

NATO allies face threats on several fronts

By JOHN VANDIVER
Stars and Stripes

NATO members are stepping up intelligence sharing to counter an intensified Russian sabotage campaign against targets in Europe, the alliance's top official said Wednesday as heads of state gathered in Washington for high-level talks.

At NATO's summit in Washington, leaders from member states are poised to approve a variety of measures aimed at bolstering support for Ukraine, including a more detailed path for the war-torn country to gain eventual membership in the security pact, alliance Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg told reporters.

Allies are also working on defense plans to ensure enough forces are in place to counter any potential Russian aggression, he said. But while there is no sign of an imminent threat from the Russian military on NATO territory, the Kremlin is using other means to launch at-

tacks, Stoltenberg said.

"What we see is a constant threat of cyberattacks, of sabotage or different types of hostile actions against NATO allies. But short of military attacks," he said.

For now, Russia's military is too preoccupied with the war in Ukraine to pose an immediate conventional military threat, Stoltenberg said.

But security concerns are growing in Europe, where U.S. military bases were recently placed on heightened alert in connection with potential threats to installations across the Continent. While the Pentagon has not specified the nature of the threat, CNN on Tuesday reported the United States received information that Russian-backed actors were considering sabotage attacks against American military personnel and facilities.

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken said allies are "acutely aware" of increased risks.

In Europe, "we have seen attacks in recent months, arson attacks, sabotage attacks, attempted assassinations, misinformation, disinformation, cyber threats," he said on the sidelines of the summit. "These are not one-offs."

Stoltenberg declined to comment on the specifics of the threats to U.S. bases, but did say allies are taking steps to deal with the Russian aggression.

"What I can say is that we have seen a pattern of increased Russian hostile acts against NATO allies over the last month organized by the Russian security services," he said, pointing to instances of arson attempts and "other malign actions."

The actions are part of a Russian intimidation campaign aimed at wrecking allied support for Ukraine, Stoltenberg said.

In response to the attacks, allies are sharing more intelligence, which has led to a series of arrests in the United King-

dom, Poland, Germany and in some Baltic countries.

In Washington, allies have announced a new round of support for Ukraine, including more air defense systems from the U.S. and several other members. Also, allies for the first time are pledging to strengthen their defense industry capacities as the military alliance readies for a protracted war in Ukraine that could last years longer.

National security adviser Jake Sullivan said the U.S. is investing \$75 billion in its defense industrial base, but is relying on collective pledges to prioritize production of the most vital defense equipment needed for a potential conflict.

"NATO can, NATO will and NATO is rising to meet this challenge without disturbing or distorting our national economies the way Russia has," he told industry leaders gathered Tuesday for a U.S. Chamber of Commerce event.

Pressure on Biden builds after Pelosi interview

The Washington Post

In a Wednesday morning interview, former House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., repeatedly urged President Joe Biden to make a decision about whether to stay in the presidential race, despite the president's insistence that he should remain at the top of the Democratic ticket.

"It's up to the president to decide if he is going to run. We're all encouraging him to make that decision, because time is running short," Pelosi said Wednesday on MSNBC's "Morning Joe." "He is beloved,

he is respected and people want him to make that decision."

Biden so far has been adamant that he should continue running for reelection, amid increasingly public concerns within the party about his candidacy after his halting performance against Donald Trump in the first debate last month. Since the debate, Biden has held campaign rallies, sat for an interview with ABC News, sent a lengthy letter to congressional lawmakers, campaigned in Pennsylvania and agreed to hold a news conference Thurs-

day, in the hopes of quelling doubts about his ability to serve a second term.

Biden and his team have also met with key party leaders — including Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, both of New York, as well as members of the Congressional Black Caucus — who have voiced strong support for his candidacy. As of Wednesday morning, only 10 Democratic lawmakers have publicly called on Biden to drop out of the 2024 race.

But Pelosi's remarks in her

television appearance Wednesday suggested that Biden had yet to make a final decision about whether to continue running. Pressed on whether she wanted him to stay in the race, Pelosi said: "I want him to do whatever he decides to do. And that's — that's the way it is. Whatever he decides, we go with."

Pelosi also implied that she had told Democratic lawmakers to refrain from voicing any opinions about Biden's candidacy until after the NATO summit Biden is hosting in Washington this week.

Sailor tried to search Biden's health records

BY CAITLYN BURCHETT
Stars and Stripes

A junior sailor attempted to look up President Joe Biden's health records in a military database in February, the Navy announced Tuesday.

The unidentified sailor, who was assigned to Navy Medicine Readiness and Training Command at Fort Belvoir, Va., searched the name "Joseph Biden" in Military Health System Genesis, an electronic government health record database,

according to Cmdr. Tim Hawkins, a spokesman for the Navy Chief of Information.

The sailor searched for Biden's medical records "out of curiosity," Hawkins said.

A co-worker reported the breach of the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act, known commonly as HIPAA, on Feb. 26 to the Fort Belvoir command. Naval Criminal Investigative Services investigated the breach, which was concluded April 24.

"The record the sailor accessed was not the electronic record of the president of the United States. The MHS Genesis system is a secure health system, and at no time was the president's personal information compromised," Hawkins said.

The sailor was administratively punished and continues to serve in the Navy, ABC News reported, citing an official.

