

## Study: DOD strategy on Russia likely to fail

By JOHN VANDIVER  
*Stars and Stripes*

STUTTGART, Germany — A Pentagon strategy that emphasizes unpredictable short-term troop rotations to Europe is more likely to risk escalation with Russia than a forward-based military presence on the Continent, a U.S. Army-commissioned study found.

The Dynamic Force Employment concept, developed by former Defense Secretary Jim Mattis, involves deployment of an array of U.S.-based forces on short-notice missions abroad to showcase American might to adversaries like Russia and China.

But the tactic “implies discontinuity” and is often associated with ratcheting up tensions, Rand Corp. said in a report released Thursday, “Deterrence and Escalation in Competition with Russia.”

“There are many reasons why the concept is attractive in theory

and from a fiscal perspective,” the report stated. “Nonetheless, our research suggests that there are inherent escalatory risks in relying on military exercises and similar activities to establish deterrence.”

Rand reached its conclusions by examining trends from various proxy wars and Russian military escalations, dating from the 1940s up through the current situation in Ukraine.

U.S. Army Europe and Africa commissioned the study, which comes as tensions with Russia soar over its military buildup near Ukraine, stoking fears of a new invasion.

The Kremlin buildup could in turn have wider ramifications for how American forces will be positioned along NATO’s eastern flank.

President Joe Biden said last week that in the event of a Russian attack on Ukraine, the United States is prepared to reinforce allied countries in the vicinity of

Russia, such as Poland and the three Baltic states of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania.

For the U.S. military in Europe, the previous eight years have been focused on deterring Russia from military action on the Continent.

Much of that effort has centered on building up a military force that by 2014, the year of Moscow’s initial invasion of Ukraine, was a shell of its former self after years of troop reduction.

Thus far, the emphasis has been on ramping up troop rotations and, more recently, on sending in forces on rapid mobilizations as part of the Dynamic Force Employment concept.

When it comes to deterring Russian aggression, however, unpredictable troop movements could end up being counterproductive, Rand found.

“A persistent, predictable U.S. forward posture is associated with lower levels of malign activity in the competition space, while

sharp, unpredictable discontinuities are associated with much more-escalatory outcomes,” Rand said.

Where the U.S. positions troops also matters when it comes to striking a balance between deterrence and escalation with Russia, the study found.

Putting troops near but not inside vulnerable countries, such as the Baltic states, was associated with more effective deterrence, the study found.

“Forces stationed in vulnerable countries can make the host countries targets for a variety of hostile measures, from military intimidation (with the ever-present risk of inadvertent escalation) to subtler forms of aggression that are intended to impose costs on or weaken the will of host countries,” the report said.

“Forces positioned in less-vulnerable countries pose fewer threats to the host country but could still be repositioned quickly as needed.”

## USS Fitzgerald visits former homeport in Japan

By ALEX WILSON  
*Stars and Stripes*

YOKOSUKA NAVAL BASE, Japan — The USS Fitzgerald steamed into Tokyo Bay on Friday, the guided-missile destroyer’s first visit to its former homeport since departing more than four years ago heavily damaged from a collision that killed seven sailors.

The Fitzgerald’s return to Yokosuka is for a routine port visit, Task Force 71 spokesman Lt. Cmdr. Joe Keiley told Stars and Stripes in an email Friday.

He declined to comment on the ship’s length of stay due to operational security, but said its crew would be able to use on-base facilities in accordance with COVID-19 mitigation procedures set by U.S. Forces Japan.

The Fitzgerald departed Naval Base San Diego, where it’s been homeported since 2020,

on Jan. 3 as part of the aircraft carrier USS Abraham Lincoln’s strike group, according to the Navy. The group has since been operating in the Western Pacific.

On June 17, 2017, the Fitzgerald was sailing off the coast of Japan, approximately 64 miles southwest of Yokosuka, when it collided with the Philippine-flagged cargo ship ACX Crystal.

The accident caused significant damage to the destroyer’s superstructure and hull. A large puncture below the waterline flooded three compartments, and the captain’s cabin was destroyed.

A Navy investigation into the collision cited crew exhaustion, skipped certifications, poor watch-standing and training and manning problems among the causes of the collision, which the report found was preventable.

Navy officials ultimately relieved the ship’s two senior officers and a senior enlisted sailor, while also holding numerous officers and enlisted watch-standers accountable for the accident.

In the days following its collision, the Fitzgerald was moved into a Yokosuka dry dock to evaluate the damage.

In November 2017, tugboats took the ship to deep water and linked it with the heavy-lift vessel MV Transshelf for transport back to the United States. The Fitzgerald was further damaged, however, when its hull was punctured by the Transshelf’s steel support structure.

The Fitzgerald finally departed Yokosuka aboard the Transshelf on Dec. 9, 2017, and was taken to a shipyard in Pascagoula, Miss., for \$523 million in repairs and upgrades.

# Fertilizer, drugs seized in Mideast waters

*Associated Press*

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates — The U.S. Navy announced Sunday that it seized a boat in the Gulf of Oman carrying fertilizer used to make explosives that was caught last year smuggling weapons to Yemen. The British royal navy said it confiscated 2,295 pounds of illegal drugs in the same waters.

The interdictions were just the latest in the volatile waters of the Persian Gulf as American and British authorities step up seizures of contraband during the grinding conflict in Yemen and ongoing drug trafficking in the region.

