

DOD plans for Afghanistan-adjacent troops

By COREY DICKSTEIN
Stars and Stripes

The Pentagon wants to put counterterrorism forces in nations neighboring Afghanistan to monitor terrorist activity in that country after U.S. troops end their two-decade fight there, top U.S. defense officials said Thursday.

Pentagon officials have yet to strike any agreements to place those troops near Afghanistan after the ongoing withdrawal, Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin told the Senate Armed Services Committee. That withdrawal, which the U.S. military said this week was about half completed, could be finished as early as July, Sen. Jack Reed, D-R.I., the committee's chairman, indicated during the hearing focused on the Pentagon's fiscal 2022 budget request.

"Those [counterterrorism] ef-

forts will be focused on those elements that can possibly conduct attacks against our homeland," Austin said, singling out al-Qaida as his top concern. "As we have retrograded ... a lot of our combat aircraft or missions are being conducted from platforms in the [Persian] Gulf [region]. And so, we have the capability now to do that. Now, what we are looking for is the ability to shorten the legs going forward by stationing some capability in neighboring countries, [and] that is still a work in progress."

Austin told senators that he and the State Department were working "as quickly as we can" to solidify plans, but he did not yet have a timetable on when an agreement might occur.

Pentagon officials have touted the U.S. military's ability to respond to problems in Afghanistan since President Joe Biden or-

dered in April the full withdrawal of American troops by Sept. 11, 2021. But Austin and others have not detailed precisely what so-called "over-the-horizon" capabilities they have in place or what forces they might add. They also have not publicly detailed scenarios in which they would send American troops or aircraft back into Afghanistan to respond.

Austin said Thursday that U.S. troops for now continue to support Afghan National Security Forces in their fight against the Taliban but doing so after withdrawing from Afghanistan would be "very difficult to do."

His remarks came just days after a new U.N. report warned the Taliban appeared poised to take back control of Afghanistan for the first time since they were ousted from power by the United States in 2001 in response to the 9/11 terrorist attacks. The U.N.

Security Council report stated the Taliban believed their recent battlefield gains strengthened their negotiating position to regain power, and the insurgent group was also preparing to take the country back from the U.S.-supported government by force, if necessary.

Austin did not reveal Thursday whether the Pentagon had plans to intervene if the Taliban appeared positioned to overrun key locations in Afghanistan, including its capital Kabul, where the United States intends to maintain an embassy. A New York Times report Thursday quoted unnamed defense officials who said the Defense Department was considering scenarios in which it might send warplanes or armed drones to respond to Taliban attacks, including on Kabul. That report said no decisions had been made.

Lawmakers blast Navy secretary's sea-launch missile cuts

By SARAH CAMMARATA
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — House and Senate lawmakers voiced concern Thursday over the acting Navy secretary's move to cancel the service's nuclear sea-launched cruise missile in fiscal 2023 as top defense leaders said they had not been briefed on the decision.

"I think we're all shocked to have heard the news of the acting secretary of the Navy appearing to take action to zero out the sea-launched cruise missile. This is something that is incredibly important," said Rep. Mike Turner, of Ohio, the ranking Republican on the House Armed Services Committee subpanel on strategic forces.

"We know that the Nuclear Posture Review isn't underway, and yet we have the first steps toward actions that would be unilateral disarmament," Turner said during the

committee's hearing to review the fiscal 2022 budget proposal for nuclear forces.

Multiple media outlets reported this week that acting Navy Secretary Thomas Harker directed the service in a June 4 memo to "defund [the] sea-launched cruise missile."

The 2018 Nuclear Posture Review — an examination of U.S. nuclear policy that occurs when a new administration takes office — supported pursuing this type of missile. The strategy under former President Donald Trump's administration called for expanding the role and capability of the U.S. nuclear arsenal.

The Defense Department's Melissa Dalton testified Thursday that the review by President Joe Biden's administration is "on the cusp" of commencing. Biden has said he wants to reduce reliance on nuclear weapons.

"The sole purpose of the U.S. nuclear arsenal should be deterring — and if necessary, retaliating against

— a nuclear attack," Biden's campaign said in an online statement before the president's election.

