

NATO presence in Black Sea down since 2014

By ALISON BATH
Stars and Stripes

NAPLES, Italy — NATO activity in the Black Sea region has become less frequent since Moscow's takeover of the Crimean Peninsula nearly eight

years ago, sparking concerns that the West is falling short in checking further Russian ambitions in the strategically critical waterway.

A Stars and Stripes analysis of the data revealed that despite NATO rhetoric about a stepped-up presence in the Black Sea, the trend has gone in the opposite direction.

The U.S. Navy has shouldered most of the burden for patrolling the Black Sea. The number of days its warships spend annually in the strategic waterway mostly has fallen since 2014, when Kremlin forces seized Crimea from Ukraine.

The area could soon become a flashpoint again as Russian ships transit eastward through the Mediterranean Sea, while its forces on land surround Ukraine.

Navy patrols, military drills and port calls are critical in sending a deterrent signal to Russia, military and security experts say.

"(With) the Black Sea specifically, so much of deterrence and dealing with other nations geopolitically has do with presence," said Jim Townsend, a fellow at the Center for a New American Security in Washington and a former Defense Department undersecretary for European and NATO policy.

"If you're not there one way or another, then the assumption is you don't care about it."

U.S. ships spent about 210 collective days in the sea in 2014, a Stars and Stripes analysis of data from the Istanbul-based shipwatching website Turkishnavy.net found. Two years later, that number was about 58 days.

Stars and Stripes compared the U.S. ship data with Navy press releases and news reports, finding rare variances of a day or two.

U.S. warships had not spent more than about 126 days in the sea annually since 2016 until last year, when tensions rose along the Ukrainian-Russian border.

In 2021, about 12 Navy ships, including the U.S. 6th Fleet flagship Mount Whitney, spent some 182 collective days in the Black Sea. That's still 15% less time than they spent there seven years earlier.

The Black Sea falls under the operations area of U.S. 6th Fleet, which did not respond to a request for comment after being sent the data.

In a Nov. 25 news release announcing that the destroyer USS Arleigh Burke was entering the Black Sea, 6th Fleet said the ship's patrol would "ensure security and stability in this vital international waterway."

The Arleigh Burke spent about 21 days in the sea and made port calls in Constanta, Romania, and Varna, Bulgaria. Both countries are NATO members.

Representation from a few other NATO countries has been picked up in recent years but has been inconsistent. Alliance members Germany, Poland and Netherlands made intermittent Black Sea patrols from 2014 to 2021, the data show.

Retired Adm. James G. Foggo III, who led U.S. Naval Forces

Europe-Africa and Allied Joint Forces Command Naples from 2017-20, said that it was frustrating to see wavering allied presence in the Black Sea, "depending on what crisis or what tension is building up in any given (situation)."

The inconsistency is driven by competing security priorities among allies, a lack of available ships and resources, and the failure of NATO to devise and implement a strategy in the Black Sea, Foggo said.

The result is an emboldened Russian President Vladimir Putin, who is orchestrating a stranglehold on Ukrainian ship traffic in the adjoining Sea of Azov and harassment of NATO ships in the Black Sea, said Foggo, now dean of the Arlington, Va.-based Center for Maritime Strategy.

He and other analysts have said that regardless of the outcome of the current situation in Ukraine, the United States must take the lead in developing a NATO Black Sea strategy.

They have advocated for a nearly constant patrol presence in the sea, an increase in the number of surveillance operations and assistance to Ukraine in building up its naval capacity and capabilities.

The burden for funding and implementing a strategy should not fall primarily to the U.S., however, said James R. Holmes, a professor at the Naval War College in Newport, R.I.

"It's time for Europeans to turn those resources into diplomatic and military influence rather than continue depending on us to guarantee the region's security," Holmes said. "We need to become an alliance of equals."

In 2021, Spanish ships spent

about 92 days in the Black Sea, according to the Stars and Stripes analysis. English ships spent some 61 days, and Italian ships spent about 52 days on patrol in the sea.

Greece and France each made three Black Sea visits last year, and Germany appears to have sent none of its ships to the sea in 2021. One German warship did spend 11 days in the sea in 2020, the data show.

Increasing presence would require creative thinking, Luke Coffey and Brent Sadler wrote in a May report from the Washington D.C.-based conservative think tank The Heritage Foundation, which relied in part on the same data.

NATO and its non-Black Sea members should "invest in and help develop the maritime capabilities of the alliance's Black Sea littoral states, such as Bulgaria, Romania and Turkey, along with NATO partners Georgia and Ukraine," they wrote.

They also recommended exploring ways around various restrictions on warships in the sea.

Russia's demands that U.S. and NATO troops leave the countries that once formed the Cold War-era Warsaw Pact have several nations on the Black Sea concerned about Moscow's intentions, particularly in light of Russia's massive military buildup along Ukraine's borders.

That is why it would be a mistake ever to ignore Russia, even while much of the U.S. security establishment has focused on China in recent years, analysts said.

"We are never going to be able to just turn our back," Foggo said. "(The Russians) are always going to be there."

US: UN will press Russia on Ukraine

Associated Press

MOSCOW — The U.S. ambassador to the United Nations vowed that the U.N. Security Council will press Russia hard in a Monday session to discuss Moscow's massing of troops near Ukraine and rising fears it is planning an invasion.