Air Force Maj. Gen. Pat Ryder, the Pentagon's press secre-

tary, said Tuesday that the Navy notified the defense secretary and White House officials in February of the incident. Ryder directed further questions to the Navy.

"The bottom line is that [the Navy] confirmed that at no time was the president's personal information compromised, and that the record that the sailor inappropriately accessed was not the electronic health record of the president of the United States," Ryder said.

Houthis resume attacks on shipping in Mideast

Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates — A suspected attack by Yemen's Houthi rebels targeted a ship in the narrow Bab el-Mandeb Strait on Wednesday, as authorities acknowledged the rebels launched their longest-range attack yet on a U.S.-flagged vessel near the Arabian Sea.

The sudden burst of attacks by the Houthis come after an unexplained pause of a week and a half by the rebels. The rebels may be regrouping ahead of the arrival of a new U.S. aircraft carrier to the region after the USS Dwight D. Eisenhower began heading home.

The attack Wednesday targeted a ship south of Mocha, the British military's United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations center said. The captain reported explosions off the ship's side.

The "vessel and all crew are safe," the UKMTO said. "The vessel is proceeding to its next port of call."

The Houthis have been attacking ships in the Red Sea corridor since November. The rebels did not immediately claim Wednesday's attack, though they often

don't do so for hours or even days.

On Tuesday, the Houthis said they launched missiles at a U.S.-flagged container ship in the Gulf of Aden. The Joint Maritime Information Center, which is overseen by the U.S. Navy, identified the ship as the Maersk Sentosa and warned it was the longest-distance attack seen from Yemen by the Houthis since November.

Late on Tuesday night, the Houthis issued a broad claim of responsibility for three attacks, which included the Maersk Sentosa. Maersk, a Danish firm that is the world's biggest shipping company, confirmed to The Associated Press that its vessel had been targeted.

"No injuries to the crew or damage to the ship or cargo were reported," the shipping company said in the statement. "The vessel is currently continuing her voyage towards her next port of call."

The rebels have targeted more than 70 vessels by firing missiles and drones in their campaign that has killed four sailors. They seized one vessel and sank two since November.

Gaza pier to briefly go back into service, then shut down

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The pier built by the U.S. military to bring humanitarian aid to Gaza was to be reinstalled Wednesday to be used for several days, but then the plan is to pull it out permanently, several U.S. officials said.

It would deal the final blow to a project long plagued by bad weather, security uncertainties and difficulties getting food into the hands of starving Palestinians.

The officials said the goal is to clear whatever aid has piled up in Cyprus and on the floating dock offshore and get it to the secure area on the beach in Gaza. Once that has been done, the Army will dismantle the pier and depart. The officials spoke on condition of anonymity because final details are still being worked out.

Officials had hoped the pier would provide a critical flow of aid to starving residents in Gaza as the nine-month-long war drags on. But while more than 19.4 million pounds of food has gotten into Gaza via the pier, the project has been hampered by persistent heavy seas and stalled deliveries due to ongoing security threats as Israeli troops continue their of-

fensive against Hamas in Gaza.

The decision comes as Israeli troops make another push deeper into Gaza City, which Hamas says could threaten long-running negotiations over a cease-fire and hostage release, after the two sides had appeared to have narrowed the gaps in recent days.

U.S. troops removed the pier on June 28 because of bad weather and moved it to the port of Ashdod in Israel. But distribution of the aid had already stopped due to the security concerns.

The United Nations suspended deliveries from the pier on June 9, a day after the Israeli military used the area around it for airlifts after a hostage rescue that killed more than 270 Palestinians.

As a result, aid brought through the pier into the secure area on the beach piled up for days while talks continued between the U.N. and Israel. More recently, the World Food Program hired a contractor to move the aid from the beach to prevent the food and other supplies from spoiling.

The Pentagon said all along that the pier was only a temporary project, designed to prod Israel into opening and allowing aid to flow better through land routes.

Lessons learned in Red Sea deployment

By ALISON BATH
Stars and Stripes

NAPLES, Italy — The experiences of sailors who spent months fighting Houthi militant threats in the Red Sea at operational levels unseen since World War II will shape the next generation of naval warriors, a senior Navy official says.

That knowledge, gleaned from nearly seven months in “the crucible of combat,” will be used well beyond the Middle East, said Rear Adm. Kavon Hakimzadeh, commander of Carrier Strike Group 2.

“The lessons we have learned ... apply to naval warfare anywhere,” Hakimzadeh told *Stars and Stripes* on Monday. “These crewmembers in the strike group are going to be the next generation of instructors, the next generation of assessors, the next generations of trainers.”

It’s too early to say how sailors will process their experience into lessons for others, Hakimzadeh said.

But during the historic deployment, strike group members grew adept at compartmentalizing stress so they could remain focused on their jobs. They also faced multiple scenarios that called for a rapid threat assessment and made very quick decisions on how to counter threats using different weapon systems, he said.

They frequently worked with engineers and support person-

nel stateside to brainstorm how to stay ahead of ever-changing Houthi tactics and capabilities, Hakimzadeh said.

They also saved the lives of 25 mariners from two different ships struck by missiles over two days in June, while many other vessels in the area ignored those calls for help, he said.

However, the priority now is to ensure that sailors have ample time to rest and reflect upon coming home.

