

Clearing mines in strait to take months

By ALISON BATH
Stars and Stripes

NAPLES, Italy — There are dozens of sea mines in the Strait of Hormuz that will require months to remove once clearance efforts begin, the Italian defense ministry said Wednesday.

Removal of the sophisticated mines will require advanced capabilities and expertise not possessed by many countries, Giovanni Iannucci, commander of Italy's Joint Operations Command, told members of the Italian house and senate foreign affairs and defense committees.

He estimated mine-clearing operations would take about two months, according to a report by the Italian news agency ANSA.

But with a fragile U.S.-Iran ceasefire and little sign that peace talks are gaining traction,

there is no concrete timeline for when those efforts will begin, the head of the International Maritime Organization warned Friday.

The effort would be further delayed by the necessary evacuation of 500 stranded ships and their crews before operations to remove an estimated 80 sea mines from the critical artery could start, IMO Secretary-General Arsenio Dominguez told reporters during an online news briefing.

Dominguez estimated that evacuation efforts would take a few weeks. The IMO paused evacuation efforts following Iran's attacks on ships in the strait last week.

Iannucci's and Dominguez's comments offer the clearest picture yet of the number of Iranian mines that may be in the strait and how long it could take

to restore the free flow of traffic through the waterway, which carries crude oil, liquefied natural gas, agricultural fertilizers and other vital products around the world.

In April, a senior Pentagon official told members of the House Armed Services Committee during a classified briefing it would take as long as six months to remove 20 or more sea mines from the about 104-mile-long strait. At the time, the Defense Department acknowledged the disclosure was made but said the information was inaccurate.

President Donald Trump has said American forces already have been searching for mines in the strait, and, in recent weeks, the U.S. has quietly helped ships through the area.

For example, some 46 vessels transited the waterway on Sun-

day and Monday with U.S. assistance, the Joint Maritime Information Center reported Tuesday.

The statements also came as the U.S. and Iran continued indirect peace talks through mediators Wednesday in the Qatari capital of Doha.

Over the weekend, Iran launched attacks on commercial ships in the Strait of Hormuz and U.S. military installations in the Middle East. The U.S. answered with strikes against Iranian military sites in and around the strait.

A key sticking point in the talks is Iran's insistence that it has the right to charge tolls for ships transiting the strategic maritime corridor. The U.S. maintains that traveling through the strait should be free, as it was before the war began in February.

Russian drone campaign exposes gaps at US bases

By JOHN VANDIVER
Stars and Stripes

STUTTGART, Germany — An extensive Russian drone campaign over Europe probed military bases housing U.S. nuclear weapons and other sensitive sites, exposing gaps in allied air defenses and an inadequate strategy to deal with the incursions, a new report said.

Between August 2024 and February 2026, hundreds of drones maneuvered in the airspace of a dozen NATO member states and Ireland, forcing repeated closures of major commercial aviation hubs and disrupting military activities, the International Institute for Strategic Studies said in a report issued Thursday.

Germany's Ramstein Air

Base, along with bases involved in NATO's nuclear deterrence mission, was surveilled in an operation designed to map allied vulnerabilities and probe for weaknesses in military-civilian decision-making, the IISS report said.

Russia-linked ships, including vessels from its so-called "shadow fleet" of clandestine vessels, were used to launch drones as part of the Kremlin's wider "unconventional war on Europe," the report added.

During the campaign, drones flew with "substantial impunity across European airspace — representing both a series of tactical successes for the Kremlin and a strategic failure of allied air defense," IISS said.

Russia has at various times de-

nied involvement in the drone missions, including incursions reported in Denmark and Norway.

During the past two years, drone sightings have been reported across Europe. The threat became more urgent in September when NATO fighters shot down a swarm of drones headed into Poland. The incident marked the first time in history that NATO planes fired on potential threats in allied airspace.

In other cases, countries struggled to formulate a response to incursions. When they did respond, they failed to hit their targets, the IISS report said.

Between November 2024 and early 2025, drone flights occurred over Ramstein Air Base,

according to IISS data culled from media reports and other open sources. It said the aircraft were likely launched from Russia-linked vessels operating as far away as the North Sea or Baltic Sea.

The IISS analysis also highlighted instances at various locations known to be connected to NATO's nuclear mission.

Volkel Air Base in the Netherlands was targeted by drones on at least three separate days in November and December 2025, the report said.

"Volkel is a highly sensitive site because it hosts dual-capable aircraft tasked with delivering US forward-deployed B61-12 gravity bombs under NATO's nuclear-sharing arrangements," the report said.

Russia's losses push casualties past 2M

By JOHN VANDIVER
Stars and Stripes

Russia has suffered as many as 450,000 deaths and 1.4 million total casualties since launching its full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the highest battlefield death toll suffered by any major power since World War II, according to a new analysis.

Overall, there have been more than 2 million casualties on both sides since Russia's February 2022 invasion of Ukraine, the Center for Strategic and International Studies, or CSIS, said in a report released Wednesday.

"The number of Russian casualties and fatalities are astonishing," the report said. "Since World War II, no major power has suffered anywhere near these numbers of casualties or fatalities in any war, leaving Russia with a grim and unparalleled recent historical record."

From a historical perspective, the United States would have to fight the Vietnam War roughly eight times to match Russia's battlefield death tally in Ukraine.