"Our voices are unified in calling for the Russians to explain themselves," Ambassador Linda Thomas Greenfield said of the U.S. and the other council members on ABC's "This Week" program on Sunday. "We're going into the room prepared to listen to them, but we're not going to be distracted by their propaganda."

Russia's massing of an estimated 100,000 troops near the

border with Ukraine has brought increasingly strong warnings from the West that Moscow intends to invade. Russia in turn demands that NATO promise never to allow Ukraine to join the alliance, and to stop the deployment of NATO weapons near Russian borders and roll back its forces from Eastern Europe.

The head of Russia's Security Council, Nikolai Patrushev, on Sunday rejected Western warnings about an invasion.

"At this time, they're saying that Russia threatens Ukraine — that's completely ridiculous," he was quoted as saying by state news agency Tass. "We don't want war and we don't need it at all."

The United States and European Union countries say a Russian invasion would trigger heavy sanctions. On Sunday, the chairman of the U.S. Senate's Foreign Relations Committee raised the prospect of imposing some punishments preemptively.

"There are some sanctions that really could take place up front, because of what Russia's already done — cyberattacks on Ukraine, false-flag operations, the efforts to undermine the Ukrainian government internally," Sen. Bob Menendez said on CNN.

In the event of an invasion, Menendez said, Russia would face "the mother of all sanc-

tions," including actions against Russian banks that could severely undermine the Russian economy and increased lethal aid to Ukraine's military.

Britain's foreign secretary said Sunday the United Kingdom would "widen" its sanctions on the Kremlin to include "companies involved in propping up the Russian state," The Washington Post reported.

The comments by Foreign Secretary Liz Truss came a day after Britain said it was preparing to send extra land, air and sea forces to Eastern Europe to support NATO allies as Russia masses tens of thousands of troops on the border with Ukraine.

Air Force couple faces \$15K bill to fly Great Dane home from Japan

BY KELLY AGEE

Stars and Stripes

YOKOTA AIR BASE, Japan — Henry is 4 years old and needs a lift to New Mexico.

Henry's trouble is he's overweight — so much so that he fails to qualify for a seat on the Patriot Express, the government-contracted air service between the United States and its overseas military bases.

He's a 145-pound Great Dane whose owners, Senior Airman Avaunte Frizzell, 22, and his spouse, Josie Hayward, 21, have started a GoFundMe page to raise the \$15,000 they need to ship him back to the States. The natives of Lake George, Mich., are moving to Cannon Air Force Base in Clovis, N.M., in February.

Their campaign, 'Help ship our baby with us' had raised \$1,285 as of Friday in Japan.

"I refuse to leave him here," said Frizzell, a flight propulsion journeyman at Yokota. "We don't have any kids. He is our pride and joy. That is all we have, and we don't plan on having kids for a while. And for him, he is big enough to be two kids. It is something we refuse to do."

Their options are limited. In March 2020,

the coronavirus pandemic prompted United Airlines to suspend its PetSafe program, with the exception of a route between Guam and Honolulu, "until further notice." The program ships dogs and cats that can't safely ride in an airplane's cabin.

The Patriot Express, also called the Rotator, is the most affordable option. It charges a sliding scale based on the combined weight of the pet and its carrier. Under 70 pounds costs \$116; 71 to 140 pounds is \$232; and 141 to 150 pounds is \$348.

The combined weight of a pet and kennel cannot exceed 150 pounds, according to the Air Mobility Command website. Pets over the limit will not be accepted for shipment.

All Nippon Airways quoted the couple a budget-busting \$30,000, they said. Searching further, they found Third Side, a small pet consultation company in Japan that wants \$15,000 to ship Henry stateside. The couple has already spent \$3,000 for a custom crate, Frizzell said.

Henry is worth the expense, Frizzell and Hayward said. They adopted him two years ago from his previous owner, who planned to drop Henry off at an animal shelter.

Firm wins \$39M Navy contract for undersea cable

BY KELLY AGEE

Stars and Stripes

A Maryland-based company has been awarded a \$38.8 million Navy contract to lay and repair transoceanic cables that carry information — vital and mundane — for the Defense Department.

The Navy gave the contract to the Transoceanic Cable Ship Co. LLC of Baltimore, for work on submarine cables around the world, the Pentagon announced in a news release Jan. 18. This agreement is an option in an underlying contract with Transoceanic from 2018.

The contract may be extended up to three years and 11 months, making it worth as much as \$205 million, according to the announcement. Work is expected to be complete by Dec. 22, 2023.

Under the contract terms, Transoceanic will do the work with the cable-laying vessel CS Global Sentinel. The 31-year-old ship is the property of oceanic cable company Tyco Telecommunication of Morristown, N.J., and is based in Baltimore, according to Nauticape-dia.com.

US East Coast digs out after weekend blizzard

Associated Press

BOSTON — Gusty winds and falling temperatures plunged the East Coast into a deep freeze as people dug out after a powerful nor'easter dumped mounds of snow, flooded coastlines and knocked out power to tens of thousands.

Dangerous wind chills fell below zero in many locations across the region on Sunday after the storm dumped snow from Virginia to Maine. Philadelphia and New York had plenty of snow, but Massachusetts bore the brunt of the storm, with the town of Sharon getting more than 30 inches of snow before the storm moved out.

