: Alex Ovechkin scored a pair of goals, including his 30th of the season, to lead visiting Washington past Nashville.

Joe Snively and Nick Jensen also scored, and Ilya Samsonov made 33 saves for Washington, which has won two of its last three. The victory gave coach

Peter Laviolette his 700th career win. He is third among active coaches in wins, trailing only New York Islanders coach Barry Trotz (894) and Lindy Ruff (772) of the New Jersey Devils.

Stars 4, Avalanche 1: Joe Pavelski scored twice, Jake Oettinger made 46 saves and visiting Dallas ended Colorado's 19-game point streak.

Rangers 2, Bruins 1 (SO): K'Andre Miller scored the deciding goal in the ninth round of a shootout and host New York edged Boston for its third straight win.

Lightning 6, Devils 3: Victor Hedman, Nikita Kucherov and Pierre-Edouard Bellemare scored in a 3:04 span of the third period as Tampa Bay ral-

lied from an early two-goal deficit to win at New Jersey.

Blues 5, Senators 2: Vladimir Tarasenko had two goals and an assist to lead St. Louis to a win at Ottawa.

Sabres 6, Islanders 3: Victor Olofsson scored twice, including the go-ahead goal with 2:55 left in host Buffalo's victory over New York.

Flames 6, Blue Jackets 2: Tyler Toffoli scored in his Calgary debut and his new team won its season-high seventh straight game.

Oilers 5, Kings 2: Kailer Yamamoto scored the tie-breaking goal with 4:46 left and Edmonton remained undefeated under new coach Jay Woodcroft with a win at Los Angeles.