The U.S. Navy's Mideast-based 5th Fleet said its guided-missile destroyer USS Cole and patrol ships halted and searched the

sailboat, a stateless fishing dhow, that was sailing from Iran on a well-worn maritime arms smuggling route to war-ravaged Yemen last Tuesday. U.S. forces found 40 tons of urea fertilizer, known to be a key ingredient in homemade improvised explosive devices, hidden on board.

Authorities said the vessel had been previously seized off the coast of Somalia and found last year to be loaded with thousands of assault rifles and rocket launchers, among other weapons. U.N. experts have said weapons with such technical characteristics likely come from Iran to support the Houthi rebels. The Navy turned over the vessel, cargo and Yemeni crew to Yemen's coast guard last week.

Officials also revealed Sunday that a British royal navy vessel had seized a large quantity of illegal drugs valued at some \$26 million from a boat sailing through the Gulf of Oman on Jan. 15.

The HMS Montrose confiscated 1,461 pounds of heroin, 191 pounds of methamphetamine and 641 pounds of hashish and marijuana, the joint maritime task force said in a statement.

The task force did not elaborate on where the drugs came from, who manufactured them or their ultimate destination. But Iran over the last decade has seen an explosion in the use of methamphetamine, known locally as "shisheh" or "glass" in Farsi, which has bled into neighboring countries.

## Navy, Coast Guard grabbed suspected drugs in Caribbean

*Stars and Stripes*

The U.S. Coast Guard and Navy seized what they suspect is cocaine worth an estimated \$22 million during a recent interdiction in the Caribbean Sea.

The littoral combat ship USS Milwaukee was involved in the Jan. 7 confiscation, which totaled roughly 700 pounds, U.S. 4th Fleet announced in a statement.

"It is a good feeling knowing that a large number of drugs will not make it onto the streets of America or our partners in the Caribbean," Cmdr. Brian Forster, the Milwaukee's commanding officer, said in the statement Wednesday.

The operation began when a patrol plane spotted a suspected drug smuggling boat, and the Milwaukee was directed to intercept. The ship deployed its MH-60S Sea Hawk helicopter and a rigid-hull inflatable boat, according to the statement.

The Coast Guard detachment saw packages being thrown into the water and then gained control of the boat. Coast Guard personnel recovered the packages from the water and five people were detained, the statement said.

The Milwaukee had deployed to the 4th Fleet's area of operations to support Joint Interagency Task Force South's mission, which includes interruption of drug trafficking in the Caribbean and eastern Pacific Ocean.

## Army breaks ground for high-tech hangar at historic Wheeler Airfield

By **WYATT OLSON**

*Stars and Stripes*

WHEELER ARMY AIRFIELD, Hawaii — Next month, this airfield in central Oahu turns 100, and its hangars still used by Army aviators are almost as old.

That is set to change in coming years with the Thursday groundbreaking for an \$80-million maintenance hangar that the Army said will feature 21st-century technology, high-speed virtual connectivity and ample space for work and training. Construction of the hangar is expected to take three years, and it is one of three slated to be built in phases.

"The aviation maintenance hangar we break ground on today serves as the cornerstone for the future home of the 25th Combat Aviation Brigade and eventually replacing the 90-year-old historic hangars along the southern boundary of the airfield," Col. Daniel Misigoy, commander of Army Garrison Hawaii, said during a brief ceremony on an open field that will eventually hold an entire support complex.

Misigoy underscored how dated the existing hangars are while talking to reporters after the ceremony.

"The hangar," Misigoy said as he turned and motioned across an open field abuzz with earthmovers, "well, we can't see it from here, but Amelia Earhart parked her airplane there."

It was in 1935 that the famed aviator flew

from Wheeler to California, piloting the first solo flight made from Hawaii to the West Coast.

"So what this will give us is a space to do maintenance inside specifically for the new helicopters that we will get or the vertical lift aircraft," he said. "It'll co-locate the unit together and provide a place for soldiers to do training as well as maintenance on the aircraft."

The structure will include a six-bay hangar, maintenance shops, administrative space and storage for parts, ground-support equipment and hazardous materials.

The maintenance hangar was fully designed by the Honolulu District of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Lt. Col. Eric Marshall, the district's commander, said during the ceremony. The construction contract was awarded to Hensel Phelps, a Colorado-based firm that maintains a district headquarters in Honolulu.

The airfield was called Wheeler Air Force Base during the Dec. 7, 1941, surprise attack on Oahu, and the Army Air Corps aircraft on it were a primary target. Japanese warplanes destroyed 83 planes, killing 33 personnel and wounding 75 more.

The airfield has been designated a National Historic Landmark for its role in the attack that led to America's entry into World War II. Scars remain on hangars that still stand from that day.

# Complex vaccine logistics prolonging the pandemic

*Bloomberg*

After losing her son to COVID-19 last year, 79-year-old Tomasa Valdez was desperate to get vaccinated. But on the remote Philippine island of San Salvador, where she lives, there were no shots to be had.

Getting to the mainland, where vaccines were available, meant a boat ride that was arduous at her age and expensive given Valdez's meager income from drying sea grass which she sells for less than \$1.95 a sack. Help only arrived in December 2021 — 10 months after the Philippines began its national COVID vaccination program and about a year after Western nations like the United States and United Kingdom started theirs.

Even then, health workers had to travel via a wooden motorized boat, ferrying heavy vaccine storage equipment across the choppy South China Sea.