The wind continued raging as more than 100,000 lost power, mostly in Massachusetts, hampering crews' ability to work on overhead lines. No other states reported widespread outages.

Winds gusted as high as 83 mph on Cape Cod in Massachusetts. It scoured the ground bare in some spots and piled the snow into huge drifts in others. Coastal towns flooded,

with wind and waves battering North Weymouth, south of Boston, flooding streets with a slurry of frigid water, according to video posted on social media. Other videos showed a street underwater on Nantucket and waves crashing against the windows of a building in Plymouth.

Forecasters watched closely for new snowfall records, especially in Boston. The Boston area's modern snowfall record for a winter storm is 27.6 inches, set in 2003.

The city tied its record for biggest single-day snowfall on Saturday, with 23.6 inches, the National Weather Service said.

The storm had two saving graces: Dry snow less capable of snapping trees and tearing down power lines, and its timing on a weekend, when schools were closed and few people were commuting.

Parts of 10 states were under blizzard warnings at some point: Maine, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut, New York and New Jersey, along with much of Delaware, Maryland and Virginia.

At least 4 dead as winter storm hits Northern Europe

Associated Press

HELSINKI — A powerful winter storm swept through northern Europe over the weekend, killing at least four people, destroying houses and cars, closing bridges and causing flooding and halting transportation while leaving thousands of households without electricity.

Storm Malik was advancing in the Nordic region on Sunday, bringing strong gusts of wind and extensive rain and snowfall in Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden.

Malik reached the Nordic region and northern Germany late Saturday after moving in from Britain where it caused havoc with material damage and transportation chaos, hitting Scotland particularly bad.

In Scotland, a boy and a 60-year-old woman were killed Saturday by falling trees as strong winds battered northern parts of Britain.

Wind gusts of more than 100 mph have been reported in parts of Scotland, causing widespread disruption to transportation and power cuts to tens of thousands of homes.

In Denmark, excessively strong winds with heavy rain caused the temporary closure of several bridges on Saturday including the key Oeresund road and rail bridge connecting Copenhagen and the Swedish city of Malmö.

Danish media reported that a 78-year-old woman died from severe injuries after falling in strong winds. In neighboring Germany, local media reported that a man was killed on Saturday after being hit by a billboard that was loosened by the storm. Flooding in many parts of Denmark caused substantial material damage. Several traffic crashes caused by falling trees and flying debris were reported to police.

Southern parts of Sweden were badly hit, too, and thousands of households were without electricity by Sunday afternoon. Ferries to the Baltic Sea island of Gotland were canceled because of strong winds.

Severe damage to houses, cars and boats, among other things, were reported in Norway while heavy snowfall throughout Finland caused road crashes and disrupted bus and train traffic in parts of the country.

NTSB launches investigation of Pittsburgh bridge collapse

Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

PITTSBURGH — The National Transportation Safety Board will be at the scene of the collapsed Fern Hollow Bridge in Frick Park in Pittsburgh for a number of days as it takes a "microscope" to the situation to determine what led the structure to fall into the ravine below it Friday morning.

NTSB Chair Jennifer Homendy said during a news conference Saturday she is unsure exactly how long the NTSB will be in Pittsburgh as crews work to remove the Port Authority bus and other vehicles from the rubble and determine whether there are any other parts of the wreckage to inspect.

Homendy stressed that the cause of the collapse will not be determined while NTSB officials are on scene, and that a final report can be expected in 12 to 18 months. She said a preliminary report could be expected in the next 10 days.

While the NTSB is in Pittsburgh, crews will focus on documenting the scene of the

collapse before diving into the bridge's history of engineering, construction, maintenance and inspections when they return to their offices.

"Over the next several days, and over the next several weeks, we'll be collecting a lot of information," Homendy said.

"When you're next to the structure, and you're underneath the structure, the damage is massive," she said.

"We're really fortunate that no one died. When I look at the bus and the position of the bus and the position of the vehicles, I'm really thankful that nobody lost their life in this collapse."

Records from the inventory show that the bridge was consistently found to be in poor shape during inspections from 2011 to 2017, with estimated repairs at \$1.5 million.

Pittsburgh Mayor Ed Gainey said the bridge was last inspected in September 2021. A statewide report from last year noted the bridge was still in poor condition.

Canada officials decry protesters' tactics

Associated Press

OTTAWA, Ontario — Thousands of protesters gathered in Canada's capital on Saturday to protest vaccine mandates, masks and lockdowns.

Some parked on the grounds of the National War Memorial and danced on the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, others carried signs and flags with swastikas and some used the statue of Canadian hero Terry Fox to display an anti-vaccine statement, sparking widespread condemnation.

"I am sickened to see protesters dance on the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier and desecrate the National War Memorial. Generations of Canadians have fought and died for our rights, including free speech, but not this. Those involved should hang their heads in shame," tweeted Gen. Wayne Eyre, Canada's Defense Staff chief.

Protesters compared vaccine mandates to fascism, one truck

carried a Confederate flag and many carried expletive-laden signs targeting Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau.

The statue of Fox, a national hero who lost a leg to bone cancer as a youngster, then set off in 1980 on a fundraising trek across Canada, was draped with a upside down Canadian flag with a sign that said "mandate freedom."

Trudeau retweeted a statement from The Terry Fox Foundation that said "Terry believed in science and gave his life to help others."