“I want them to make sure they have thought through the story they are going to pass on to the folks that follow them,” said Hakimzadeh, who assumed command of the strike group in June.

The Dwight D. Eisenhower Carrier Strike Group is transiting the Atlantic Ocean as it returns to the U.S. after nearly nine months on deployment in the Middle East and eastern Mediterranean Sea.

About seven of those months were spent defending commercial and military vessels in the Red Sea, Bab-el-Mandeb and the Gulf of Aden against Houthi drones and missiles.

During that time, the group’s cruiser and destroyers launched more than 180 missiles from their vertical launch systems in self-defense or as pre-planned strikes, Hakimzadeh said.

The group’s air wing expended 60 air-to-air missiles and released 420 air-to-surface weapons. All told, the strike group

completed more than 13,800 flights totaling about 31,500 hours, he said.

“The numbers and varieties of weapon expenditures are for the most part unprecedented, especially from the surface ships,” said Hakimzadeh, who noted that the air wing numbers were about 1.5 times those expected during a full deployment. “That hasn’t happened before.”

As a result, the aircraft carrier USS Dwight D. Eisenhower received a combat action ribbon in April for performance under fire, among other awards. Six other Navy ships, including strike group members USS Philippine Sea, USS Gravely and USS Mason, also earned the ribbon.

Still, those efforts and those of other countries participating in the U.S.-led Operation Prosperity Guardian haven’t restored confidence among many commercial shippers.

In March, officials aboard Eisenhower acknowledged that the number of transits of container ships through the Red Sea had dropped considerably since the Iran-backed group began its attacks in November.

The Kiel Institute for the World Economy estimated in a July 2 report that the average daily number of container ships traveling through the Red Sea had declined 70.1% from the previous year.

Even so, thousands of ships — many under military escort —

have safely transited the waterway since January.

However, Houthi militant attacks continue. For example, a June 12 missile and surface drone attack on a Greek-owned coal carrier saw the vessel sink six days later.

The lack of reassurance among commercial shippers is due to “the Pentagon’s mostly defensive strategy, not to the operators in the Eisenhower task force,” said James Holmes, chair of the maritime strategy program at the Naval War College in Newport, R.I. “They did their job.”

The deployment demonstrated the effectiveness of several weapons that weren’t previously used in combat, including missiles like the SM-6, AGM-88E AARGM and AGM-154C JSOW, according to a strike group statement.

The success of the new weapons was particularly notable against evolving threats, such as the Houthis’ ballistic missiles, Holmes pointed out.

The strike group also saw the first air-to-air engagement of a hostile aerial drone by a U.S. warship, first air-to-air engagement from an EA-18G Growler and use of the first AGM-114K Hellfire missile in combat engagement, according to the statement.

“Our ships took no hits, and that’s attributable not just to weapons and sensors but to the skill and elan of the crews using them,” Holmes said.

Court date set for soldier who crossed into N. Korea

By ROSE L. THAYER
Stars and Stripes

AUSTIN, Texas — A soldier charged with desertion for running into North Korea last year will have his first preliminary hearing in court in Texas next week where his lawyers plan to present the results of a mental competency evaluation.

Pvt. Travis King, 24, faces four charges for his July 2023 sprint from South Korea across the Demilitarized Zone into North Korea, where he stayed until the United States and Sweden negotiated his return in September 2023, according to court documents and the Defense Department.

In the months since charges were announced against him, King’s attorneys requested he undergo a psychological evaluation, which was performed by a team from Walter Reed National Military Medical Center in Bethesda, Md., said Frank Rosenblatt, an attorney for King.

Rosenblatt is a former Army

attorney who previously served as the lead military lawyer for Army Sgt. Bowe Bergdahl, who in 2017 faced a court-martial for desertion for leaving his base in Afghanistan in 2009. He was captured by the Taliban and held until May 2014.

The evidentiary hearing will occur July 16 at Fort Bliss.

US disrupts Russian disinformation bot farm

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — A Russian propaganda campaign backed by the Kremlin that spread on-line disinformation in the United States and was boosted by artificial intelligence has been disrupted, the Justice Department said Tuesday.

U.S. officials described the internet operation as part of an ongoing effort to sow discord in the U.S. through the creation of fictitious social media profiles that purport to belong to authentic Americans but are actually designed to advance the aims of the

Russian government, including by spreading disinformation about its war with Ukraine.

U.S. officials said the scheme was organized in 2022 after a senior editor at RT, a Russian-state-funded media organization that has registered with DOJ as a foreign agent, helped develop technology for a so-called social media bot farm. It received support and financial approval of the Kremlin, with an officer of Russia's Federal Security Service leading a private intelligence organization that promoted disinformation on so-

cial media through a network of fake accounts. The RT press office did not respond directly to a question about the allegations.

The disruption of the bot farm comes as U.S. officials have raised alarms about the potential for AI technology to impact this year's elections and amid ongoing concerns that foreign influence campaigns by adversaries could sway the opinions of unsuspecting voters, as happened during the 2016 presidential campaign when Russians launched a huge but hidden social media trolling campaign

aimed in part at helping Republican Donald Trump defeat Democrat Hillary Clinton.