"Vaccines really have to be brought closer to the people, not the other way around," said Noel Bueno, the doctor who inoculated Valdez.

While lack of supply was the biggest threat initially to the vaccination programs of developing nations, now it's logistics.

Places like the Philippines are now struggling to get shots into the arms of their citizens, millions of whom live on distant archipelagos or far-flung mountain tops, under-

served by roads, transport and basic infrastructure. Developed countries are getting to the point where they are choosing to live with COVID and treat it as endemic, their hospital systems insulated by higher vaccination rates. But logistical issues continue to bedevil the rollouts of poorer countries, becoming one of the world's biggest public health challenges as the pandemic enters into its third year.

The Philippines has one of Asia's lowest vaccination rates, with only about half of its population receiving two shots, according to the Bloomberg Vaccine Tracker. Its limited and costly testing apparatus, fragmented tracing program and fragile health system have made it hard to stamp out outbreaks despite several economically devastating lockdowns. In recent days, the country has posted record daily case increases, potentially due to the spread of the ultra-contagious omicron strain.

The hurdles that developing nations face in widening the reach of their inoculation programs — which can extend beyond logistics to issues of vaccine hesitancy and social media rumors — are likely to stymie global efforts to contain the virus. New strains can proliferate in under-vaccinated populations and lengthen the pandemic as the emergence and spread of the delta and omicron variants in India and Africa have shown.

# USFJ extends order to isolate through Jan. 31

**By JOSEPH DITZLER**

*Stars and Stripes*

TOKYO — The U.S. military authority in Japan has extended a stay-at-home order until Jan. 31 for its service members, civilian employees and their families as COVID-19 continues to spread quickly throughout the nation.

"This decision was made out of an abundance of caution to protect all personnel from rapid spread of COVID-19 in local communities," U.S. Forces Japan announced on its website Friday. The original two-week order was scheduled to expire Monday.

Omicron, while creating milder symptoms and fewer hospitalizations than previous variants, continues to infect record numbers of people in Japan. But case counts within the U.S. military are flattening and, at many U.S. bases, numbers are falling, according to USFJ.

"The stringent COVID-19 mitigations implemented in December have effectively stalled the spread of the virus on U.S. installations," said Friday's statement.

Under the stay-at-home order, U.S. personnel are prohibited from most non-duty travel beyond the gates of their installations or outside their homes if they live off base. Essential services, such as grocery shopping, religious services, medical or veterinary appointments, school and auto repairs, for example, are permitted. Personnel living in Japanese communities are also permitted to run or bicycle as exercise.

The order includes a 10 p.m. to 6 a.m. off-base curfew that was imposed as a separate measure.

The original order followed discussions between the U.S. secretaries of state and defense and their Japanese counterparts after Americans returning to Japan after the holidays brought new COVID-19 cases with them.

Also Friday, USFJ reported another 550 new cases of the coronavirus respiratory disease at 18 U.S. installations throughout Japan. Another 17 cases were pending confirmation.

No one within the U.S. military population is hospitalized or considered seriously ill, according to USFJ.

"This variant prefers the upper respiratory tract and thankfully not the lungs," Dr. David Leary, an Air Force lieutenant colonel and public health emergency officer at Yokota, said Friday on AFN Radio.

# Overseas military personnel now eligible for COVID-19 testing kits

**By ALEX WILSON**

*Stars and Stripes*

YOKOSUKA NAVAL BASE, Japan — Military and diplomatic personnel stationed overseas are eligible for free, at-home COVID-19 testing kits the Biden administration began offering every U.S. household on Wednesday.

The administration is purchasing 1 billion of the rapid tests, and the first 500 million are now available for free online at COVIDtests.gov. Every home in the United States can order a set of four free tests that usually ships within seven to 12 days, according to the website.

Households with a registered APO, FPO

or DPO overseas address are also eligible. Sporadic reports surfaced Wednesday, however, of problems ordering the kits using an overseas internet connection. Those issues appeared to be resolved by Friday.

After the website launched on Wednesday, Stars and Stripes reporters attempted to order tests for APO and FPO addresses at Yokota Air Base and Yokosuka Naval Base in Japan. But the website returned an error message while attempting to connect to the order page.

The Yokosuka order went through, however, using a virtual private network, or VPN, to connect to the website.



# Filers face overloaded IRS this tax season

*Associated Press*

WASHINGTON — Count 30-year-old Ethan Miller among that subset of Americans who are actually eager to file their taxes once income tax filing season opens on Monday.

The financial planner who lives in Silver Spring, Md., is looking forward to claiming the new deductions that will come from buying a home. He also wants to get a jump on a tax season that promises to bring lots of extra headaches and delays for filers this year.

“I’m trying to get a head start on my taxes as much as possible,” Miller said, adding that he is not too nervous about forecasts of extra delays because he will file online and will not be waiting for too

big a refund.

Plenty of other filers, though, may be in for more heartburn.

An IRS worker shortage, an enormous workload from administering pandemic-related programs and stalled legislation that would have given the agency billions of dollars for more expeditiously processing returns will combine to cause taxpayers pain this filing season.

Agency officials are already warning filers that “in many areas, we are unable to deliver the amount of service and enforcement that our taxpayers and tax system deserves and needs,” as IRS Commissioner Chuck Rettig put it earlier in the month.

Delays in processing are to be

expected — especially because the IRS said it still is working through 2020 tax returns.