Russian battlefield casualties and fatalities have been significantly higher than those on the Ukrainian side throughout the fighting, with Ukraine suffering roughly 600,000 casualties overall. But the ratio has increasingly shifted in Ukraine's favor. For most of the war, the Russia-Ukraine casualty ratio was between 2:1 and 3:1, but that rate has risen to nearly 8:1 in the first half of 2026, the report said.

Russia's monthly casualty rate of over 30,000 per month in 2026 now exceeds recruitment rates of roughly 27,000 new troops per month, it added.

The mounting Russian losses come as Ukraine makes gradual

territorial gains on the battlefield. Russia's territorial control of the country shrank by roughly 60 square miles in April and May, the report said.

In addition, Ukraine has developed "a new paradigm for air power" with short-, medium- and long-range strikes against Russian military and economic targets using drones and AI-enabled systems.

One recent development is Ukraine's fielding of the Hornet, a one-way, autonomous attack drone that costs roughly \$6,000 and has a range of up to 93 miles, CSIS said. The weapon was developed in partnership with Ukrainian and U.S. companies and uses AI to analyze feeds to identify and strike targets.

The use of such systems is "changing the character of warfare," CSIS said.

Ukraine has also struck deeper into Russian territory with dramatic attacks inside Moscow and St. Petersburg, with video of incoming drones circulating widely on social media.

"In a stunning acknowledgment of Russia's struggles in Ukraine, President Vladimir Putin dramatically scaled back his annual military parade in May 2026 because of concerns about Ukrainian long-range strikes and increasing battlefield challenges in Ukraine," the report said.

Strikes on oil and gas facilities around Moscow have led to shortages of fuel and lines at the gas pump. But despite the difficulties, Putin has not changed his war aims, CSIS said.

"So long as Putin remains willing to pay the steep price, Russia can continue to tap into a deep manpower pool and a war economy that, while strained, has not yet buckled," the report said.

Intense missile and drone attack on Kyiv launched

Bloomberg News

Russia unleashed one of the most intense missile and drone attacks on Kyiv so far this year, killing at least 20 people and injuring dozens, according to Ukrainian officials.

"As of now, 20 deaths are known," Tymur Tkachenko, head of Kyiv's military administration, said Thursday in a post on Telegram.

Kyiv Mayor Vitali Klitschko said a day of mourning had been declared in the city for Friday.

Earlier, Klitschko said at least 86 people were injured and 70 hospitalized in attacks that damaged residential areas in seven city districts.

Ukraine's Air Defense said ballistic and cruise missiles were used in the assault on Kyiv as well as jet-powered drones, while strikes were also reported in the Kharkiv, Sumy, Dnipro, Zaporizhzhia, and Cherkasy regions. According to military data, Ukraine shot down 48 out of

74 missiles and 476 out of 496 drones.

The Ukrainian DTEK private energy company said its facility in Kyiv was also hit.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said the attacks showed that supplies of air defenses to Ukraine remained "an absolute and critical priority."

"It is especially important that we move forward with implementing our agreements on the production of anti-ballistic capabilities," Zelenskyy said in a post on X. "We also very much count on a decision by the United States regarding licenses for Patriots and other forms of cooperation."

Germany's Foreign Ministry said the attacks demonstrated that Russian President Vladimir Putin "shows no willingness to negotiate." Continued support for Ukraine's defense would be a focus of next week's North Atlantic Treaty Organization summit in Turkey, it said.

Russia and China increase naval activity near Japan

By BRIAN McELHINEY
AND KEISHI KOJA

Stars and Stripes

China exercised its ability to transit Japan's stretch of the first island chain by sending 10 warships through its maritime passes in the past week.

Eight Chinese navy vessels were spotted heading toward the Pacific Ocean between the afternoon of June 26 and early Tuesday morning, according to multiple news releases from the Ministry of Defense.

The number of trips by Chinese and Russian ships through Japanese straits is not unusually high, but "their operations are certainly expanding and in-

tensifying," a Japan Joint Staff spokesman said Wednesday.

Two Chinese destroyers, the Guiyang and Xining, sailed southwest Saturday morning and Sunday morning toward the East China Sea in waters northeast of Tsushima, an island about halfway between Kyushu and the Korean Peninsula.

Five Russian naval vessels also made trips through Japanese straits over the same time, but the Joint Staff spokesman said the trips, which sometimes operate in tandem, this time appeared coincidental.

"To the best of our knowledge, this did not involve any joint exercises," he said.

USMC signs deal for autonomous vehicles

By GARY WARNER
Stars and Stripes

U.S. Marines could go into battle in the near future flanked by uncrewed vehicles operating as part of their Marine Air Defense Integrated System (MADIS).

The Marine Corps and Seattle-based Overland AI announced Monday that they had signed a \$20 million contract for platforms that would enable troops to push farther into conflict areas with fewer personnel by using the uncrewed vehicles to supplement crewed ones.

The Marines use Joint Light Tactical Vehicles with the MADIS — a mobile, short-range air defense system designed to “detect, track and destroy drones, helicopters and low-flying air-

craft” while accompanying Marine units in the field, the service says.

The new autonomous ground vehicles would be integrated into the manned vehicle force. They could be used for transport, logistics and communications, as well as platforms for other systems.