"Today's actions represent a first in disrupting a Russian-sponsored Generative AI-enhanced social media bot farm," FBI Director Christopher Wray said in a statement. "Russia intended to use this bot farm to disseminate AI-generated foreign disinformation, scaling their work with the assistance of AI to undermine our partners in Ukraine and influence geopolitical narratives favorable to the Russian government."

Millions of Houston residents still without power after Beryl

Associated Press

HOUSTON — The return of searing heat in the Houston area has deepened the misery for people still without power after Hurricane Beryl left residents in search of places to cool off and fuel up as the extended outages strained one of the nation's largest cities.

More than 1.7 million homes and businesses in Texas lacked electricity Wednesday morning, down from a peak of over 2.7 million on Monday, according to PowerOutage.us. State officials faced questions over whether the power utility that covers much of the area had sufficiently prepared.

Texas Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick said a sports and event complex would be used to temporarily take up to 250 hospital patients who are awaiting discharge but cannot be released to homes with no power.

Beryl, which made landfall in Texas early Monday as a Category 1 hurricane, has been blamed for at least seven U.S. deaths — one in Louisiana and six in Texas — and at least 11 in the Caribbean. It weakened as it moved deeper into the United States.

In the Houston area, Beryl compounded and repeated the

misery of May, when storms killed eight people and left nearly 1 million without power.

High temperatures Tuesday climbed into the 90s with humidity that made it feel even hotter. Similar heat and humidity were expected Wednesday. The National Weather Service described the conditions as potentially dangerous, given the lack of power and air conditioning.

People coped as best they could. Kyuta Allen took her family to a Houston community center to cool down and use the internet.

"During the day you can have the doors open, but at night you've got to board up and lock up — lock yourself like into a sauna," she said.

An executive for CenterPoint Energy, which covers much of the Houston area, defended the utility's preparation and response.

"From my perspective, to have a storm pass at 3 p.m. in the afternoon, have those crews come in in the late evening, and have everything ready by 5 a.m. to go out and get out and start the workforce is rather impressive, because we're talking about thousands of crews," said Brad Tutunjan, vice president of regulatory policy.

Las Vegas on track for fifth straight day over 115 degrees

Associated Press

LAS VEGAS — Used to shrugging off the heat, Las Vegas residents are now eyeing the thermometer as the desert city is on track Wednesday to set a record for the most consecutive days over 115 degrees amid a lingering hot spell that will continue scorching much of the United States into the weekend.

On Tuesday, Las Vegas flirted again with the all-time temperature record of 120 reached on Sunday, but settled for a new daily mark of 119 that smashed the old one of 116 set for the date in 2021. Forecasters said the city will likely hit a record fifth straight day above 115 on Wednesday.

Even by desert standards, the prolonged baking that Nevada's largest city is experiencing is nearly unprecedented.

"This is the most extreme heat wave in the history of record-keeping in Las Vegas since 1937," said meteorologist John Adair, a veteran of three decades at the National Weather Service office in southern Nevada.

Tuesday's high temperature tied the mark of four straight days above 115 set in July 2005. And Adair said the record could be extended through Friday.

Alyse Sobosan said this July has been the hottest in the 15 years she has lived in Las Vegas. A counselor at a charter school that's on summer break, Sobosan said she doesn't step outside during the day if she can help it, and waits until 9 p.m. or later to walk her dogs.

"It's oppressively hot," she said. "It's like you can't really live your life."

It's also dangerously hot, health officials have emphasized.

"Even people of average age who are seemingly healthy can suffer heat illness when it's so hot it's hard for your body to cool down," said Alexis Brignola, an epidemiologist at the Southern Nevada Health District.

The searing heat wave gripping large parts of the U.S. also led to record daily high temperatures in Oregon, where it is suspected to have caused six deaths, the state medical examiner's office said Tuesday. More than 161 million people around the U.S. were under heat alerts Tuesday, especially in Western states.

Dozens of locations across the West tied or broke previous heat records over the weekend and are expected to keep doing so all week.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Actor impeded cops at Capitol riot, pleads guilty

DC WASHINGTON — An actor who played a street-brawling newsman in the movie “Anchorman: The Legend of Ron Burgundy” and a pizzeria owner in the television series “Bob’s Burgers” pleaded guilty on Monday to interfering with police officers trying to protect the U.S. Capitol from a mob’s attack.

Jay Johnston, 55, of Los Angeles, faces a maximum sentence of five years in prison after pleading guilty to civil disorder, a felony. U.S. District Judge Carl Nichols is scheduled to sentence Johnston on Oct. 7.

Johnston, who was arrested last June, is one of more than 1,400 people charged with federal crimes stemming from the Jan. 6, 2021, attack on the U.S. Capitol.

Video footage captured Johnston pushing against police and helping rioters who attacked officers guarding an entrance to the Capitol in a tunnel on the Lower West Terrace, according to an FBI agent’s affidavit. Johnston held a stolen police shield over his head and passed it to other rioters during the attack on Jan. 6, 2021, the affidavit says.

Teen bitten by shark at lifeguard training camp

FL PONCE INLET — A shark bit a Florida teen on the leg during a lifeguard training camp Monday morning, officials said.

The attack occurred near the Ponce Inlet lifeguard tower shortly before noon, Volusia County Beach Safety officials said. The 14-year-old boy had been practicing water entries

when he landed on a shark.

The teen’s injuries weren’t considered life-threatening, officials said. He was taken by his parents to get stitches.