In a Senate Armed Services Committee budget hearing Thursday, Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin and Army Gen. Mark Milley, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said they had not been briefed on the memo about the sea-launched cruise missile.

At the House hearing, Turner asked Vice Adm. Johnny Wolfe, the Navy's director of strategic systems programs, if he had been consulted about the missile.

"I was not privy to it before it was actually signed. But my understanding is, for the [Navy secretary] it was part of a deliberate process to start the dialogue for building the next [Program Objective Memorandum] ... in starting that dialogue he does point out that it is not a decision," Wolfe testified.

"It's a hell of a way to start a dia-

logue, to call for the canceling," Turner replied.

Rep. Doug Lamborn, R-Colo., called out Harker for "going rogue."

"I don't say that lightly. It appears to me that he's gone rogue, because the people above him and the people below him are denying any knowledge of this decision and seem to be disavowing the decision," Lamborn said.

Austin testified all the services are "making tough choices in terms of what to prioritize."

"I don't feel comfortable in commenting on his memo," he said. "I would just say that again, I am committed to a posture review to make sure that we adequately analyze what our capabilities are."

Milley said he was "not familiar with the memo, and nor was I consulted, but as soon as we're done here, I'll go find that memo, and get consulted."

Top Navy shipbuilder to hire 3K workers

BY CAITLIN DOORNBOS
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Huntington Ingalls Industries, one of the Navy's main shipbuilders, announced plans to hire about 3,000 full-time workers to build ships at its Pascagoula, Miss., shipyards as the service pushes toward its 355-ship fleet goal.

The nation's largest military shipbuilder is launching the hiring campaign "as part of its future growth plan," the company's shipbuilding division, Ingalls Shipbuilding, said in a statement issued Wednesday.

"It is vital to our mission that we have a quality workforce with the capacity to fulfill all current and potential naval contractual obligations," Huntington Ingalls spokeswoman Kianna Mitchell said Thursday. "As we continue to execute on our significant backlog, account for normal

attrition and enter into new contracts in the coming years, we will continue to bring new shipbuilders to our team."

In February, the company had a backlog of shipbuilding projects worth \$46.5 billion to complete in 10 years, The Virginian-Pilot reported at the time.

Since then, Ingalls Shipbuilding has won more than \$3.6 billion in new Navy contracts for work including advance procurement of a yet-to-be-named America-class amphibious assault ship and the refueling and overhaul of the aircraft carrier USS John C. Stennis, according to its website.

The move comes as the Navy works to increase its fleet by nearly 60 ships to reach its congressionally mandated goal of a 355-ship fleet. Congress in the 2018 National Defense Authorization Act, which

sets annual spending and policy priorities for the Pentagon, ordered the service to work toward 355-ship goal "as soon as possible."

The company did not specify whether the hiring campaign was directly linked to the Navy's promised growth, but the initiative aims to "attract the talent we need to build ships that protect and defend our nation," the company's Vice President of Human Resources and Administration Edmond Hughes said in the statement.

Ingalls Shipbuilding's acquisition team held a hiring event in Pascagoula on Thursday to help find candidates for the 3,000 positions after recruiting trips across Mississippi, Alabama and Louisiana. Once hired, the shipbuilders will join the more than 41,000 Huntington Ingalls employees, according to the statement.

Iranian warships on rare mission in Atlantic Ocean

Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates — An Iranian destroyer and support vessel are now sailing in the Atlantic Ocean in a rare mission far from the Islamic Republic, Iran's state TV reported on Thursday, without offering the vessels' final destination.

The trip by the new domestically built destroyer Sahand and the intelligence-gathering vessel Makran comes amid U.S. media reports, citing anonymous American officials, saying the ships were bound for Venezuela. The Associated Press could not immediately confirm the ships' destination.

The vessels departed last month from Iran's southern port of Bandar Abbas, said Adm. Habibollah Sayyari, Iran's deputy army chief. He described their mission as the Iranian navy's longest and most challenging voyage yet, without elaborating.

Iranian state TV released a short clip of the destroyer cruising through the Atlantic's rough seas. The video likely was shot from the Makran, a converted commercial oil tanker with a mobile launch platform for helicopters.