Eric Simmons, from Oshawa, Ontario, said all vaccine mandates should be ended.

"They're not effective, they're not working. It's not changing anything. We can't keep living like this. People are losing their jobs because they don't want to get the vaccine," Simmons said.

The convoy of truckers and others prompted police to prepare for the possibility of violence and warn residents to avoid

downtown. The prime minister's itinerary for the day usually says he is in Ottawa if he's at home, but on Saturday it said "National Capital Region" amid a report he was moved to an undisclosed location.

Canada has one of the highest vaccination rates in the world, and the premier of the province of Quebec who is proposing to tax the unvaccinated is popular.

Some are, in part, protesting a new rule that took effect Jan. 15 requiring truckers entering Canada be fully immunized against the coronavirus. The United States has imposed the same requirement on truckers entering that country.

The Canadian Trucking Alliance said a great number of the protesters have no connection to the trucking industry, adding they have a separate agenda to push. The alliance notes the vast majority of drivers are vaccinated. The organizers of the protest have called for the forceful elim-

ination of all COVID-19 restrictions and vaccine mandates and some called for the removal of Trudeau.

The Shepherds of Good Hope, which has a soup kitchen for the homeless in Ottawa, reported staff and volunteers "experienced harassment from convoy protesters seeking meals from our soup kitchen. The individuals were given means to defuse the conflict."

Some opposition Canadian Conservative lawmakers served coffee to the protesters. Conservative party leader Erin O'Toole met with some truckers. The protest has also attracted support from former U.S. President Donald Trump and some Fox News personalities.

"We want those great Canadian truckers to know that we are with them all the way," Trump said at a rally in Conroe, Texas. "They are doing more to defend American freedom than our leaders by far."

Latest North Korea missile test is intermediate-range

BY DAVID CHOI
Stars and Stripes

CAMP HUMPHREYS, South Korea — North Korea carried out its seventh weapons test of the month on Sunday, firing an intermediate-range ballistic missile off its eastern coast, South Korean and Japanese officials said.

South Korea's military detected the launch from the North's northern border at around 7:52 a.m., according to separate statements from the country's Joint Chiefs of Staff and National Security Council.

The military estimated the missile flew about 500 miles at an altitude of 1,240 miles. The launch was still being analyzed by U.S. and South Korean intelligence agencies, the Joint Chiefs said.

Meanwhile, Japanese officials confirmed and condemned North Korea's latest weapons test.

"Such a violent ballistic missile launch violates the relevant U.N. Security Council resolution, and Japan has made a strict protest against North Korea," Chief Cabinet Secretary Hirokazu Matsuno told reporters about an hour after the launch. "We will continue to collect information to protect the lives and property of the people."

The launch of an intermediate-range ballistic missile would be North Korea's first in nearly five years. The communist regime last tested an IRBM and its first intercontinental ballistic missile in 2017, amid heightened tensions with the United States and South Korea.

'Bloody Sunday' remembered 50 years later in North Ireland

Associated Press

LONDON — Hundreds of people gathered Sunday in Northern Ireland to mark 50 years since "Bloody Sunday," one of the deadliest days in the conflict known as The Troubles.

Thirteen people were killed and 15 others wounded when British soldiers fired on civil rights protesters on Jan. 30, 1972, in the city of Derry, also known as Londonderry.

Relatives of those killed and injured took part in a remembrance walk Sunday, retracing the steps of the original march. Crowds gathered at the Bloody Sunday Monument, where political leaders including Irish Premier Micheal Martin laid wreaths in a ceremony.

Britain's government apologized in 2010 after an official inquiry found that the soldiers

fired without justification on unarmed, fleeing civilians and then lied about it for decades. The report refuted an initial investigation that took place soon after the slayings that said the soldiers had been defending themselves against Irish Republican Army bombers and gunmen.

One former British soldier was charged in 2019 in the killing of two of the protesters and the injury of four others. But prosecutors decided last year not to proceed with the case because there was no longer a prospect of conviction. Families of one of the victims have brought a legal challenge against that decision.

Martin, the Irish leader, said Sunday that there should be full accountability in all legacy issues.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

City's new logo causes upset among residents

AL FLORENCE — Some residents think a northern Alabama city's new logo might be sending the wrong message.

Florence's new logo uses the first three letters of its name — a capital F followed by an L and an O arranged as an exclamation point — to form F!

When the city unveiled the new logo this week, it drew immediate backlash and an online petition demanding changes that had nearly 7,500 signatures.

City Council member Kaytrina Simmons said she has requested a meeting with the mayor and council to discuss the logo and revise it. In a letter to residents, Simmons apologized for the logo which "has brought so much disappointment to our great city."

Man admits smuggling migrants in with coffin

TX CORPUS CHRISTI — A Texas man who transported two men from Mexico in a U.S. flag-draped coffin has pleaded guilty to human smuggling.

Zachary Taylor Blood, of Galveston, faces up to five years in prison and a fine of up to \$250,000 for his plea last week in federal court in Corpus Christi.

Prosecutors said a van that Blood, 33, was driving arrived at the Border Patrol checkpoint near Falfurrias, Texas. Agents saw the coffin but noticed it was in poor condition with the U.S. flag taped to the lid with pack-

ing tape. A secondary inspection revealed two Mexican nationals inside.