There will be plenty of new issues to navigate this year.

For example, individuals who are eligible to claim the child tax credit and have gotten advance payments throughout the year may get a smaller refund than they normally would see.

People who did not get stimulus checks that they were qualified for as part of the pandemic relief package might yet be able to claim a “recovery rebate credit” on their taxes.

The IRS anticipates that most taxpayers will receive their refund within 21 days of when they file electronically, barring any is-

issues with processing their return.

But plenty of pitfalls remain, in part due to staffing troubles.

Tony Reardon, president of the National Treasury Employees Union that represents IRS workers, said the agency “has a hard time recruiting because they’re up against Burger King or McDonald’s,” which offer similar pay without requiring workers to “deal with confusing rules and regulations.”

As of Thursday, the agency’s careers website listed at least 180 open jobs, including clerks and tax examiners paid as little as \$11 an hour. Of those, 42 positions were open to the public; most were available only to internal applicants.

## Burkina Faso troops act out, sparking coup fears

*Associated Press*

OUAGADOUGOU, Burkina Faso — Mutinous soldiers seized control of a military base in Burkina Faso’s capital Sunday, raising fears of a coup attempt in the West African nation as gunfire rang out for hours amid growing frustration with the government’s handling of the Islamic insurgency.

The apparent mutiny came one day after the latest public demonstration calling for President Roch Marc Christian Kaboré’s resignation. On Sunday, security forces used tear gas to disperse crowds seeking to publicly support the mutineers and crowds vandalized a building occupied by the president’s political party.

Defense Minister Aime Barthélemy Simpore told state broadcaster RTB that a few barracks had been affected by unrest not only in the capital of Ouagadougou but in “some cities” elsewhere too. He denied, however, that the president had been detained by the mutineers.

“Well, it’s a few barracks. There are not too many,” Sim-

pore said. “In some of these barracks, the calm has already returned.”

A news headline on the state broadcaster described the gunfire as “acts of discontent by soldiers.”

At the Lamizana Sangoule military barracks in the capital, angry soldiers shot into the air Sunday, directing their anger over army casualties at the president. About 100 motorcycles later left the base, chanting in support of the mutineers, but were stopped when security forces deployed tear gas.

The soldiers put a man on the phone with The Associated Press who said that they were seeking better working conditions for Burkina Faso’s military amid the escalating fight against Islamic militants.

Among their demands are increased manpower in the battle against extremists and better care for those wounded and the families of the dead. The mutinous soldiers also want the military and intelligence hierarchy replaced, he said.

## Daniels and Avenatti, once allies, set to clash at trial

*Associated Press*

NEW YORK — Stormy Daniels, the porn star who catapulted herself and Michael Avenatti to fame with lawsuits against former President Donald Trump, will have a starring role in court beginning Monday when prosecutors try to prove that the California lawyer cheated her of \$300,000 in book proceeds.

Her testimony in Manhattan federal court will be pivotal for prosecutors trying to prove Avenatti engaged in wire fraud and aggravated identity theft to keep from giving his client money he had received from her publisher. Opening statements are set for Monday. Daniels is not expected to testify until Tuesday, at the earliest.

Avenatti, 50, has pleaded not guilty to the charges in what will be his third criminal trial in two years.

In early 2020, he was convicted of trying to extort up to \$25 million from Nike by threatening to tarnish the sportswear giant’s reputation unless it met his demands. He has not yet begun

servicing a 2½-year prison sentence. Last year, a mistrial resulted in California on charges that he cheated clients there. He awaits retrial.

The attorney-client relationship between Daniels and Avenatti seemed strong in the spring of 2018 when the pair showed up together at a Manhattan court hearing pertaining to raids on the home and office of Michael Cohen, Trump’s longtime personal attorney.

Cohen had played a role in a \$130,000 hush-money payment to Daniels to buy her silence 11 days before the 2016 presidential election. He eventually pleaded guilty to charges and served a year behind bars before finishing his three-year prison term at home.

With Avenatti’s help, Daniels sued Trump to try to win back her freedom to speak openly about what she contended was a brief affair with Trump a decade earlier. As a result of the litigation in 2018, a Los Angeles judge ordered Trump to pay Daniels \$44,100 in legal fees. Trump has denied the sexual encounter.

**AMERICAN ROUNDUP**

**Mix-up leads to switched verdict in murder trial**

**IL** PEORIA — A jury’s paperwork mix-up resulted in a central Illinois judge announcing a not guilty verdict in a murder trial, only to inform the defendant minutes later that he had in fact been convicted.

Micha Gordon and his attorney hugged after Peoria County Circuit Judge John Vespa spoke the words “not guilty” in announcing the jury’s apparent verdict on a first-degree murder charge.

It turned out the panel of 12 jurors had filled out the wrong form, and after about five minutes, Vespa read a new verdict: guilty, the (Peoria) Journal Star reported.

Gordon, 55, now faces at least 20 and possibly up to 60 years in prison when he is sentenced March 24 in the August 2021 stabbing death of Rolando Westbrook, 37.

**Black man arrested as a white felon sues police**

**NV** LAS VEGAS — A 25-year-old Black man is suing two police agencies in Nevada after he was misidentified as a white ex-felon nearly twice his age, arrested, and held for six days in jails in two Las Vegas-area jurisdictions.