"The navy is improving its seafaring capacity and proving its long-term durability in unfavorable seas and the Atlantic's unfavorable weather conditions," Sayyari said, adding that the warships would not call at any country's port during the mission.

Images from Maxar Technologies dated April 28 appear to show seven Iranian fast-attack craft typically associated with its paramilitary Revolutionary Guard on the deck of the Makran. Satellite images from Planet Labs Inc. suggest it left a port at Bandar Abbas sometime after April 29. It wasn't immediately clear where the Makran and the destroyer are now.

Official: Russia to supply Iran with satellite system

The Washington Post

Russia is preparing to supply Iran with an advanced satellite system that will give Tehran an unprecedented ability to track potential military targets across the Middle East and beyond, according to current and former U.S. and Middle Eastern officials briefed on details of the arrangement.

The plan would deliver to the Iranians a Russian-made Kanopus-V satellite equipped with a high-resolution camera that would greatly enhance Iran's spying capabilities, allowing continuous monitoring of facilities ranging from Persian Gulf oil refineries and Israeli military bases to Iraqi barracks that house U.S. troops, the officials said. The launch could happen within months, they said.

While the Kanopus-V is marketed for civilian use, Iranian military officials have been heavily involved in the acquisition, and leaders of Iran's elite

Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps have made multiple trips to Russia since 2018 to help negotiate the terms of the agreement, the officials said. As recently as this spring, Russian experts traveled to Iran to help train ground crews who would operate the satellite from a newly built facility near the northern city of Karaj, the officials said.

Details of the agreement were described by a current and a former U.S. official as well as a senior Middle Eastern government official briefed on the sale. The three officials spoke on the condition of anonymity, citing sensitivities surrounding ongoing intelligence collection efforts. The Russian Foreign Ministry in Moscow did not respond to an email request.

Under the agreement reached with Moscow, Iran's new satellite would be launched in Russia and would feature Russian hardware.

British PM opens Group of 7 Summit

Associated Press

CARBIS BAY, England — British Prime Minister Boris Johnson greeted world leaders on a wooden boardwalk atop the sand of Carbis Bay to open the Group of Seven summit Friday, offering elbow bumps to dignitaries and urging countries not to let the pandemic leave a lasting scar of inequality.

Recovery from the pandemic was set to dominate their discussions, with members of the wealthy democracies club expected to commit to sharing at least 1 billion vaccine shots with struggling countries. That includes a pledge from U.S. President Joe Biden to share 500 million doses, and a promise from Johnson for another 100 million shots.

Opening three days of talks in Cornwall, in southwest England, Johnson warned that world leaders must not repeat errors made over the past 18 months — or those made in the recovery from the 2008 global financial crisis.

“It is vital that we don’t repeat the mistake of the last great crisis, the last great economic recession in 2008, when the recovery was not uniform across all parts of society,” he said after leaders posed for a formal “family photo” by the sea.

“And I think what’s gone wrong with this pandemic, and what risks being a lasting scar, is that I think the inequalities may be entrenched,” Johnson added.

Earlier, Biden said: “We’re going to help lead the world out of this pandemic working alongside our global partners.”

The leaders of the G-7 — which also includes Canada, France, Germany, Italy and Japan — hope the meeting at the resort will also energize the global economy.

Climate change is also a top issue on the agenda, and hundreds of protesters gathered in Cornwall to urge the leaders to act. Demonstrators deployed a barge off the coast with two large inflatable figures depicting Biden and Johnson on board. At another protest, demonstrators carried flags that read “G7 drowning in promises” and “Action not words.”

Senators at tentative public works agreement

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — A bipartisan group of senators is eyeing an infrastructure deal with \$579 billion in new spending as negotiators try to strike a nearly \$1 trillion deal on President Joe Biden’s top priority, according to those briefed on the plan.

The 10 senators have been huddling behind closed doors, encouraged by Biden to keep working on the effort after he walked away from a Republican-only proposal this week unable to resolve differences. The senators are briefing their colleagues privately and cautioned changes could still be made.