Man guilty of using twin's ID for veterans benefits

FL JACKSONVILLE — A Florida man has pleaded guilty to using his twin brother's stolen identity to obtain tens of thousands of dollars in military veterans benefits.

Wayne Bowen, 64, of Jacksonville, pleaded guilty to aggravated identity theft in Jacksonville federal court, according to court records. He faces a mandatory two years in federal prison. He must also pay \$63,773 in restitution as part of his plea agreement.

According to the plea agreement, Bowen used the name, Social Security card and military discharge papers of his estranged twin brother in 2014 to apply for federally subsidized housing benefits intended for indigent military veterans.

Man to face charges after toddler kills teenager

KS TOPEKA — A Topeka man accused of leaving out a loaded gun that a toddler later used to accidentally shoot a teenager will go on trial for murder, a judge ruled.

Shawnee County District Judge David Debenham found that prosecutors had enough evidence to try DeJuan Yelverton for first-degree murder and aggravated endangering of a child.

Yelverton pleaded not guilty to those two counts but pleaded guilty to criminal possession of a weapon by a felon, The Topeka Capital-Journal reported.

Shawnee County District Attorney Mike Kagay alleged Yelverton left a gun hanging off of the top of a refrigerator in June. A toddler later got the loaded gun and accidentally shot DaMya Hudnall, 13, in the head.

Hudnall died a few days later.

Officials: Man fatally shot by bailiff during eviction

OH CLEVELAND — A man was fatally shot by a Cleveland Housing Court bailiff as they tried to evict him from his apartment, Cleveland officials said.

A statement said two Housing Court bailiffs knocked on the door of the man's west side apartment around noon and received no answer.

After asking a maintenance worker to help them enter the apartment, the man opened the door and began assaulting the worker and bailiffs with a blunt object, prompting one of the bailiffs to shoot him, officials said.

The man died at a Cleveland hospital. His name and age, as well as the bailiff's names, have not been released.

Teen returns home after surviving highway collapse

MS LUCEDALE — A Mississippi teenager who survived a deadly collapse of a highway after Hurricane Ida is back home after spending nearly five months in Georgia recovering from her injuries.

Hundreds gathered Thursday at Lucedale City Hall to welcome home Layla Jamison, 18, of Lucedale, after a long

journey of rehabilitation and recovery at the Shepherd Center in Atlanta, WLOX-TV reported. Jamison suffered many broken bones including her legs, arms and back and internal injuries after the Aug. 30 washout of Highway 26 following Ida.

Three people died after the road gave way amid a torrential downpour and 10 were injured, including Jamison.

Jamison was in a car that landed on a pickup truck where two people were trapped after the truck plunged into a dark, muddy pit when the highway collapsed. The highway reopened in November.

Amazon manager pleads guilty in theft scheme

NC CHARLOTTE — An operations manager at an Amazon warehouse in North Carolina has admitted to a scheme in which he stole, then sold merchandise worth more than a quarter of a million dollars, federal prosecutors said.

Douglas Wright Jr., 27, of Charlotte, pleaded guilty to mail fraud, U.S. Attorney for the Western District of North Carolina Dena King announced in a news release.

From June 2020 and September 2021, Wright stole merchandise worth more than \$273,000 from the company's Charlotte warehouse, where he was an operations manager, according to plea documents and the hearing.

Wright admitted in court that he then sold the stolen merchandise for profit.

— From wire reports



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Nadal makes history with 21st Slam win

Associated Press

MELBOURNE, Australia — Rafael Nadal got to 21 first, breaking the men's record for most Grand Slam singles titles and doing it the hard way by coming back from two sets down to beat Daniil Medvedev in an almost 5½-hour Australian Open final.

Nadal was broken when serving for the championship for the first time at 5-4 in the fifth set, but he made no mistake two games later by serving an ace to earn three championship points and converted it on the first attempt.

The 35-year-old Spaniard now has one more major title than Roger Federer and Novak Djokovic, his long-time rivals in the so-called Big Three.

With the 2-6, 6-7 (5), 6-4, 6-4, 7-5 win, Nadal also became just the fourth man in history to win all four of the sport's major titles at least twice.

Nadal and Medvedev packed a lot of drama into the final that started Sunday night, was delayed for a while in the 84-minute second set when a protester jumped onto the court, and then finished early Monday morning.

"Good evening. No, good morning!" Nadal, looking at his watch, told the crowd at Rod Laver Arena when he finally got up for

his acceptance speech at 1:30 a.m.

In the background, Rod Laver, the aging Australian tennis great, was in the stands holding up his smartphone to capture the scenes. A woman nearby held up a sign that stated: "Rafa is the GOAT."

For now, in terms of men's major titles at least, Nadal is the Greatest Of All Time.

Nadal said it had been "one of the most emotional matches in my tennis career," and he praised Medvedev for the part he played in the 5-hour, 24-minute final. It was the second longest Australian Open final ever, after Nadal's loss to Djokovic in the 2012 decider that lasted 5:53.

His victory was even more remarkable considering Nadal flew to Australia with just two matches under his belt in the second half of 2021 because he was sidelined with a chronic foot injury that can be treated but not cured. He also overcame a bout of COVID-19.

"For me, it's just amazing. Being honest, one month and a half ago, I didn't know if I'd be able to play on the tour again," Nadal said. "Without a doubt, (it's) probably been one of the most emotional months in my tennis career."