Shane Lee Brown claims civil rights violations, false imprisonment, negligence and other wrongful conduct by Las Vegas and Henderson police and their top officials and seeks at least \$50,000 in damages.

The civil lawsuit describes Shane Neal Brown, now 51, as a white man with a bushy white beard who is taller than Shane

Lee Brown. Police later learned that Shane Neal Brown was in jail in San Bernardino County, Calif.

Shane Lee Brown was arrested in January 2020 during a traffic stop by Henderson police, jailed in that city’s lockup and transferred in custody two days later to Las Vegas police. He remained jailed in Las Vegas until he appeared before a judge who ordered him freed.

**Cops: McDonald’s worker shot over discount**

**MO** ST. LOUIS — A St. Louis woman was jailed after she shot a worker at McDonald’s after a dispute over a discount for french fries, St. Louis County authorities said.

Terika Clay, 30, was charged with first-degree assault and armed criminal action.

Clay was in a drive-through at a McDonald’s in the St. Louis suburb of Normandy when she argued with an employee over not getting a discount on her fries, according to a statement from a Normandy detective.

The argument continued when the employee went outside for a smoke break, and Clay struck the employee with her gun and shot her, police said.

**Man gets prison time for Yellowstone rampage**

**WY** CHEYENNE — A judge sentenced a California man to nine months in prison for a drunken rampage in Yellowstone National Park in which he did thousands of dollars in damage to a hotel and struggled with rangers trying to subdue him.

U.S. Magistrate Judge Mark L. Carman also ordered Benja-

min J. Bagala, 27, of Santa Rosa, Calif., to stay out of Yellowstone and not use alcohol for a year after his time in prison.

Bagala pleaded guilty in December to three counts of assaulting, resisting or impeding law enforcement officers and one count of damaging federal property.

**State mulls bill to allow recreational weed delivery**

**ME** AUGUSTA — Maine is considering a bill that would allow recreational marijuana stores to deliver to residents across the state even if a town prohibits recreational marijuana stores.

A legislative committee heard from the bill’s supporters and sponsor, Democratic Rep. Joe Perry, The Portland Press Herald reported.

Perry said that since a majority of Maine towns have not opted into the state’s recreational program, the bill would make marijuana accessible, which would keep people from buying from the illegal market.

Maine legalized recreational marijuana in 2016, but in 2018 lawmakers banned selling recreational marijuana through online sales platforms or delivery services.

**Officials: Teen shot mom over meth dispute**

**MN** COOK — A 16-year-old girl was charged with attempting to kill her mother because she took methamphetamine away from her daughter, according to prosecutors in St. Louis County.

The teen was charged in juvenile court with attempted murder. The 40-year-old mother

was shot and wounded.

Authorities received a call about a woman who was being taken to the hospital in Cook with a possible gunshot wound. They were told that the suspected shooter was a juvenile family member who was last seen at the residence where the shooting occurred.

Deputies found the teen’s car stuck in a ditch about two miles from the crime scene. Three people were in another vehicle nearby. Two were identified as good Samaritans, while the third was identified as the suspect, officials said.

**Man sentenced for stealing vet benefits**

**FL** FORT LAUDERDALE — A Georgia man convicted of participating in a scheme in Florida to steal more than \$1.8 million in veteran and Social Security benefits was sentenced to six years and six months in prison.

Jamare Mason, 27, was sentenced in Fort Lauderdale federal court, according to court records. He pleaded guilty in November to conspiring to commit bank and wire fraud. He was also ordered to pay more than \$1.3 million in restitution. Four others have been convicted in the conspiracy.

From 2012 to 2017, Mason and others attempted to redirect benefits from more than 100 disabled veterans and Social Security beneficiaries, officials said. They said the scheme resulted in the actual loss of nearly \$1 million, though the federal government reimbursed the victims for the full amounts of their stolen benefits.

— From wire reports



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# Gould's last-second kick lifts 49ers past Packers

*Associated Press*

GREEN BAY, Wis. — Robbie Gould lived up to his name.

On a field littered with snow flurries, Gould made a 45-yard field goal Saturday night as time expired and the San Francisco 49ers knocked off the top-seeded Packers 13-10 and possibly ended Aaron Rodgers' tenure in Green Bay.

Gould has made all 20 of his career playoff field-goal attempts. His latest helped the 49ers complete an improbable comeback by scoring 10 unanswered points in the last five minutes.

"I always trust Robbie. He's as good as gold, man," Niners quarterback Jimmy Garoppolo said. "He always is."

The 49ers (12-7) continued their postseason hex on Rodgers and advanced to the franchise's 17th conference championship, most by any team since conferences were formed in the 1970 merger. San Francisco's win, coupled with the Cincinnati Bengals' 19-16 victory over the Tennessee Titans earlier in the day, marked the first time both No. 1 seeds lost in the divisional round in the same season since 2010. The Packers won at Atlanta and

the New York Jets won at New England that season.

"It's dangerous, man. When a team gets hot, it's dangerous," Garoppolo added. "So we've just got to keep this thing going, focus on next week now, and keep this thing rolling."

Rodgers went 20-for-29 for 225 yards and dropped to 0-4 in career playoff starts against the 49ers. He's the first quarterback in NFL history to lose four playoff starts to a single opponent. Green Bay (13-5) earned the NFC's top seed for a second straight season and was the league's only unbeaten team at home, but again failed to reach the big game. It hasn't made it to the Super Bowl since its 2010 championship season.