Monday’s attack comes just days after two separate bite incidents in nearby New Smyrna Beach. A 26-year-old man was bitten on the foot while floating in an inner tube Friday, and a 21-year-old man was bitten Thursday while playing football in shallow water.

Flight loses wheel after takeoff, lands safely

CA LOS ANGELES — A United Airlines Boeing jet lost a main landing gear wheel Monday while taking off from Los Angeles and later landed safely in Denver, the airline said.

There were no reported injuries on the ground or on board Flight 1001, United said in a statement.

The Boeing 757-200 was carrying 174 passengers and 7 crewmembers.

On March 7, a United Boeing B777-200 jet lost a tire midair after takeoff from San Francisco. It landed on a car in an airport employee parking lot. Nobody was hurt.

Vaping regulations, DMV changes signed into law

NC RALEIGH — North Carolina Gov. Roy Cooper signed four bills Wednesday that include the creation of a new registry for vaping products and a slew of changes related to transportation laws and the state DMV.

Cooper also vetoed two other bills.

One of the bills signed by Cooper focuses on creating a registry under the North Carolina Department of Revenue for certified vapor products — like e-cigarettes — or consumables containing nicotine at the end of the year. Certification for those products would be mandatory for manufacturers to sell in North Carolina.

Another approved bill makes a wide variety of changes to transportation laws. The modifications include creating digital driver’s licenses that can be displayed on mobile devices, printing temporary registration plates on-demand, implementing a work zone safety course and increasing littering penalties.

Columbia ousts officials after antisemitic texts

NY NEW YORK — Columbia University said Monday that it has removed three administrators from their positions and will keep them on leave indefinitely after finding that text messages they exchanged during a campus discussion about Jewish life “disturbingly touched on ancient antisemitic tropes.”

In a letter to the Columbia community, university president Minouche Shafik and provost Angela Olinto said the administrators have been permanently removed from their positions at the university’s undergraduate Columbia College. The college’s dean, who previously apologized for his part in the text exchanges, will remain in that role.

The administrators, whom the university did not identify by name, were first put on leave last

month after a conservative news outlet published images of what it said were text messages they exchanged while attending the May 31 panel discussion “Jewish Life on Campus: Past, Present and Future.”

The news outlet, the Washington Free Beacon, published examples on June 12 and 21 of what it said were some of the text exchanges. Among them was a message suggesting that a panelist could have used recent campus protests as a fundraising opportunity and another that appeared critical of a campus rabbi’s essay about antisemitism.

Woman who just finished radiation wins lottery

PA LANCASTER COUNTY — A great-grandmother from Pennsylvania who recently completed radiation treatments for breast cancer won \$5 million on a scratch-off state lottery ticket that she only bought because a scheduled family trip didn’t go as planned.

Donna Osborne, 75, scored the big prize last month when she bought a \$50 “Monopoly Own It All” ticket while buying gas at a convenience store in Lancaster County, where she lives. Osborne said she had previously bought a \$5 lottery ticket that won her \$50, so she used that money to get another ticket.

“I was at the airport with my daughter. We were on our way to see family in Florida when the flight got delayed. Well, it was delayed so many times, I decided to go home. My daughter stayed and flew to Florida,” Osborne said. “If I didn’t leave the airport, I would have never bought that ticket!”

— From wire reports

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Rybakina, Krejčíková to meet in semis

Associated Press

LONDON — Elena Rybakina knows people see her as the favorite to win her second Wimbledon title.

The 2022 champion's 6-3, 6-2 victory over No. 21 Elina Svitolina to reach the semifinals on Wednesday will only bolster that view.

"Definitely, I have an aggressive style of game. I have a huge serve, so it's a big advantage," she said in an on-court interview. "Of course I want to go until the the end, but match by match. For now, I'm happy with the way I am going."

The 25-year-old Rybakina — at No. 4 the highest-seeded woman left in the draw — improved her record at the All England Club to 19-2.

Rybakina will next face No. 31 Barbora Krejčíková, who reached her first Wimbledon semifinal by eliminating No. 13 Jelena Ostapenko 6-4, 7-6 (4) in a match between former French Open champions.

Krejčíková, who won the title

at Roland Garros in 2021, trailed 4-1 in the second set but managed to recover.

Ostapenko, who hadn't dropped a set on her run to the quarterfinals, instructed her coach to leave during the second set, but it ultimately didn't help the 2017 French Open champion.

"It's a great moment for me," said Krejčíková, who is from the Czech Republic. "It's an unbelievable moment that I'm experiencing right now."

Krejčíková had struggled with injuries and illness earlier this season.

"There have been many doubts from the inside, but also from outside — from the outside world — but I'm super happy that I never gave up and that I'm standing here right now," she said.

Svitolina, a Ukrainian who is a two-time Wimbledon semifinalist, was not wearing a black ribbon as she did in her fourth-round match to mourn victims of the Russian missile attack.

On the men's side, Novak Djokovic's smooth trip through the bracket got even easier on Wednesday, when he moved into his record-tying 13th semifinal at the tournament via a walkover because his quarterfinal opponent, Alex de Minaur, pulled out with a hip injury.

Djokovic had knee surgery less than a month before the start of play at the All England Club, raising questions about whether he'd even be able to try to earn his eighth championship at the grass-court major and add to his men's mark of 24 Grand Slam trophies.