"The huge support I've received for the last three weeks will stay in my heart for the

rest of my life."

Nadal won his first Australian Open title in 2009 and lost four other finals at Melbourne Park before his dramatic win over U.S. Open champion Medvedev. His conversion rate in major finals is now 21 out of 29. Federer and Djokovic each have 20 majors from 31 finals appearances.

Medvedev, who was aiming to be the first man in the Open era to win his second Grand Slam title at the very next major, was ever-so-close to spoiling another 21st celebration.

Djokovic was chasing the same record at the U.S. Open last year, and a calendar-year Grand Slam, when Medvedev beat him in straight sets in the final.

Federer also had his chance at 21, but Djokovic stopped that when he saved match points before winning the 2019 Wimbledon final.

Medvedev now joins Andy Murray among those who've lost the final at the next major tournament after their career breakthrough at the highest level.

It was just the fourth time Nadal has rallied from two sets down to win a best-of-five-set match, and the first since a fourth-round victory in 2007 at Wimbledon over Mikhail Youzhny.

Panthers roar back, defeat Sharks 5-4 in overtime

Associated Press

SUNRISE, Fla. — Sam Bennett scored 1:08 into overtime and the Florida Panthers came from behind to beat the San Jose Sharks 5-4 for their ninth straight victory at home.

Jonathan Huberdeau had a goal and two assists, and Gustav Forsling added a goal and an assist for Florida. Aleksander Barkov and Mason Marchment also scored, and Sergei Bobrovsky stopped 30 shots in front of a season-high crowd of 18,152.

The Panthers (31-9-5), who lead the NHL with 67 points, have won three in a row and eight of 10. They overcame a two-goal deficit in the third period and improved to 23-3-0 at home.

Jonathan Dahlen had two power-play goals, and Tomas Hertl and Matt Nieto also scored

for the Sharks. James Reimer made 44 saves.

Flyers 4, Kings 3 (OT): Scott Laughton scored 2:22 into overtime, Cam Atkinson had two goals in regulation and assisted on the winner and host Philadelphia snapped a franchise-record 13-game losing streak.

Laughton scored on the rebound of Atkinson's shot for the Flyers' first victory since Dec. 29. Gerry Mayhew also scored for Philadelphia.

Hurricanes 2, Devils 1: Antti Raanta made 24 saves in his first action in nearly a month as host Carolina beat New Jersey.

Jordan Martinook and Andrei Svechnikov scored in the first period to help the Hurricanes win their third straight and sixth in the last seven.

Golden Knights 3, Lightning 2 (SO): Mark Stone scored the

winner in the seventh round of a shootout and Vegas won at Tampa Bay after blowing a two-goal lead in the third period.

Robin Lehner stopped 27 shots for the Golden Knights, including 18 combined in the third period and overtime. Brett Howden and William Carrier both had a goal and an assist.

Maple Leafs 7, Red Wings 4: Michael Bunting had three goals, Rasmus Sandin scored the tiebreaker with 2:51 remaining and Toronto rallied for five unanswered goals in the third period to win at Detroit.

Mitch Marner scored a power-play goal with 1:14 left and John Tavares, who assisted on Sandin's goal, made it 7-4 with 11 seconds to go. Pierre Engvall also scored for the Maple Leafs.

Jets 4, Blues 1: Paul Stastny scored twice, Eric Comrie made

24 saves in his first start since early last month and Winnipeg won at St. Louis to snap a six-game losing streak.

Ducks 2, Senators 1: John Gibson made a season-high 44 saves and Troy Terry and Rickard Rakell scored in Anaheim's victory at Ottawa.

The Ducks (23-16-8) have won four of their past five games.

Sabres 3, Coyotes 1: Craig Anderson made 27 saves in his return from the injured list to lead Buffalo to a win at Arizona.

Oilers 7, Canadiens 2: Zach Hyman and Leon Draisaitl each had two goals, Evander Kane scored in his Edmonton debut and the Oilers rolled to a win at Montreal.

Flames 1, Canucks 0 (OT): Johnny Gaudreau scored 29 seconds into overtime and host Calgary beat Vancouver.

No. 12 Kentucky tops No. 5 Kansas

Associated Press

LAWRENCE, Kan. — Keion Brooks scored 27 points and Oscar Tshiebwe had a double-double as No. 12 Kentucky manhandled No. 5 Kansas 80-62 on Saturday night.

The Wildcats grabbed a big halftime lead in Allen Fieldhouse and cruised to improve to 24-10 all-time in the series. The Jayhawks had won four of the past five coming in. The last Kentucky win in Allen Fieldhouse was in 1985.

Alabama 87, No. 4 Baylor 78: The host Crimson Tide used a 14-2 run early in the second half and another big surge down the stretch to pull off an win over the Bears in the Big 12/SEC Challenge on Saturday.

No. 1 Auburn 86, Oklahoma 68: Jabari Smith bounced back from a rough shooting night with 23 points and 12 rebounds and Walker Kessler scored 21 to lead the host Tigers.

Auburn (20-1) built a big lead, lost most of it and then dominated the final minutes for their nation-leading 17th consecutive win. The Sooners (13-8) visited as part of the Big 12/SEC Challenge.