“Our group — comprised of 10 Senators, 5 from each party — has worked in good faith and reached a bipartisan agreement on a re-

alistic, compromise framework to modernize our nation’s infrastructure and energy technologies,” the senators said in a joint statement.

“This investment would be fully paid for and not include tax increases,” they added. “We are discussing our approach with our respective colleagues, and the White House, and remain optimistic that this can lay the groundwork to garner broad support from both parties and meet America’s infrastructure needs.”

The White House said Democratic senators briefed the administration on the emerging plan but questions remain.

“The President appreciates the senators’ work to advance critical investments we

need to create good jobs, prepare for our clean energy future, and compete in the global economy,” said deputy press secretary Andrew Bates. “Questions need to be addressed, particularly around the details of both policy and pay-fors, among other matters.”

A person familiar with the negotiations but unauthorized to discuss them publicly said the cost would be \$974 billion over five years, as is standard for highway spending, or \$1.2 trillion if spread over eight as Biden proposes. At that size, the new package would be more than the previous Republican-only effort of \$330 billion in new spending in a \$928 billion package, but still short of the \$1.7 trillion over eight years Biden is seeking.

Rep. Omar says she wasn’t equating US, Israel and terrorists

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Rep. Ilhan Omar tried edging away Thursday from a bitter fight with Jewish Democratic lawmakers who’d accused her of likening the U.S. and Israel to Hamas and Afghanistan’s Taliban, saying her remarks were “in no way equating terrorist organizations with democratic countries.”

A three-sentence statement by the Minnesota Democrat also said her comments were “not a moral comparison between Hamas and the Taliban and the U.S. and Israel,” and seemed to dial back a more confrontational tone she’d taken earlier. In a series of tweets, Omar had said her critics’ public rebuke of her was “shameful,” accused them of “Islamophobic tropes” and said she was merely

seeking justice “for all victims of crimes against humanity.”

Minutes after Omar released her latest remarks, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., and the other top five House Democratic leaders issued an unusual joint statement making clear they’d disapproved of Omar’s initial comments.

This week’s flareup involving Omar, 38, a Muslim-American born in Somalia, and fellow Democrats began when she tweeted a Monday exchange with Secretary of State Antony Blinken in a video conference in which she called for justice “for all victims of crimes against humanity.”

In remarks that drew the most attention, she said, “We have seen unthinkable atrocities

committed by the U.S., Hamas, Israel, Afghanistan, and the Taliban. I asked @SecBlinken where people are supposed to go for justice.”

Late Wednesday, Rep. Brad Schneider, D-Ill., and 11 other Jewish House Democrats issued a statement labeling those remarks offensive and misguided. They said she should “clarify” what she meant.

On Thursday, Omar tweeted that it was “shameful” that fellow Democrats who sometimes seek her support on issues didn’t ask her for an explanation by simply calling her. “The Islamophobic tropes in this statement are offensive. The constant harassment & silencing from the signers of this letter is unbearable,” she wrote.

Trump DOJ seized data from House Dems

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Justice Department under former President Donald Trump seized data from the accounts of at least two members of the House Intelligence Committee in 2018 as part of an aggressive crackdown on leaks related to the Russia investigation and other national security matters, according to a committee official and two people familiar with the investigation.

Prosecutors from Trump's Justice Department subpoenaed Apple for the data, according to the people, who were granted anonymity to discuss the secret seizures first reported by The New York Times.

The records of at least 12 people connected to the intelligence panel were eventually shared, including Chairman Adam Schiff, who was then the top Democrat on the committee. California Rep. Eric Swalwell was the second member, according to spokeswo-

man Natalie Edelstein. The records of aides, former aides and family members were also seized, including one who was a minor, according to the committee official.

Apple informed the committee last month that their records had been shared, but did not give extensive detail. The committee is aware, though, that metadata from the accounts was turned over, the official said. The records do not contain any other content from the devices, like photos, messages or emails, one of the other people said. The third person said that Apple complied with the subpoena, providing the information to the Justice Department, and did not immediately notify the members of Congress or the committee about the disclosure.

While the Justice Department routinely conducts investigations of leaked information, including classified intelligence, opening such an investigation into members of

Congress is extraordinarily rare.