But, despite limitations on movement, the 37-year-old Djokovic has dropped only two sets so far, while facing a qualifier in the first round, a wild-card entrant in the second and only one seeded player, No. 15 Holger Rune. Djokovic was supposed to go up against No. 9 de Minaur on Wednesday, but instead will get three full days off before Friday's semifinals.

More eventful for Djokovic

has been his interactions with some spectators at Centre Court. After beating Rune in straight sets on Monday, Djokovic told fans that a group of them showed "disrespect" toward him with the way they were cheering.

Djokovic's next match will come against No. 13 Taylor Fritz of the United States or No. 25 Lorenzo Musetti of Italy. Fritz and Musetti were scheduled to play their quarterfinal on Wednesday.

No man has made it to as many Grand Slam semifinals as Djokovic's 49. He and Roger Federer are the only men with 13 appearances in the final four at Wimbledon.

De Minaur's exit is the latest to come because of injury in Week 2 of the tournament. Players who stopped competing in the middle of fourth-round matches because they were hurt include No. 10 Grigor Dimitrov in the men's draw, and No. 12 Madison Keys and No. 17 Anna Kalinskaya in the women's.

Leonard replaced on Paris roster by Celtics' White

Associated Press

LAS VEGAS — Derrick White of the NBA champion Boston Celtics has replaced the Los Angeles Clippers' Kawhi Leonard on the U.S. team for the Paris Olympics, USA Basketball said Wednesday in the first shakeup to a roster that was announced in the spring.

Leonard missed 12 of the Los Angeles Clippers' final 14 games this past season with right knee inflammation, though he said in recent days that he felt fine and the knee was doing well. USA Basketball said it, along with the Clippers, made the decision on Leonard's status for Paris.

"Kawhi has been ramping up for the Olympics over the past several weeks and had a few strong practices in Las Vegas," USA Basketball said in a state-

ment. "He felt ready to compete. However, he respects that USA Basketball and the Clippers determined it's in his best interest to spend the remainder of the summer preparing for the upcoming season rather than participating in the Olympic Games in Paris."

White averaged 15.2 points and 5.2 assists for the Celtics this past season. His selection gives Boston three of the 12 players on the U.S. roster; Celtics teammates Jayson Tatum and Jrue Holiday are also Paris-bound.

White is expected to be in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates, later this week to join the U.S. squad. The team will fly to Abu Dhabi from Las Vegas on Thursday and is scheduled to practice there Saturday ahead of exhibi-

tion games against Australia on July 15 and Serbia on July 17.

"I am happy to announce that Derrick will compete at his first Olympic Games on the heels of a championship season in Boston," USA Basketball managing director Grant Hill said. "We look forward to him joining the team in the coming days as we continue preparations for Paris."

"I want to thank Kawhi for his commitment to the USA Men's National Team," Hill added. "He earned the opportunity to represent the United States, but USA Basketball and Clippers leadership felt it's important to allow Kawhi to prepare for the NBA season."

White — a second-team All-Defensive selection after this past NBA season, meaning he'll clearly take some of the on-ball

defending duties that the Olympic team likely envisioned Leonard having — has some USA Basketball experience, including being part of the 2019 World Cup team that finished seventh in China. He and the Celtics agreed on a four-year extension worth nearly \$126 million after the playoff run, one in which he led Boston with 65 made 3-pointers on a team-best 40.4% shooting from beyond the arc.

Leonard is a two-time NBA champion, six-time All-Star and six-time All-NBA player, but injury issues have been a recurring theme in his career. USA Basketball had monitored him closely in recent weeks, making sure he was doing well enough to be on the court after his season with the Clippers ended prematurely.

Messi leads Argentina to Copa America final

Associated Press

EAST RUTHERFORD, N.J. — Lionel Messi and Argentina moved within one win of joining Spain as the only nations to win three straight major titles.

“It’s insane what this team has done, what the Argentina national team is doing,” Messi said Tuesday night after his 109th international goal sealed a 2-0 victory over Canada that earned a berth in this weekend’s Copa America final. “For those who remain from the old guard, it’s beyond impressive that the national team is in another final.”

Julián Álvarez put the Albiceleste ahead in the 22nd minute, controlling a long pass from Rodrigo De Paul, taking two touches to get away from Moïse Bombito and slipping the ball through the legs of goalkeeper Maxime Crépeau for his ninth international goal.

Messi redirected Enzo Fernández’s shot following a poor Ismaël Koné clearance in off the face of Crépeau from 4 yards in the 51st for his first goal of the tournament. Messi

has 28 goals in his last 25 matches for Argentina and 14 in Copa America play, three shy of the record. He has scored against 38 different nations.

“I wasn’t sure if Enzo’s ball was going to get in,” Messi said. “It was a reflex.”

Only Portugal’s Cristiano Ronaldo with 130 has more international goals than Messi, who turned 37 on June 24. Iran’s Ali Daei had 108 or 109 from 1993 to 2006, with a lingering dispute over whether a goal against Ecuador in 2000 occurred in a full international match.

With a victory on its independence day, Argentina extended its unbeaten streak to 10 games. The Albiceleste seek a record 16th Copa title when they play Uruguay or Colombia on Sunday in Miami Gardens, Fla.