"I just didn't envision it like this," said the Packers' Aaron Jones, who had nine catches for 129 yards and 12 carries for 41 yards.

San Francisco tied the game with 4:41 left thanks to a breakdown by Green Bay's special teams, the Packers' biggest weakness all season.

Jordan Willis' outstretched left hand blocked a punt by Corey Bojorquez, who was kicking from the front of his end zone. Tala'noa Hufanga picked up the ball at the 6-yard line and ran it in to make it 10-10.

# McPherson's last-moment FG carries Bengals past Titans

*Associated Press*

NASHVILLE, Tenn. — Maybe, just maybe, these young Cincinnati Bengals really are that good.

Especially with the way they keep ending postseason droughts. And with their latest victory putting them in the franchise's first AFC championship game in 33 years — and a win away from the Super Bowl.

Rookie Evan McPherson kicked a 52-yard field goal as time expired, lifting fourth-seeded Cincinnati past the top-seeded Tennessee Titans 19-16 on Saturday to end the NFL's longest active road playoff skid.

"He's got ice in his veins," Bengals coach Zac Taylor said of McPherson. "There's not much more to be said. He's just as cool as it gets."

A week after snapping a 31-year playoff

victory drought, Cincinnati (12-7) finally won its first road game in the postseason after losing their first seven. They reached the 1981 and 1988 Super Bowls by winning on their home field.

"We're here to make some noise, and teams are going to have to pay attention to us," Bengals quarterback Joe Burrow said.

Cincinnati will play in the AFC championship game next Sunday at the winner of the Buffalo-Kansas City matchup. They play in the other AFC divisional round game Sunday.

The Bengals intercepted Ryan Tannehill three times, setting up two of McPherson's four field goals. Logan Wilson picked off Tannehill with 20 seconds left. Burrow hit Pro Bowl rookie receiver Ja'Marr Chase with a 19-yard pass, then Cincinnati ran twice to set up McPherson for the win.

# Nadal advances to quarterfinals for 14th time in Australian Open

*Associated Press*

MELBOURNE, Australia — Rafael Nadal finally got the better of a crazy, long tiebreaker and knew he'd won half the battle.

After saving four set points and missing with the first six of his own, Nadal finally clinched a tiebreaker that lasted 28 minutes and 40 seconds to set himself on course to secure a spot in the Australian Open quarterfinals for a 14th time.

After his 7-6 (14), 6-2, 6-2 fourth-round victory over fellow left-hander Adrian Mannarino on Sunday, Nadal is potentially just three wins away from a men's record 21st Grand Slam singles title.

He later reflected on a tiebreaker where momentum swung wildly; where chants of "Let's go Rafa, Let's go!" rang out; where a point was decided on a 25-shot rally with both players scrambling at full stretch; and that ended only when Nadal volleyed from deep in the court and Mannarino's reflex reply skewed wide.

"Well, you know, I played a couple," he said, smiling, in reference to long tiebreakers. "But, yeah, (it was) a crazy one, chances for both. And, yeah, lucky to win that tiebreak at the end, no?"

"Half of the match in the tiebreak, without a doubt."

Nadal will next play Denis Shapovalov, the 22-year-old Canadian who finished off a 6-3, 7-6 (5), 6-3 win over Olympic gold medalist Alexander Zverev on Margaret Court Arena less than an hour later to reach the last eight in Australia for the first time.

Shapovalov had to isolate after testing positive for COVID-19 when he arrived in Australia ahead of the year's first major, but recovered quickly to help Canada win the ATP Cup in Sydney and now is in a Grand Slam quarterfinal for the third time.

Women's No. 1 Ash Barty advanced to the quarterfinals for the fourth straight year when she beat 20-year-old American Amanda Anisimova 6-4, 6-3.

Barty is aiming to be the first Australian woman to win her home Grand Slam title since 1978 and has gone through the first four rounds without dropping a set.

Anisimova, coming off a third-round upset over defending champion Naomi Osaka, broke Barty's opening service game of the second set — a first for the tournament — but the two-time major winner responded by taking six of the last seven games.



# Kessler drives No. 2 Auburn to win over No. 12 Kentucky

Associated Press

AUBURN, Ala. — Walker Kessler scored 19 points and K.D. Johnson added 17, helping No. 2 Auburn keep its hot streak alive with an 80-71 victory over No. 12 Kentucky on Saturday.

The Tigers (18-1, 7-0 Southeastern Conference) rallied from a 10-point deficit to win their 15th straight in likely the biggest home game since Auburn Arena opened in 2010. It was big enough that the traditional football school had students set up tents Friday morning, camping out to make sure they got in.

The Tigers, who have matched the highest ranking in program history, made it worth the wait. Fans chanted No. 1 in the final moments, hoping to supplant Gonzaga.

The Wildcats' No. 2 scorer, TyTy Washington, only played eight minutes and scored four points before being helped off the court with a left ankle injury. He didn't return.

**No. 5 Baylor 65, Oklahoma 51:** Adam Flagler scored 16 points and the Bears won their 14th straight game away from home.

LJ Cryer added 14 points and Matthew Mayer had 12 for Baylor (17-2, 5-2 Big 12).

**No. 6 Duke 79, Syracuse 59:** AJ Griffin hit five three-pointers — the most by a Blue Devils player this season — as host Duke bolted to an early lead and never trailed.