“Pairing the autonomous platforms with our Marine Air Defense Integrated System will greatly extend the operational reach and lethality of our air defense units,” Joe Klocek, Marine Corps Program Manager for Ground Based Air Defense, said in a statement.

Byron Boots, chief executive officer of Overland AI, said the Pentagon has signaled an urgent

need to field autonomous ground vehicles as rapidly as possible.

“Overland AI is proud to be the first ground autonomy company to prime a production contract,” Boots said.

Boots said the \$20 million contract falls under the “other transaction authority production agreement” awarded through the office of the Undersecretary of Defense for Research and Engineering’s program to accelerate the acquisition and deployment of innovative technologies.

“This is the first step toward integrating fully autonomous ground vehicles at scale in USMC programs of record,” Overland AI said in a statement. “Until now, unmanned assets

have been largely tele-operated and remote-controlled, constraints that limit operators to single-vehicle control and create dependence on communications during operations.”

The Overland AI vehicles were developed in conjunction with the Program Manager, Ground-Based Air Defense (PM GBAD).

“PM GBAD is setting the pace, moving past discussion and experimentation to put autonomous capabilities directly into the hands of Marines,” the company said.

Details of the number of vehicles that would be obtained under the \$20 million contract were not immediately available from the Marines.

Trump takes 1st flight on \$400M jet gifted by Qatar

New York Daily News

President Donald Trump on Wednesday took his first trip on his new luxe Air Force One, a retrofitted Boeing 747 worth an estimated \$400 million transferred for free from the oil-rich Middle East nation of Qatar.

“I’m excited about the first flight,” he told reporters ahead of his flight to North Dakota, where he planned to tour the new Theodore Roosevelt Presidential Library.

“They made it appropriate for a president, that means the security and all of the different bells and whistles they put on,” Trump added. “(It’s) very complex now, but it’s really quite something.”

Trump says the new jet, which had to be given security upgrades at a cost to taxpayers of about \$400 million, will be used until new versions of the presidential jet are expected to be delivered in 2028.

The plane has raised ethical concerns because Trump and his family have significant business dealings with Qatar and Trump

has said it will eventually be handed over to his presidential foundation or library, not to the U.S. government.

Qatar may also hope to use the gift as leverage in its extensive diplomatic dealings with the U.S., critics say.

“Frankly, we couldn’t build a plane like this because we wouldn’t be willing to spend the kind of money necessary. They spent top dollars,” Trump said of the Qatari officials.

Trump ordered the plane spiffed up in his preferred image. Gone is the trademark light blue hull, replaced by the trademark Trump color scheme of a navy belly and red and gold stripes.

It has the luxury features that the president believes a commander in chief’s extensive entourage deserves, including plush carpets, lie-flat seats, wood paneling and a presidential seal on the seat belts.

Boeing is expected to deliver two long-delayed planes that will permanently serve as Air Force One.

Mutty takes over 7th Fleet expeditionary command

By ALEX WILSON
Stars and Stripes

A former amphibious assault ship commander took charge Wednesday of the U.S. 7th Fleet’s expeditionary command, which oversees amphibious operations in the Pacific.

Rear Adm. Brian Mutty assumed command of Expeditionary Strike Group 7/Task Group 76 during a ceremony aboard the expeditionary sea base USS John L. Canley off the coast of Singapore. He took over from Rear Adm. Tom Shultz, according to a news release Wednesday from the strike group.

Mutty also assumed responsibility for Task Force 78, which helps coordinate military, interagency and international partners across the Indo-Pacific.

“I am excited to join this exceptional team of Sailors and Marines and to build upon the culture of excellence Rear Adm. Shultz established,” Mutty said in the news release. “I look forward to working side-by-side with the Sailors and Marines

from the premier expeditionary strike group in the Pacific Fleet.”

The strike group gives the 7th Fleet its amphibious capabilities in the region, including integrated operations between the Navy and U.S. Marine Corps assets.

Its fleet includes the amphibious assault ship USS Tripoli and its expeditionary strike group and is responsible for missions that include humanitarian and disaster relief, training and combat, according to its website.

The Tripoli deployed in March to the Middle East under Central Command with 2,500 Marines of the 31st Marine Expeditionary Unit in support of Operation Epic Fury, the war against Iran.

Shultz will head to Stuttgart, Germany, where he’ll serve as the director of operations at U.S. European Command headquarters.

Mutty, of Portsmouth, Va., most recently served as assistant chief of staff for operations at Joint Force Command Naples, Italy.

Trump: Far-left Dems are communists

CQ-Roll Call

WASHINGTON — Victories in some Democratic primaries by far-left candidates have given President Donald Trump a new campaign-trail boogeyman amid his low poll numbers: communism.

“It’s becoming a communist party. These are not social ‘Dumocrats,’ these are hardcore, godless communists,” Trump said Friday, using a relatively new derisive nickname for members of the opposition party. “All communists are godless. They don’t believe in God.”

Speaking to a friendly crowd at the annual Faith & Freedom Coalition’s conference in Washington, D.C., he went so far as to declare the far-left candidates’ victories represented “the most serious threat to our country since its existence, in my opinion, 250 years ago — this is a major threat to our country.”

Those Trump remarks came three days after a pair of House Democrats from New York City lost reelection bids to challengers backed by New York City Mayor Zohran Mamdani.