“We have to enjoy every moment of what we’re are living,” Messi said. “I’m conscious that these are the last battles.”

Trying to string together Copa America titles around the 2022 World Cup championship, Argentina hopes to match

Spain’s feat of winning the 2008 and 2012 European Championships along with the 2010 World Cup.

“These are statistics. I’m not really interested about it,” Argentina coach Lionel Scaloni said through a translator. “The most important thing is to win.”

Making his 38th Copa America appearance, Messi had missed Argentina’s group stage finale with a leg injury and was subdued while playing 90 minutes in the quarterfinal win over Ecuador. He was much more agile and shot just wide in the 12th and 44th minutes.

Messi had 45 touches and a 79% pass success rate.

“They make us pay on small details,” Crépeau said.

MetLife’s temporary grass surface appeared heavy, with water splashing and sand popping up during dribbles.

“It’s has been a very difficult Copa América,” Messi said, “very competitive, bad surfaces, excessive heat.”

Argentina fans gathered in Times Square on the eve of the match and filled the streets on

Manhattan before heading to MetLife Stadium. The crowd of 80,102 on a night with an 82-degree temperature and 82% humidity was overwhelmingly pro-Argentina, with only a few sections dominated by red-clad Canadian supporters.

It was among the biggest games for Canadian soccer, which went 0-6 in its only World Cup appearances in 1986 and 2022 and won its only major title at the 2000 CONCACAF Gold Cup. Argentina had beaten Canada 2-0 in the tournament opener on June 20.

“The tournament caught up with us a little bit,” Canada coach Jesse Marsch said. “There’s been heat, there’s been travel, there’s been a lot of challenges. ... We’re still at the beginnings of our process, right? Argentina’s maybe had eight years together, seven years together with this team, and so we need to develop more players that can contribute so that we can also rotate in tournament play, because eventually the physicality and the fatigue can catch up with you.”

Big 12 commissioner: Conference is now in nation’s top 3

Associated Press

Brett Yormark believes the Big 12 has clearly solidified itself as one of the nation’s top three conferences in a period of drastic change in college athletics, and the commissioner said the expanding league is more relevant than it has ever been in its nearly three-decades history.

“We are truly a national conference in 10 states, four time zones, and all eyes are now on the Big 12 for all the right reasons,” Yormark said at the start of league’s football media days Tuesday in Las Vegas.

While the league’s past national champions, Oklahoma and Texas, left for the Southeastern Conference, a move that became official last week, Yormark touted the additions of the Four Corners schools from the Pac 12: Arizona, Arizona State, Colorado and Utah. Those schools are participating in media days before their Big 12 membership formally begins at the start of August to

make it a 16-team league for the first time.

“On the football front, we will be the deepest conference in America. Every week will matter,” Yormark said, then repeating that for emphasis before moving on. “We have star power and parity. We boast some of the top players and coaches in the game. November will be incredibly exciting and we will brand it as a race to the championship.”

The SEC and Big Ten, the wealthiest and most powerful conferences, have worked together and at one point this year had proposed multiple automatic bids for their conferences in the College Football Playoff, which expands from four to 12 teams this season.

Yormark, going into his third year as the Big 12 commissioner after years in the entertainment industry, including a stint as CEO of Roc Nation, said his only thought each day is making the Big 12 the best ver-

sion of itself. The Big 12 in 2022 extended its media rights deal with ESPN and Fox Sports through the 2030-31 school year, a move that came with two years left on the old deal and created stability and clarity for the league.

“Everything else doesn’t really matter. And if we take care of business, we’re going to be just fine,” he said. “Not only have we had a great 24 months, but we continue to get better.”

The Big 12 last month announced the 14 schools that participated in the 2023-24 academic year shared a record \$470 million of revenue distribution, an increase of about \$30 million from the previous year. Without giving specific numbers, Yormark said the Big 12’s sponsorship business grew 79% in the first year after that was streamlined to be handled directly by the conference instead of outside parties, and that ticket sales grew 23% across the league.

Turner slam helps Wheeler win 10th

Associated Press

PHILADELPHIA — Trea Turner hit his sixth career grand slam, Bryson Stott and Brandon Marsh also went deep and the Philadelphia Phillies welcomed back Bryce Harper and Kyle Schwarber from injuries with a 10-1 win over the Los Angeles Dodgers on Tuesday night.

“I thought Trea’s grand slam gave us some distance,” Phillies manager Rob Thomson said.

Turner’s slam in a six-run fourth inning did indeed give the Phillies the cushion needed to make sure they didn’t push their luck with ace Zack Wheeler. The Phillies lost Wheeler on a steamy night with left low back tightness after five innings.

A 2024 All-Star, Wheeler (10-4) joined Aaron Nola and Ranger Suárez as a trio of Phillies pitchers with 10 wins before the All-Star break. It’s the first time in franchise history the Phillies have three pitchers with 10 wins before the break.

Thomson and Wheeler both said the pitcher should make his next scheduled start Sunday against Oakland.

“Just playing it safe and we’ll go from there,” Wheeler said.

Cubs 9, Orioles 2: Michael Busch and Ian Happ homered, and Jameson Taillon and three relievers combined for a five-hitter as visiting Chicago beat Baltimore.

Taillon (6-4) allowed two runs and four hits with seven strikeouts and a walk in six innings. The 32-year-old right-hander retired the last 11 batters he faced.