The Trump administration's attempt to secretly gain access to data of individual members of Congress and others connected to the panel came as the president was fuming publicly and privately over investigations — in Congress and by then-special counsel Robert Mueller — into his campaign's ties to Russia. Trump called the probes a "witch hunt," regularly criticized Schiff and other Democrats on Twitter and repeatedly dismissed as "fake news" leaks he found personally harmful to his agenda. As the investigations swirled around him, he demanded loyalty from a Justice Department he often regarded as his personal law firm.

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., said in a statement that "these actions appear to be yet another egregious assault on our democracy" waged by the former president.

California to appeal court ruling on assault weapons

Associated Press

SACRAMENTO, Calif. — California's governor denounced in starkly personal terms a federal judge's upending of the state's restrictions on assault weapons as officials announced the filing Thursday of a formal notice that they will appeal the decision.

They described last week's ruling by U.S. District Judge Roger Benitez as an outlier that conflicts with at least six other federal decisions upholding assault weapons laws in California and elsewhere, a ruling that is designed to get the issue before a recently more conservative U.S. Supreme Court.

Gov. Gavin Newsom, the son of a judge, denounced Benitez as "a stone cold ideologue. He is a wholly owned subsidiary of the gun lobby of the National Rifle Association."

The state already is appealing the same

judge's 2017 ruling against the state's nearly 2-decade-old ban on the sales and purchases of magazines holding more than 10 bullets, and his ruling last year blocking a 2019 California law requiring background checks for anyone buying ammunition.

"We need to call this federal judge out. He will continue to do damage, mark my word," Newsom said. "This is a very focused agenda to work through this judge, where the decision's already made before it's even presented, who writes 'press releases' on behalf of the gun lobby."

Gun owners' rights groups have made no secret of their effort to get firearms restrictions before the nation's high court.

But the Firearms Policy Coalition, which led plaintiffs who won at the trial level, condemned the governor's "outrageous and callous personal attacks" on the judge.

"Newsom's verbal assaults on a long-respected member of the judiciary shows his deep and continuing disrespect for the rule of law, the judiciary, the Constitution, and the human rights of California citizens," the group said.

Benitez was appointed by Republican President George W. Bush, and Newsom, a Democrat, also assailed Republicans who don't support gun restrictions.

A three-judge appeals court panel agreed with Benitez on his ammunition magazine ruling, but the decision is being reconsidered by a larger appellate panel.

Attorney General Rob Bonta filed the three-page notice of appeal and plans to ask the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals for a stay so the current 32-year assault weapons ban will remain in effect throughout the appeals process.

2 test positive for COVID-19 on North American cruise

New York Daily News

Two people traveling on the first North American cruise since March 2020 have tested positive for COVID-19.

The passengers on the Celebrity Millennium shared a room and are now in isolation, cruise owner Royal Caribbean said in a statement. Both people are asymptomatic.

All passengers on the cruise were re-

quired to be fully vaccinated if they were over age 18. All crew members were vaccinated, according to Royal Caribbean. The ages of the people who tested positive were not released.

The Celebrity Millennium departed the island of St. Maarten on June 5, making it the first North American voyage since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. Another

ship is scheduled to leave from the Bahamas on June 12.

All adult passengers were required to show proof of vaccination, in addition to a recent negative COVID test, according to Royal Caribbean.

The Celebrity Millennium had been scheduled to return to St. Maarten on June 12.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Judge sends man to prison for beheading bear

MN ST. PAUL — A federal judge has sentenced a Brainerd man to 15 months in prison for killing and then beheading a 700-pound black bear on the Red Lake Indian Reservation in northern Minnesota.

U.S. District Judge Susan Richard Nelson sentenced James Stimac, 39, on Wednesday.

According to prosecutors, Stimac isn't a Red Lake tribal member but entered the reservation without permission in September 2019. He used a compound bow to shoot and kill the bear near the reservation's garbage dump.

He returned to the dump the next day and posed for photographs with the bear's carcass. He later posted the photos on social media. The bear was too big to move so he sawed its head off and took it to a taxidermist in Ironton to make it into a trophy. He left the remainder of the carcass to rot.