Mamdani, a self-described democratic socialist, ran on a far-left, affordability platform last year, with three candidates he backed successfully pushing similar policy ideas during their primary campaigns.

The democratic socialists’ primary wins, collectively, have handed the president a new brush with which to try painting every Democratic incumbent and nominee as too left-leaning to truly represent average Americans.

Trump’s new attack lines, so far, have been one part economic at a time when just about every public opinion poll gives him low marks on economic issues. Some Republicans fear those

concerns could cost the GOP the House majority come November.

“Anybody who wants a house, don’t worry about it, just pick the house you want. Everybody gets free food. Everything is free from this point forward. Everyone’s going to vote for me. The problem is, after two or three years, the country is a disaster area,” Trump told the conservative crowd. “The country fails — they always do, it always does. It’s so easy to sell that first year, boy, you’re the most popular. ... But you’ll start living in squalor.

“There will be no food. There will be no housing. There will be no military. There will be no law and order. There will be no nothing,” he contended. “You’ll be a third-world inhabitant in every way — and everyone will suffer or die.”

The president renewed his communism allegations Mon-

day during an Oval Office exchange with reporters after CNN reported that community organizer Darializa Avila Chevalier, who won a primary in New York’s 13th District, once had a since-deleted social media account that contained posts expressing sympathy with communism, Marxism and Soviet figures like Vladimir Lenin, perhaps the leading architect of Russian communism.

“I think it’s the biggest threat to our nation there is — maybe since our founding, that includes World War I, World War II, Sept. 11, it includes the Pearl Harbor attack,” he said from behind the Resolute Desk. “I think this is the biggest threat to our nation.”

Trump’s new rhetorical bludgeon, however exaggerated, has continued his second administration’s eagerness to revive the country’s culture wars.

Some Guthrie ransom notes not legitimate

New York Daily News

Three ransom notes delivered after “Today” show host Savannah Guthrie’s mother, Nancy Guthrie, disappeared are not legitimate, according to a report.

The debunked messages include a pair of ransom notes received by media outlets in early February — just days after Guthrie was reported missing — as well as a third note that was sent out last week, Reuters reported. A second law enforcement source familiar with the matter also confirmed the FBI’s assessment, according to Reuters.

However, The Associated Press reported the FBI said Wednesday it’s still evaluating others that might be legitimate. The FBI did not specify how

many ransom notes have been received, other than saying “several.”

Guthrie, who at 84 is barely mobile and suffers from a heart condition, has not been seen or heard from since Jan. 31. She went out to dinner that night with her other daughter, Annie, who later dropped her off at her Tucson, Ariz., home between 9:30 and 9:45 p.m., police said.

The Guthrie matriarch was reported missing the following day, after she failed to show up for a viewing of remote church services as usual.

A subsequent search of the residence turned up Guthrie’s blood in the doorway, leading investigators to suspect foul play.

They have had few breaks in the case since.

Carroll rejects Trump ask to delay \$5M owed payout

New York Daily News

NEW YORK — President Donald Trump — having failed to convince the Supreme Court to let him fight a verdict holding him responsible for sexual assault — continues to drag his heels in coughing up the \$5 million he owes E. Jean Carroll, according to new court filings.

Writing late Tuesday to Manhattan Federal Court Judge Lewis Kaplan, who presided over the 2023 trial, Carroll’s lawyers said Trump had asked them to consent to a grace period while he mulled asking the Supreme Court to reconsider. Carroll’s team said no.

The nation’s highest court unanimously rejected the appeal Monday, with nary a dissent from its Trump-friendly conservative supermajority. The justices did not include a

reason for declining the case.

A Manhattan jury on May 9, 2023, determined Trump had sexually assaulted Carroll inside a dressing room at Bergdorf Goodman in 1996 and slandered her as a mentally unstable liar in various statements made in 2022.

Carroll, a former daytime talk show host and Elle columnist, provided extensive testimony about the violent attack she says occurred after a chance encounter at the store. Among 11 witnesses, she called friends she told in the aftermath as well as two women with accusations that Trump had sexually assaulted them in similarly spontaneous attacks. Trump skipped the trial to go golfing in Ireland.

The panel awarded Carroll \$5 million in compensatory and punitive damages.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

State takes step toward reintroducing grizzlies

CA SACRAMENTO — California on Tuesday moved a step closer to reintroducing grizzly bears, the quarter-ton predators that once roamed the Golden State but have been locally extinct for more than a century.

A bill to study the feasibility of bringing back the omnivorous animals passed the Assembly Water, Parks and Wildlife Committee 8-2. It passed the Senate on May 27.

The measure specifies that grizzlies would not be introduced to California unless a study shows they can be brought back safely for residents, livestock and pets. But it comes at a time when California is struggling to manage other predator populations — particularly those that, like the grizzlies, are protected from hunting and harassment by environmental laws.

The proposal to study grizzly reintroduction drew strong opposition from parts of the state where residents have experienced problems with wolves, mountain lions and black bears.

Trump reverses on aid for tornado-ravaged counties

DC WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump said late Tuesday that Michigan will receive \$32.1 million in federal disaster relief aid following tornadoes that resulted in four deaths and significant property damage in southwest Michigan in March.

Trump posted on social media that he had spoken to Gov. Gretchen Whitmer to inform her of the approval, and

“she was very grateful.” Whitmer’s office said she spoke to the president Tuesday night.