**No. 7 Kansas 78, Kansas State 75:** Ochai Agbaji hit a baseline jumper with 9 seconds left as the Jayhawks snapped the Wildcats' two-game winning streak against ranked foes.

**No. 9 UCLA 71, Colorado 65:** Johnny Juzang scored 23 points, including a pair of

crucial free throws with 16 seconds left, and the visiting Bruins held on for a win.

**No. 10 Houston 79, East Carolina 36:** Kyler Edwards had 25 points, eight rebounds and seven assists as the host Cougars won their ninth game in a row and 36th straight at home.

**No. 11 Villanova 85, Georgetown 74:** Collin Gillespie scored 28 points and Justin Moore added 19 as the visiting Wildcats beat the Hoyas for the 17th time in 20 meetings.

**No. 24 Tennessee 64, No. 13 LSU 50:** Santiago Vescovi scored 16 points as the host Volunteers handed the Tigers their third straight loss.

**TCU 59, No. 15 Iowa State 44:** Damion Baugh scored 23 points on 11-for-17 shooting as the visiting Horned Frogs held the Cyclones to their lowest point total in the 50-year history of Hilton Coliseum.

**No. 16 Southern California 79, Utah 67:** Drew Peterson scored 23 points and Boogie Ellis added 18 as the visiting Trojans (16-2) continued their hottest start since the 1970-71 season.

**No. 18 Texas Tech 78, West Virginia 65:** Terrence Shannon scored a season-high 23 points with a go-ahead three-point play as the Red Raiders remained undefeated in 12 games at home.

**Missouri State 79, No. 22 Loyola Chicago 69:** Isaiah Mosley scored 40 points on 14-for-22 shooting as the Bears ended the Ramblers' 30-game home winning streak.

**No. 23 Texas 56, Oklahoma State 51:** Marcus Carr scored 14 points and made two free throws with five seconds remaining as the host Longhorns snapped a two-game losing streak.

# Middleton leads Bucks by Kings minus Giannis

Associated Press

MILWAUKEE — Khris Middleton scored 34 points and Jrue Holiday added 26 to lead the Milwaukee Bucks to a 133-127 victory over the Sacramento Kings on Saturday night, making up for the absence of Giannis Antetokounmpo.

The two-time MVP sat out with right knee soreness one night after scoring 30 points in a defensive struggle against Chicago. The defending NBA champions (30-19) won their third straight game and second in two nights.

Middleton sank a clutch three-pointer with 1:09 left after the Kings (18-30), who trailed by as many as 15, rallied within three points. After Harrison Barnes converted a layup for the Kings, Holiday threw down a left-handed dunk to give the Bucks a 126-120 lead with 47.6 seconds remaining.

Donte DiVincenzo added 20 points for Milwaukee, which made 21 of 42 three-point attempts one night after shooting 19.4% from behind the arc.

Barnes paced Sacramento with 29 points. **Suns 113, Pacers 103:** Mikal Bridges tied a season high with 23 points, Bismack Biyombo matched his career best with 21 and host Phoenix won its sixth straight game by beating Indiana.

Biyombo also grabbed 13 rebounds as the Suns improved their NBA-best record to 36-9, shaking off a tough night for leading scorer Devin Booker. He had just 11 points on 5-for-23 shooting, including 0-for-6 from three-point range.

Chris Paul added 18 points and 16 assists to help Phoenix equal its best start through 45 games.

The short-handed Pacers were coming off impressive back-to-back wins against the Lakers and Warriors but couldn't keep the momentum going. Chris Duarte and Lance Stephenson both scored 17 points.

**Cavaliers 94, Thunder 87:** Darius Garland had 23 points and 11 assists, and rookie Evan Mobley added 15 points and a season-high 17 rebounds to lift host Cleveland over Oklahoma City.

Jarrett Allen added 14 points and 13 rebounds for the Cavaliers, who have won six of seven.

Shai Gilgeous-Alexander paced the Thunder across the board with 29 points, nine rebounds and six assists. Kenrich Williams scored 12 points and Luguentz Dort had 10 before being ejected for elbowing Kevin Love in the head.

# Mann leads Army over Navy in OT

Associated Press

ANNAPOLIS, Md. — Chris Mann had a career-high 20 points as Army narrowly defeated Navy 74-73 in overtime on Saturday.

There were five lead changes in overtime, with Army scoring the final four points on two free throws by Mann and a layup by Jalen Rucker.

Army overcame a 22-point halftime deficit to take a 65-63 lead with 48 seconds left when Rucker hit a pair of free throws. Na-

vy's Greg Summers made a layup with 26 seconds left to tie it and send the game to overtime.

**Colorado State 73, Air Force 53:** David Roddy registered 14 points and nine rebounds as the host Rams routed the Falcons.

Jake Heidbreder had 16 points for Air Force (9-8, 2-4). A.J. Walker added 13 points. Ethan Taylor had 10 points and six rebounds.

# Capitals rally past Senators in OT

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Alex Ovechkin scored his 28th and 29th goals of the season in the third period, Nicklas Backstrom pounced on a turnover to get the winner 1:13 into overtime and the Washington Capitals rallied for a 3-2 victory over the Ottawa Senators on Saturday night.

Backstrom also assisted on Ovechkin's second goal, which tied Chris Kreider of the New York Rangers for the NHL lead.

Backstrom then took the puck off a Senators defender deep in Ottawa's zone and beat goaltender Matt Murray with a breakaway backhand to give the Caps just their third win in nine games.