Outdoor theater gets \$10 million donation

WI MADISON — An outdoor theater struggling through the COVID-19 pandemic has received a massive donation.

The Wisconsin State Journal reported Thursday that the Pleasant T. Rowland Foundation has handed the American Players Theatre \$10 million.

The theater, located outside Spring Green, scrapped its 2020 season due to the pandemic, resorting to online performances and putting renovation plans on hold. The theater resumed in-person performances last month.

Theater officials say about \$7 million will go toward the thea-

ter's endowment for programming. The rest of the money will go toward building additional housing for artists who work at the theater and renovating administrative offices.

Man arrested near mental health center

NH MANCHESTER — A man was arrested outside of a community mental health center in Manchester after he said he had a bomb, police said Wednesday.

Police said the man had a box and was yelling. Officers calmed him down and got him to move away from the box. He was taken into custody.

The center and four homes were evacuated as a precaution.

The New Hampshire State Police Bomb Squad disrupted the device and determined that there was no danger to the public, police said.

The man taken into custody was identified as Ernesto Mateo, 31, of Manchester. He was charged with placement of simulated explosives and resisting arrest.

Overcrowding at jail investigated after fight

WV MOUNDSVILLE — A fight that broke out at the Northern Regional Jail in Moundsville, W.V., involved makeshift weapons and left three inmates injured.

The state Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation is investigating overcrowding issues at the facility after the June 3 incident, The Intelligencer of Wheeling reported.

None of the people hurt required outside medical care, according to Lawrence Messina, a state spokesman.

"Inmate population levels re-

main a challenge throughout the regional jails system," Messina told the newspaper. "While this was an issue before COVID-19, the precautions and safeguards established in response to the epidemic have greatly restricted transfers among facilities and otherwise heightened this challenge."

As of June 4, there were 411 inmates at the jail, with 43% of them awaiting trial or a court order. There were around 470 inmates at the end of March and 460 on May 17, according to the state.

Hawaiian monk seal pup on his own after weaning

HI HONOLULU — A 6-week-old Hawaiian monk seal pup born on a Waikiki beach has been weaned and is now on his own.

The seal's mother, designated RK96 by scientists but also known as Kaiwi, swam away Tuesday morning and left the pup behind, the Honolulu Star-Advertiser reported.

The adult seal's abrupt departure was natural and expected weaning behavior by a monk seal mother, said Angela Amlin, Hawaiian monk seal recovery coordinator for the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

It's also necessary for the survival of monk seal mothers, who, because they don't forage while nursing, lose up to a third of their body weight.

Man pleads guilty to tampering with dough

ME PORTLAND — A Maine man accused of tampering with pizza dough has pleaded guilty to one of two federal charges of tampering with a consumer product.

Nicholas Mitchell was arrested last October after razor blades and bits of metal were discovered in premade pizza dough sold at Hannaford supermarkets in Maine and New Hampshire, WCSH-TV reported Wednesday.

Authorities say they identified Mitchell in video surveillance last October tampering with pizza dough.

Mitchell was indicted on March 26 and pleaded not guilty to both charges on March 29. He has now agreed to plead guilty to one count and accept a sentence of up to four years and nine months, according to court documents.

Mitchell waived his right to bail and will remain in jail until his trial on Aug. 2.

Key reservoir dips to its record low amid drought

NM ALBUQUERQUE — A key reservoir on the Colorado River has dipped to its record low in the latest showing of the drought's grip on the region.

The surface elevation of Lake Mead along the Nevada-Arizona border dipped to 1,071.56 feet at 11 p.m. on Wednesday evening. The level was last hit in July 2016 and is 18.5 feet lower than one year ago, according to the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation. It's the lowest level since Lake Mead was filled in the 1930s.

"We're expecting the reservoir to keep declining until November, then it should start to rebound," said U.S. Bureau of Reclamation spokeswoman Patti Aaron.

The water level affects the recreation industry at what is one of the largest human-made reservoirs in the country and the efficiency of hydropower generation at Hoover Dam.