Whitmer on April 1 had asked Trump to declare a major disaster in three southwest Michigan counties — Branch, Cass and St. Joseph — that were hit hard by the March 6 storms, seeking federal individual assistance grants to help with home repairs, temporary housing and other recovery costs for those who sustained uninsured or underinsured losses.

State will receive 2M eggs per a settlement

MD BALTIMORE — Maryland will receive more than 2 million eggs for food banks and community organizations as part of a multistate settlement accusing three major egg producers of illegally coordinating to drive up prices, Attorney General Anthony G. Brown announced Tuesday.

The settlement, reached by Brown and a bipartisan coalition of state attorneys general with the U.S. Department of Justice, also requires Cal-Maine Foods, Versova/Centrum and Hickman’s Egg Ranch to pay a combined \$3.3 million and implement measures aimed at preventing future antitrust violations. Maryland will receive more than \$120,000 tied to the alleged conduct.

The investigation found the companies coordinated from June 2022 through March 2025 to influence daily egg price quotes published by Urner Barry, a benchmark pricing service used in egg supply contracts, according to officials. The companies allegedly communicated about bidding strategies and

submitted higher bids, which affected the pricing index used by retailers and ultimately consumers.

Ex-corrections officer to plead to receiving bribes

SC COLUMBIA — A former South Carolina corrections officer, two inmates and four other people were arrested after investigators uncovered their participation in a massive bribery scheme, according to the U.S. Attorney’s Office for South Carolina.

Lowanda Atkinson, 52, of Kershaw County, will plead guilty to one count of conspiracy to commit honest services wire fraud, following her role as a corrections officer at Lee Correctional Institution, where she collected more than \$550,000 in bribes, according to a news release.

Atkinson is accused of accepting more than a half a million dollars from inmate Jason Brown, former inmate Larry Williamson and Brown’s family and associates in exchange for smuggling contraband into Lee, including cellphones and accessories, tobacco and marijuana, the release said.

State again has highest food stamp error rate

AK ANCHORAGE — Alaska’s federal food assistance program had the highest error rate in the nation for the fourth consecutive year, according to data recently published by federal officials.

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, formerly known as food stamps, serves more than 66,000 Alaskans, or roughly 9% of the state’s popula-

tion.

Alaska’s highest-in-the-nation 2025 error rate is based on an analysis conducted by the U.S. Department of Agriculture Food and Nutrition Service. It coincided with Alaska’s ongoing failure to process SNAP benefit applications on time in the majority of cases. The Alaska Division of Public Assistance regularly takes weeks to process applications that should be processed in a matter of days.

Alaska erred in 23% of payments made in 2025, according to the federal data. That is the lowest error rate Alaska has reported since 2019, but still the highest in the nation. Alaska’s error rate was 57% in 2022, 60% in 2023 and 25% in 2024.

Odor leads to discovery of rotting corpse

NY NEW YORK — A rotting human corpse was found stuffed in the chimney of a Queens public school Tuesday, police said.

An exterminator investigating a foul odor at PS/IS 113, the Anthony Pranzo School, in Glendale found the remains in the chimney just before 9 a.m. Police are now trying to identify the adult male.

School ended for the summer on Friday and no students or school staff were inside the building when the grisly discovery was made, police said.

Contractors had been working on the school building over the last few days, a police source said. Police are now trying to determine if all the workers have been accounted for.

City Medical Examiner workers removed the body and will determine how the man died.

— From wire reports

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US defeats Bosnia, advances to round of 16

Associated Press

SANTA CLARA, Calif. — Malik Tillman stepped up for a free kick with a bloody sock and a new right boot after being stepped on by an opponent as the United States scrambled to protect a one-goal lead, down a man in a World Cup knockout round.

Tillman delivered the goal of his life, and one of the biggest ever by a U.S. man at the World Cup, sending this American soccer fairy tale into the round of 16.

"I've been dreaming about this game," Tillman said after scoring the final goal in a 2-0 victory over Bosnia-Herzegovina on Wednesday night. "I've been dreaming about maybe taking a free kick and scoring a free kick. I've practiced this in training and I think today I showed what I can do."

The win set up a Monday matchup in Seattle against Bel-

gium as the U.S. hopes to make a deep run on home soil. The Red Devils beat the Americans 2-1 in extra time at 2014's round of 16.

"It's about to keep dreaming," said U.S. coach Mauricio Pochettino, who belted out "Take Me Home, Country Roads" as it played over the public-address system after 10 minutes of stoppage time. "In football all is possible if you believe."

Folarin Balogun put the Americans ahead in the 45th minute with his third goal of the World Cup, then was sent off in the 64th for a red card.

U.S. star Christian Pulisic had a goal disallowed for offside in the 78th, and Tillman helped seal the win when he curled in a free kick that got over the wall and on target from just outside the box in the 82nd. The ball went off diving goalkeeper Nikola Vasilj's right hand and in despite the pain in Tillman's bloody right foot from being

stepped on.

Balogun dominated the first half and scored in the 45th minute. The Americans had to scramble after his foul for awkwardly stepping on Tarik Muharemovic and preserved the shutout despite playing short-handed for more than 30 minutes.

"It felt so comfortable, even down to 10 men," captain Tim Ream said. "That's the way you want to feel. You don't want to have that panic set in. You want have that calm and focus and we had that."