Happ, who entered the game with a .171 average on the road — the lowest in the majors among qualifying hitters, according to STATS — finished 2-for-4 with a walk.

Rays 5, Yankees 3: All-Star Isaac Paredes hit a three-run homer and host Tampa Bay held on to hand struggling AL East rival New York its 17th loss in 23 games.

Right-hander Ryan Pepiot (5-5) limited one of baseball’s best offenses to one run and four hits in 5½ innings, and Tampa Bay won despite having only two hits after the third inning.

Red Sox 12, Athletics 9: Brayan Bello (9-5) fanned a career-high 11 batters — getting each of his first 10 outs by strikeout — and Wilyer Abreu and Dominic Smith homered on back-to-back pitches in an eight-run second inning to help host Boston beat Oakland.

On the day he was scratched from the All-Star Game with a sore shoulder, Rafael Devers had two hits and a walk, driving in

three runs and scoring twice as the Red Sox won for the seventh time in eight games and improved to a season-high 10 games over .500.

Astros 4, Marlins 3: Alex Bregman had three RBIs and his tiebreaking two-run home run in the seventh inning lifted host Houston to a win over Miami.

The game was tied at 2 with one out in the seventh when Chas McCormick reached on a throwing error by rookie shortstop Xavier Edwards. There were two outs in the inning when Bregman sent an off-speed pitch from Huascar Brazobán (1-2) into the seats in left field to make it 4-2.

The victory was Houston’s seventh straight at home and comes after the Astros dropped the final two games of a series at Minnesota last weekend.

Mets 7, Nationals 5: Jose Quintana permitted one hit in seven shutout innings, Brandon Nimmo and Francisco Lindor both homered and drove in three runs, and host New York beat Washington.

Harrison Bader had three hits and scored twice from the bottom of the batting order for the Mets, who moved back to .500 at 45-45. Lindor also had three hits and scored two runs in the leadoff spot.

Guardians 9, Tigers 8 (10): Josh Naylor hit a tiebreaking single in the 10th for his fourth RBI and Brayan Rocchio added a sacrifice fly in the extra inning as visiting Cleveland held on to beat Detroit after blowing a 6-0 lead early in the game.

Jose Ramirez joined Paul Goldschmidt as the only players to get intentionally walked three times and to have three hits in a game since Major League Baseball began tracking free passes in 1955.

Reds 12, Rockies 6: Will Benson hit a three-run homer in a five-run second inning, rookie Rece Hinds crushed a 458-foot shot and host Cincinnati cruised to a win over Colorado.

The 23-year-old Hinds hit a long homer for the second time in as many nights. He had a 421-foot shot in his major league debut on Monday, before teeing off on Colorado reliever Justin Lawrence as part of a four-run Cincinnati seventh. He came up a single short of hitting for the cycle.

Tyler Stephenson and Spencer Steer also homered as the Reds downed the Rockies for the second night in row.

Pirates 12, Brewers 2: Joey Bart hit a grand slam and visiting Pittsburgh scored six runs in the sixth inning to storm past Milwaukee.

All-Star Bryan Reynolds, Rowdy Tellez, Jack Suwinski and Joshua Palacios also homered for the Pirates, who won in Milwaukee for just the 12th time in 42 games since 2019. The five home runs were a season-high surrendered by Brewers pitching.

Quinn Priester (1-5) pitched six innings in relief to get the win, giving up one earned run and four hits with eight strikeouts.

Rangers 5, Angels 4: Adolis García broke out of a 1-for-19 slump with a solo homer in the eighth inning and visiting Texas extended its winning streak to a season-high five, defeating Los Angeles.

The Angels lost for the eighth time in nine games despite two homers and three hits from Logan O’Hoppe.

García was batting .115 in July (3-for-26) before he drove a sinker from Luis García (3-1) into the elevated stands in right-center. Despite the struggles at the plate, García has reached base in 17 of his last 18 games.

Mariners 8, Padres 3: Julio Rodríguez went 4-for-4 with a 411-foot home run into the second deck in left field, Cal Raleigh had a pair of two-run homers among his three hits and All-Star Logan Gilbert was brilliant for AL West-leading Seattle in a win over host San Diego.

Rodríguez also drove in two runs and scored three times in his biggest game of the year.

Rodríguez, who hit an RBI single in the first, was aboard for both of Raleigh’s shots.

Gilbert (6-5) took a one-hit shutout into the seventh before allowing Jake Cronenworth’s homer with one out.

Giants 4, Blue Jays 3: Brett Wisely hit a tying RBI single with two outs in the ninth inning and Tyler Fitzgerald scored the winning run moments later on a wild pitch by Trevor Richards, rallying host San Francisco past Toronto.

Richards (1-1) allowed Patrick Bailey’s single and walked Fitzgerald to put the tying and go-ahead runs aboard in the ninth before Wisely’s single got through between first and second.

Braves 6, Diamondbacks 2: Chris Sale outdueled Zac Gallen with 5½ solid innings, Adam Duvall hit a three-run homer and visiting Atlanta beat Arizona for its fourth straight win.

Duvall connected for his three-run shot in the sixth, extending Atlanta’s lead to 5-0. The 441-foot homer was launched deep into the left field seats, ending Gallen’s night in frustration.