No. 2 Gonzaga 104, Portland 72: Andrew Nembhard scored 22 points and the host Zags made 18 three-pointers to earn their 10th straight victory.

No. 3 Arizona 67, Arizona State 56: Benedict Mathurin and Oumar Ballo scored 14 points each as the host Wildcats turned up the defensive pressure in the second half to win despite some woeful shooting.

No. 7 UCLA 66, Stanford 43: Jules Ber-

nard scored 16 points and host Bruins stymied Stanford's shooters to regain sole possession of first place in the Pac-12.

No. 7 Houston 63, UCF 49: Kyler Edwards scored 13 of his 17 points in the first half and Josh Carlton added 13 points and 14 rebounds as the visiting Cougars won their 10th straight victory.

Texas 52, No. 18 Tennessee 51: Timmy Allen's free throw with 6 seconds left sent the host Longhorns to a win in the Big 12/SEC Challenge after the Volunteers rallied from 17 points down in the second half.

No. 9 Duke 74, Louisville 65: AJ Griffin scored 22 points, including consecutive three-pointers during a late 12-0 run to help the Blue Devils escape with a road win.

No. 10 Michigan State 83, Michigan 67: Max Christie scored 14 of his 16 points in the first half and Malik Hall finished with 15 points as the host Spartans held off their in-state rival.

No. 13 Texas Tech 76, Mississippi State 50: Adonis Arms had 16 points and seven assists as the host Red Raiders stayed undefeated at home.

No. 14 Villanova 73, St. John's 62: Collin Gillespie scored 17 points, and Eric Dixon and Caleb Daniels each had 15 as the host Wildcats used a three-point-happy first half to cruise.

No. 15 Southern California 79, California 72: Isaiah Mobley scored a career-high 24 points and Boogie Ellis added a season-high 21 for the host Trojans.

TCU 77, No. 19 LSU 68: Chuck O'Ban-

non scored 16 of his career-high 19 points after halftime, including three consecutive three-pointers from basically the same spot and the host Horned Frogs held on to beat the slumping Tigers in the Big 12/SEC Challenge.

No. 20 UConn 57, De Paul 50: R.J. Cole scored 25 points as the visiting Huskies won their fifth in a row.

No. 21 Xavier 74, Creighton 64: Jack Nunge and Paul Scruggs fueled a dramatic second-half turnaround that saw the visiting Musketeers score 29 of the first 31 points of the period to wipe out a 17-point deficit against the Bluejays.

No. 23 Iowa State 67, Missouri 50: Izaiah Brockington scored 15 points and Tyrese Hunter added 14 as the host Cyclones won in the Big 12/SEC Challenge.

No. 24 Illinois 59, Northwestern 56: Kofi Cockburn returned from a concussion and scored 22 points and grabbed nine rebounds to lead the visiting Illini.

No. 25 Davidson 77, La Salle 69: Luka Brajkovic scored 22 points, Foster Loyer added 14 points, six rebounds and five assists and the host Wildcats held on for a win in coach Bob McKillop's 1,000th game as the team's head coach.

Navy 47, American 45: John Carter Jr. registered 14 points and eight rebounds and the host Midshipmen (14-7, 7-3 Patriot League) defeated the Eagles.

Army 60, Lafayette 56: Aaron Duhart had 18 points and seven rebounds as the Black Knights won at home.

Thompson's 3 helps Warriors top short-handed Nets

Associated Press

SAN FRANCISCO — Klay Thompson hit the biggest shot yet of his 2 1/2-year injury comeback, making a three-pointer with 12 seconds left to send the Golden State Warriors to a 110-106 victory over Kyrie Irving and the Brooklyn Nets on Saturday night.

Irving wasn't done and made a three of his own moments later and scored 32 points while hearing boos from the Bay Area crowd directed at the unvaccinated Nets star.

Thompson finished with 16 points. Stephen Curry hit a go-ahead three-pointer with 5:09 left and five free throws over the final 1:44 to score 19 points as Irving kept delivering on the other end without the injured Kevin Durant and James Harden.

Andrew Wiggins contributed 24 points and eight rebounds as the Warriors made key late stops, including Irving's missed reverse layup try with a minute left. Jordan Poole added 17 points and six assists off the bench.

Brooklyn's Patty Mills made three three-pointers in the final 9:46, tying the game at 96 with 4:42 remaining and finished with 24 points.

Raptors 124, Heat 120 (3OT): Fred VanVleet hit two three-pointers in the third overtime and Toronto won at Miami.

Gary Trent Jr. led the Raptors with 33 points. Sidelined the previous two games with right knee soreness, VanVleet finished with 19.

Jimmy Butler had a triple-double with 37

points, 14 rebounds and 11 assists for the Heat.

76ers 103, Kings 101: Joel Embiid scored 36 points, Tyrese Maxey keyed a game-changing run in the fourth quarter and Philadelphia won its fourth straight.

Mavericks 132, Pacers 105: Luka Doncic had 30 points and 12 assists and host Dallas spoiled former coach Rick Carlisle's return with Indiana.

Celtics 107, Pelicans 97: Jayson Tatum scored 38 points and visiting Boston beat short-handed New Orleans.

Grizzlies 115, Wizards 95: Ja Morant scored 34 points, his sixth straight game of at least 30 points, and host Memphis beat Washington.