Pochettino became the first U.S. coach with three World Cup victories, and the Americans gained just their second World Cup knockout round win. They made it to the semifinals in the first tournament in 1930 by winning their group and won a round of 16 matchup against Mexico in 2002.

Balogun leads the U.S. with

three goals, but will miss the Belgium match because of an automatic suspension for the red card, assessed by Brazilian referee Raphael Claus after a video review. Balogun stepped on an ankle of Muharemovic, apparently not intentionally.

"Obviously the ref made a decision that he made, but I think it's questionable," midfielder Weston McKennie said. "I think there's been many other plays like that throughout the tournament on other players that a card wasn't given at all. It's disappointing."

Balogun matched Landon Donovan in 2010 for the second-most goals by an American in a World Cup, behind only Bert Patenaude's four in 1930.

"Of course he's a great player," Tillman said. "We have great players who can replace him, and give the best they can, and hopefully score some nice goals as well."

Belgium rallies to tie, defeats Senegal on penalty kick

Associated Press

SEATTLE — Belgium overturned a two-goal deficit and scored from the penalty spot deep into extra time to beat Senegal 3-2 on Wednesday in the biggest comeback of the World Cup so far.

Senegal held a 2-0 lead with just 5 minutes of regulation time remaining, but late goals by Romelu Lukaku and Youri Tielemans pushed the round of 32 match into extra time.

Tielemans completed Belgium's comeback by converting a penalty in the 125th minute of the game — the latest goal in World Cup history.

"Being part of this comeback is a proud moment because I scored the last two goals to give the team the win today. I'm very proud of that to be able to help the team to score goals and bring us over the line," Tielemans said.

He was fouled with only seconds to go and with a penalty shootout looming, and the referee awarded the spot kick after a video review, ignoring protests from the Senegal team.

"I do not want to interpret the decision. We all have different interpretations when it

comes to awarding a penalty," Senegal coach Pape Thiaw said. "I'd rather not comment, not interpreting the referee's decision."

The win for Belgium marked the second time in the last 11 World Cups that a team trailed by two or more goals in the knockout round and advanced. Belgium also did so in a 3-2 victory over Japan in the round of 16 at the 2018 tournament.

"Senegal deserved to win," Belgium coach Rudi Garcia said. "But I am happy it was us."

Many of the key players from the Belgium team that finished in third place in Russia in 2018 were instrumental to Wednesday's victory. Lukaku, who leads his nation in goals scored, came off the bench to get Belgium back into the match by scoring in the 86th minute, setting the scene for Tielemans to force extra time.

"It is a cruel loss, as we were good in the game," Thiaw said. "We had the advantage. We were leading 2-0. However, a football match is not an 85-minute one. Belgium came back, and we were not able to deal with that ... We must congratulate Belgium

as they progress."

Belgium is back in the round of 16 for the third time in four tournaments. The team reached the quarterfinals in 2014 and the semifinals in 2018, but failed to get out of the group stage four years ago in Qatar.

The Belgians will next face the United States on Monday in Seattle.

Senegal long appeared to be heading toward the round of 16. Habib Diarra scored in the first half and Ismaïla Sarr made it 2-0 at the start of the second. It was his fourth goal of the World Cup, and one of the most beautiful of the tournament. Sarr made a perfect first touch off his chest on a long ball from Moussa Niakhate and then sent his shot past Belgium goalkeeper Thibaut Courtois.

Courtois, who was playing in his fourth World Cup, then made three key saves to keep Senegal from increasing its lead.

Senegal defender Krépin Diatta said Belgium should not have been allowed to get back into the game.

"It shouldn't have happened. You have to defend your box and you have to be the boss of your box," he said. "We suffered, but we have to go on. It's a pity."

Celtics trade Brown to 76ers in blockbuster

Associated Press

Jaylen Brown's time in Boston has come to a surprising end, with the Celtics deciding to trade him to one of their most storied rivals.

Brown—the 2024 NBA Finals MVP, a five-time All-Star and the league's fourth-leading scorer this past season—is getting traded by Boston to the Philadelphia 76ers, a person with knowledge of the deal's terms said Wednesday.

The Celtics getting Paul George, along with a slew of draft capital that could become two first-round picks and two second-round picks, said the person who spoke to The Associated Press on the condition of anonymity because the trade does not yet have the required league approvals.

ESPN first reported the trade agreement, and the terms were later confirmed by The Boston Globe.

Add this move to the list of blockbuster moves across the NBA so far this offseason. LeBron James is leaving the Los

Angeles Lakers as a free agent, and now this trade joins a long list of moves that involve All-Star-caliber players—like Giannis Antetokounmpo going from Milwaukee to Miami, Kawhi Leonard and Brandon Ingram headlining a swap between Toronto and Los Angeles Clippers, and Ja Morant getting traded to Portland by Memphis.

It's a move that breaks up what has been one of the league's most successful 1-2 punches in Brown and Jayson Tatum, who helped carry the Celtics to the 2024 NBA title.

Tatum missed most of this past season while recovering from an Achilles tear that happened during the 2025 playoffs, meaning Brown had to carry even more of the load for Boston.

It seemed, though, that Brown has felt underappreciated, especially after it became known that the Celtics had included him in trade talks with the Bucks when Antetokounmpo was on the market.