"This month hasn't gone our way, and that's OK," said Washington coach Peter Laviolette, whose team remains fourth in a tight race atop the Metropolitan Division.

"It's OK to grind and embrace that a little bit, that you have to work for something or you have to dig out of a hole as a group. And you've got to figure out how to do it. There's nothing wrong with that. And tonight was a perfect example, right?"

**Sabres 6, Flyers 3:** Jeff Skinner, Tage Thompson and Peyton Krebs each scored twice, and host Buffalo handed Philadelphia its 11th consecutive loss.

The Flyers' skid (0-8-3) matches the Arizona Coyotes and New York Islanders for the longest in the NHL this season. It is one short of the franchise record of 12 straight losses set in 1999.

**Avalanche 3, Canadiens 2 (OT):** Gabriel Landeskog scored 1:16 into overtime and Colorado won its 15th straight at home.

The Avalanche, who have won six in a row overall, became the first NHL team to win 15 consecutive home games since the Washington Capitals did it Jan. 1 to March 4, 2017.

**Bruins 3, Jets 2:** David Pastrnak scored a tiebreaking power-play goal early in the third period to lead surging host Boston.

Charlie Coyle and Oskar Steen also scored for the Bruins, who are 10-2 since New Year's Day.

**Maple Leafs 3, Islanders 1:** Morgan Rielly had a goal and an assist, Petr Mrazek stopped 25 shots and visiting Toronto beat New York.

Mitch Marner and Pierre Engvall also scored as the Maple Leafs finished a six-game road trip at 3-2-1.

**Rangers 7, Coyotes 3:** Chris Kreider had a hat trick to set his career high with 29 goals, tying for the NHL lead, and host New York scored six unanswered to get its eighth win in 11 games.

**Devils 7, Hurricanes 4:** Jesper Bratt scored the tiebreaking goal late in the second period and host New Jersey rallied to beat Carolina.

Nathan Bastian scored twice and Andreas Johnsson had a goal and two assists for the Devils, who snapped a three-game skid. Ryan Graves had three assists and Dawson Mercer added two.

**Predators 4, Red Wings 1:** Matt Duchene had two goals and an assist to lead host Nashville.

**Wild 4, Blackhawks 3:** Marcus Foligno scored at 4:22 of overtime to lift host Minnesota.

The Wild twice trailed in the third period but got goals from Kirill Kaprizov and Kevin Fiala to force overtime.

Henrik Borgstrom scored twice for Chicago.

**Oilers 5, Flames 3:** Leon Draisaitl had two goals and two assists, Evan Bouchard also scored twice and host Edmonton came from behind to snap a seven-game losing streak.

**Lightning 7, Sharks 1:** Ross Colton scored twice and visiting Tampa Bay routed San Jose. Alex Killorn and Steven Stamkos each had a goal and an assist for the Lightning, who have won seven of nine.

# Ngannou keeps belt, Figueiredo reclaims title

Associated Press

ANAHEIM, Calif. — Francis Ngannou retained his UFC heavyweight title with a surprising display of superior grappling in a unanimous-decision victory over previously unbeaten Cyril Gane at UFC 270 on Saturday night.

Deiveson Figueiredo also beat Brandon Moreno by unanimous decision, concluding a thrilling fight trilogy by reclaiming the flyweight championship belt he lost to Moreno seven months ago.

Ngannou (17-3) defended his heavyweight belt for the first time with impressive perseverance against Gane (10-1), his fellow French citizen. The champ also did it on an injured knee, and he said afterward that several doctors advised him to pull out of the bout three weeks ago.

"I'm very happy to move on through injury and all the drama, all the talk around this fight," Ngannou said. "I'm very happy to finally get over this in the best way. ... That was the point I came here tonight to

make, to prove that I'm the champ, and what it takes to prove that is to defend the title. It feels pretty good. It's always good to have the victory. It doesn't matter how."

Both heavyweights possess incredible power and uncommonly fluid athleticism for big men, but the champion took control of a cagey fight in the third round with the first of several takedowns. Ngannou turned a matchup between fearsome strikers into a wrestling match that showcased his much-improved game on the ground.

The judges scored it 48-47, 48-47 and 49-46 for Ngannou, who had never won a decision in his mixed martial arts career. The Associated Press also scored it 48-47 for Ngannou, the Cameroon-born French citizen who trains in Las Vegas.

Just 10 fights and 3½ years after his professional MMA debut, Gane appeared to have an edge in the first two rounds of his first title fight with superior striking with both fighters showed appropriate caution for each other's power.

Gane mixed in some spinning kicks with increasing confidence, but Ngannou changed the tone of the fight early in the third when he got an arm under Gane's leg and lifted the challenger skyward, slamming him down. Gane had never been taken down in his UFC career, but Ngannou did it repeatedly in the third and fourth rounds, showing off his markedly improved wrestling and Gane's weaknesses in defense.

Ngannou landed a leg sweep in the fifth, but Gane recovered and attempted to secure a heel hook. The bid failed, and Ngannou got back on top and finished the fight strongly.

Figueiredo (21-2-1) won the penultimate bout 48-47 on all three judges' scorecards after a frenetic, physical addition to a rivalry that has featured 13 rounds of outstanding action over the last 13 months. The trilogy began with a majority draw in December 2020 and continued with Moreno's third-round stoppage victory last June in Arizona.