Brady to retire? Bucs say to hold on

Tampa Bay Times

TAMPA, Fla. — Tom Brady's career highlights rolled across national media outlets Saturday. Some of his greatest moments from seven Super Bowl victories aired on the NFL Network.

Former teammates took to social media to congratulate Brady on an unparalleled career after CBS, then ESPN reported that he had decided to retire after 22 seasons.

TB12 Sports, his nutrition and fitness company, posted a tweet listing Brady's career accomplishments and thanking him before deleting it.

An hour after ESPN's Adam Schefter and Jeff Darlington reported Saturday afternoon that Brady is retiring, Tampa Bay Buccaneers general manager Jason Licht received a telephone call from Brady who said he still wasn't close to making a decision about his future.

Coach Bruce Arians had not received any word about those plans from Brady or his agent.

"No he hasn't (retired) that we know of," Arians told the Tampa Bay Times just minutes after the media reports. "Agent (Donald Yee) just told us he hasn't made up his mind."

Yee said Brady should comment on his future soon.

"I understand the advance speculation about Tom's future," Yee said in a statement. "Without getting into the accuracy or inac-

curacy of what's being reported, Tom will be the only person to express his plans with complete accuracy. He knows the realities of the football business and planning calendar as well as anybody, so that should be soon."

Brady's father, Tom Sr., told KRON-4 News in San Francisco that his son is not retiring. Brady Sr. said an online publication started circulating an unsubstantiated rumor.

If Brady ultimately does decide to walk away from the NFL, he goes out on top.

While the final season of his illustrious career didn't end with confetti in his hair, he led the NFL in passing yards (5,316) and touchdowns (43) during the regular season, making the case that even at 44 years old, he was the best to do it at his position.

Those closest to Brady have said that while he knows he can absolutely still play at a championship level, the desire to spend more time with his wife and three children has weighed on him to possibly end an unparalleled career after 22 seasons.

"Tom loves football, he loves everything about it and he pours all he has into being the best quarterback and leader for his coaches and teammates," quarterbacks coach Clyde Christensen told the Tampa Bay Times. "But he also wants to be a Hall of Fame dad and a Hall of Fame husband. That's just as important and probably more so than being a Hall of Fame quarterback."

In two seasons with the Bucs, Brady has

won 29 games as well as division, conference and the Super Bowl 55 titles.

He would walk away in tremendous physical condition thanks to his TB12 fitness regimen as the greatest NFL player of all time with seven Super Bowl rings and 10 appearances in the league's championship game.

For the Bucs, it would be the end of a two-year fantasy.

Reports of Brady's possible retirement didn't catch the Bucs completely off guard. Even though he was under contract for another year and had talked about playing until he was 45, they knew it was a possibility he could walk away at any time.

If he is done, it would leave the Bucs in the market for another quarterback. The only one under contract with the Bucs is Kyle Trask, the Florida Gators star who was inactive every game during his rookie season. Backup Blaine Gabbert is a free agent but would be an option.

On Monday, however, Arians talked about wanting to see which quarterback was behind "Door No. 2"

The Bucs were beset with injuries on both sides of the football in Year 2, but Brady was at his best, winning games with walk-off touchdown passes to Breshad Perriman (in overtime vs. Bills) and Cyril Grayson (at Jets).

Injuries to the offensive line caused Brady to be hit 17 times by the Rams in last weekend's 30-27 NFC division playoff loss.

Source: Vikings discussing coach job with Harbaugh

Associated Press

MINNEAPOLIS — Jim Harbaugh has taken a step toward a potential return to the NFL.

Harbaugh and the Minnesota Vikings had an exploratory conversation about the team's head coaching vacancy Saturday, a person with knowledge of the process said.

The person, who spoke on condition of anonymity because the team was not publicizing the interview, said both sides were gauging interest. The Vikings made the formal request earlier this week to speak with him.

A message seeking comment was left with Harbaugh, whose

seventh season at Michigan ended last month with a loss to Georgia in the College Football Playoff.

The Vikings hired former Cleveland Browns vice president of football operations Kweisi Adofo-Mensah as general manager this week, and they're still searching for a coach.

The 58-year-old Harbaugh could be a good fit with Adofo-Mensah, who is a first-time GM at age 40. Adofo-Mensah started working in the research and development department with the San Francisco 49ers in 2013, when Harbaugh was in his third of four seasons coaching the team.

Might Michigan's khaki-wearing coach be ready to leave his alma mater?

Harbaugh is 61-24 with the Wolverines, who he led to a win over rival Ohio State last season for the first time under his guidance. They went on to end a school-record, 17-year streak without a Big Ten championship and made the four-team national playoffs for the first time in eight years under the current format.

The former NFL quarterback was 44-19-1 as San Francisco's coach from 2011-14 and 5-3 in the playoffs, helping the 49ers reach the Super Bowl after the 2012 season. They lost to the

Baltimore Ravens, who were coached by his brother, John Harbaugh.

A little more than a year ago, Michigan gave Harbaugh a new five-year contract that cut his guaranteed compensation and gave him an opportunity to make up for the financial loss with performance bonuses. Harbaugh bounced back to produce his best season with 12 wins.

The Vikings fired general manager Rick Spielman and coach Mike Zimmer after a second straight absence from the playoffs. Zimmer went 72-56-1 in eight seasons and 2-3 in the playoffs.