"Nobody has won more combined regular-season and

playoff games since I entered the league 10 years ago," Brown posted on social media over the weekend. He's right: Boston has won 523 games with Brown in the lineup, including playoff contests, which is six more than Denver has won with Nikola Jokic over that span.

Brown now gets to be part of a squad in Philadelphia alongside guard Tyrese Maxey and center Joel Embiid—someone who Brown recently called a flopper on a livestream.

Brown, Maxey (the league's No. 5 scorer this past season) and Embiid (a two-time NBA scoring champion) could become a positively frightening trio for the 76ers, and the Celtics deciding to play a role in creating such a triumvirate only adds to the intrigue surrounding why they wanted to trade Brown in the first place.

The trade ends a tremendously disappointing two-year stint for George, who was traded with two years left on a four-year, \$212 million free-agent contract. The 36-year-old George

never approached his nine-time All-Star form in Philadelphia and his tenure was marred by a 25-game suspension last season for flunking a drug test.

He averaged just 16.7 points in his two seasons with the Sixers after topping the 20-point mark in nine straight seasons with Indiana, Oklahoma City and the Clippers.

Brown is the latest big name brought in to team with All-Stars and franchise cornerstones Embiid and Maxey. Brown can try and lead Philadelphia to its first title since 1983, a feat a steady string of stars from Ben Simmons to James Harden to George failed to do when paired with Embiid and Maxey to make a Big Three.

This was the first blockbuster pulled off under new team president Mike Gansey, who replaced the fired Daryl Morey.

"Philadelphia is a good basketball team," Brown said after the Game 7 loss to the 76ers.

His job now will be to make that good basketball team even better.

Leafs land goalie Bobrovsky as Sharks support Celebrini

Associated Press

New general manager John Chayka's transformation of the Toronto Maple Leafs isn't dependent on youth alone.

Days after selecting play-making 18-year-old forward Gavin McKenna with the first pick in the NHL draft, Chayka added veteran depth in a series of moves highlighted by the signing of goalie Sergei Bobrovsky to a three-year, \$21 million contract as free agency opened on Wednesday.

At nearly 38, Bobrovsky is a two-time Cup champion and leaves Florida to fill what's been a long-unaddressed need in Toronto.

"Sergei's a real game-changer for us in terms of the stability, the consistency, the durability," Chayka said. "We think he's

really motivated to come into the largest hockey market in the world, and it's important to him that he finish his career strong."

Among the other more active teams was San Jose. The Sharks signed free agent defenseman Jacob Trouba and forward Mason Marchment, while also acquiring defenseman Darnell Nurse in a trade with Edmonton.

Utah signed former New York Islanders captain Anders Lee to a three-year, \$16.2 million contract and acquired Vincent Trocheck from the New York Rangers as the Mammoth muscled up their front line.

Aside from Lee, and with veteran forward Patrick Kane and defenseman John Carlson still available, Bobrovsky was considered among the most prized free

agents on the market.

"Things happen where decisions get made and people move on. It's part of our game. We have nothing but appreciation for Sergei," said Panthers general manager Bill Zito, who this past week had traded for goalies Jacob Markstrom and Akira Schmid.

Though nearly a decade removed from winning the Vezina Trophy for a second time as the NHL's top goalie with Columbus in 2017, Bobrovsky represents an upgrade for a Maple Leafs team that's gone through a carousel of netminders, including five alone last season. Toronto is attempting to retool on the fly with a new coach after finishing last in the Atlantic Division.

More than 11 hours into free agency, Tampa Bay signed defen-

seman John Carlson to a two-year, \$17 million contract, according to a person with knowledge of the deal who spoke to The Associated Press on the condition of anonymity because it had not been announced.

San Jose stocks up

The Sharks acquired Nurse in a deal that sent defensive prospects Shakir Mukhamadullin and Zack Sharp to Edmonton. Trouba signed a four-year, \$33 million deal and Marchment signed a five-year, \$33.75 million contract.

After San Jose enjoyed a 19-win jump in the standings and barely missed the playoffs, Trouba called being part of a team on the rise behind Macklin Celebrini one of the biggest reasons he signed with the Sharks.

Orioles top White Sox in Kremer's return

Associated Press

BALTIMORE — Dean Kremer pitched six impressive innings in his return from a quad injury, and the Baltimore Orioles avoided a sweep Wednesday with a 6-1 victory over the Chicago White Sox.

Kremer (1-1) allowed a run and four hits, and Tyler O'Neill homered in Baltimore's four-run fifth. Noah Schultz (2-5) no-hit the Orioles for four innings but retired only one more batter before being pulled.

Leody Taveras also went deep for Baltimore.

Sam Antonacci led off the game with a home run off Kremer, who was pitching for the first time since April 18. The AL Central-leading White Sox, who had taken the first two games of the series, didn't do much more after that big swing.

O'Neill — who made a diving catch in right field with two on and two out in the fourth — tied it at 1 with a drive to left in the fifth. After a strikeout and a walk, Blaze Alexander hit a single. That was it for Schultz, who had gone through the order twice.

Phillies 10, Pirates 6: Paul Skenes (6-8) lasted four innings, allowing six hits and a season-high seven earned runs. He has not won in his last nine starts, losing six decisions in that stretch.

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The defending NL Cy Young Award winner's first loss in this slide came at PNC Park on May 17 at the hands of Wheeler and the Phillies by 6-0. He didn't allow a run that day until the fifth inning. This time, the Phillies didn't wait that long.

Pirates third baseman Nick Gonzales fielded a bases-loaded grounder in the second inning and had a routine force play at the plate, but he fired the ball off runner Alec Bohm's hand for an

error and two runs. Turner hit the next pitch into the seats for his third homer in as many games and a 5-0 lead.

Tigers 6, Yankees 2 (11): The New York Yankees' losing streak stretched to seven, their longest in three years, as Camilo Doval forced in the go-ahead run with a bases-loaded walk to Spencer Torkelson in a four-run 11th inning that gave Detroit a road victory.

New York rallied with two runs in the ninth and stranded runners at second and third in the 10th when Keider Montero (5-5) struck out Ali Sánchez.

New York is on its longest losing streak since a nine-game skid from Aug. 12-22, 2023. The Yankees, missing Aaron Judge, Giancarlo Stanton and Trent Grishman, had seven hits and totaled just 23 in their last six games. New York has lost 11 of 14 and is 12-15 since Judge fractured a rib.

Guardians 9, Rangers 4: David Fry and Austin Hedges hit home runs, and host Cleveland defeated Texas to snap the Rangers' six-game winning streak.

Rookie Chase DeLauter added three hits for the Guardians, who host the AL Central-leading Chicago White Sox in a pivotal four-game series starting on Thursday.

It was the sixth time this season Cleveland has scored at least nine runs in a game, a rare offensive outburst for a team that scored the second-fewest runs in June (87).

Cubs 23, Padres 3: Dansby Swanson hit three home runs, including a grand slam, Michael Conforto homered twice and host Chicago pounded San Diego.

Swanson had a career-high eight RBIs — second-most in major league history from a player batting ninth. Seiya Suzuki, Pete Crow-Armstrong and Michael Busch also homered for the Cubs, who scored their most runs in a home game since 1977.

Blue Jays 9, Mets 3: Nolan

McLean and three relievers combined on a six-hitter, Francisco Alvarez and Luis Torrens both hit solo home runs and visiting New York beat Toronto.

Brooks Raley pitched the seventh, Luke Weaver worked the eighth and Devin Williams finished for his 12th save in 13 chances.

Braves 5, Cardinals 1: Nathan Church hit a three-run homer, Nelson Velázquez added a solo shot and Matthew Liberatore threw five strong innings as visiting St. Louis beat NL East-leading Atlanta.

Velázquez started a four-run fourth inning with his third homer of the year — a 444-foot shot to center field that tied the game at 1.

Church followed later in the inning with his sixth homer of the season, a three-run shot, to increase the lead to 4-1.

Rays 4, Royals 0: Junior Caminero homered in his sixth straight game to match the Tampa Bay record, hitting a two-run shot in the first first inning to help the visiting Rays beat Kansas City for their seventh victory in a row.

Caminero hit his 24th homer on the first pitch he saw from Seth Lugo (3-6) following Jonathan Aranda's one-out single. Caminero tied Carlos Peña's team record set in 2010.

Twins 8, Astros 3: Taj Bradley struck out 11 to tie his career high, Josh Bell, Kody Clemens and Luke Keaschall homered and visiting Minnesota beat Houston.

Bradley (7-3) allowed a run and four hits and walked four in five innings. After Jose Altuve scored from third base when Isaac Paredes grounded into a double play in the first inning, Bradley recorded 10 consecutive outs by strikeout.

Rockies 6, Marlins 3: Mickey Moniak finished a single shy of the cycle, Hunter Goodman hit a two-run homer to cap a four-run fifth inning and host Colorado beat Miami to snap an eight-

game losing streak against the Marlins.

Moniak homered for a second straight game when he hit the sixth pitch from Max Meyer (9-1) for his 14th of the season to put the Rockies up 1-0 in the first.

Brewers 4, Reds 2: Garrett Mitchell tripled in the go-ahead run in the seventh inning to cap a four-hit night to help NL Central Division-leading host Milwaukee beat Cincinnati.

The Brewers (53-31) moved a season-high 22 games over .500 with their sixth straight victory over the Reds this season.

Athletics 7, Dodgers 1: Shea Langeliers hit his 20th home run and the host Athletics defeated Los Angeles to stop a four-game losing streak, their longest this season.

Jonah Heim and Alike Williams also homered for the A's. J.T. Ginn (7-4) allowed one run and three hits in six innings to win for the fourth time in his last five starts. Ginn walked five and struck out four.

Giants 6, Diamondbacks 4: Trevor McDonald pitched six scoreless innings, Victor Bericoto hit a two-run homer and visiting San Francisco beat Arizona.

Heliot Ramos had a solo homer and an RBI triple to help the Giants snap an eight-game skid against Arizona. San Francisco avoided being swept by the Diamondbacks for the third time this year and its first 0-9 start to a season against a single opponent in franchise history.

Nationals 10, Red Sox 2: James Woods belted a three-run homer for his 22nd of the season, Andrés Chaparro and Nasim Núñez each hit their first and visiting Washington beat Boston at steamy Fenway Park to take the series.

Chaparro's was a two-run shot, and Luis García Jr. added a pinch-hit, two-run single as the Nationals rebounded to close a 4-2 trip after losing the series opener on Monday.