— From wire reports

STARS AND STRIPES®

Single source convenience, reliably independent. Visit www.stripes.com.

Reporting
World, National
and Military News

Tsitsipas defeats Zverev for 1st Slam final

Associated Press

PARIS — Stefanos Tsitsipas went from way ahead to suddenly stuck in a five-set struggle against Alexander Zverev at the French Open on Friday before emerging to earn his first berth in a Grand Slam final.

The fifth-seeded Tsitsipas entered with an 0-3 record in major semifinals and it seemed as if he might let this one slip away, too, until a late surge carried him to the 6-3, 6-3, 4-6, 4-6, 6-3 victory after more than 3½ hours at Court Philippe Chatrier.

On Sunday, Tsitsipas will face 13-time Roland Garros champion Nadal or top-seeded Novak Djokovic for the championship on the red clay.

Nadal and Djokovic were scheduled to face each other for the 58th time later Friday.

Tsitsipas regained control of his semifinal on a cloudy afternoon in the late going thanks to a combination of more solid returning by him and a succession

of groundstroke unforced errors from the sixth-seeded Zverev, a 24-year-old from Germany.

The fifth set began with a key service hold after Tsitsipas double-faulted to fall behind love-40. From there, he won five consecutive points.

Then Tsitsipas broke to go up 3-1 with plenty of help from Zverev, who double-faulted, then missed a backhand, followed by a forehand and another backhand.

Zverev winced and Tsitsipas raised his right fist.

Fifteen minutes later, Tsitsipas earned his first match point, and while he needed five of them to close the proceedings, he eventually did convert one with an ace.

Tsitsipas will be the first player from Greece in a Grand Slam singles final and youngest man to appear in the title match at the French Open since Nadal won the 2008 championship five days after his 22nd birthday.

Zverev's loss makes him 0-10 against

members of the Top 10 at Grand Slam tournaments, an especially confounding statistic when viewed in contrast to his 31-30 mark against such opponents in any other setting.

On the women's side Friday, Barbora Krejčíková hit a backhand winner to close out the biggest victory of her career, saving a match point midway through the final set and outlasting No. 17-seeded Maria Sakkari of Greece, 7-5, 4-6, 9-7.

"I always wanted to play matches like this," Krejčíková said.

She must like roller coasters, too. Her opponent Saturday will be 29-year-old Russian Anastasia Pavlyuchenkova, who also advanced to her first major final by beating unseeded Tamara Zidansek, 7-5, 6-3.

It was only the second time in the professional era that there were four first-time Grand Slam women semifinalists at a major tournament, and the first time since the 1978 Australian Open.

College Football Playoff will consider 12-team format

Associated Press

There was a time not so long ago, 2012 to be exact, when the big news in college football was conference commissioners simply using the word playoff when talking about the future of the sport's postseason format.

Less than 10 years later, and eight years into College Football Playoff era, the number of teams that will have a chance to win a national title in the postseason is poised to triple.

The College Football Playoff announced Thursday it will consider expanding from four to 12 teams to settle the championship, with six spots reserved for the highest-ranked conference champions and the other six going to at-large selections.

"This proposal, at its heart, was created to provide more participation," CFP Executive Director Bill Hancock said.

Notre Dame athletic director Jack Swarbrick, part of the group that has been working on an expansion plan, noted that only about 4% of major college football teams reach the playoff. In most other NCAA sports, more than 20% of the competing schools participate in the championship event.

The playoff's popularity seems to have waned as only a few teams have grabbed the majority of the spots since 2014. Alabama and Clemson have each made the playoff six times in seven years. Ohio State and Oklaho-

ma have each been selected four times. That's 71% of the playoff spots to just four of the 130 FBS teams.

There was concern that down the stretch of the season, the pool of teams with a legitimate chance to make the four-team playoff had become too small.

"This (proposed model) creates energy in October and November. The practical effect will be that with four to five weeks to go in the season, there will be 25-30 teams with a legitimate chance," Big 12 Commissioner Bob Bowlsby said.

The CFP's surprising announcement outlined a detailed plan, but there are still steps to be taken and time for discussion and possible tweaks.

If the format is adopted — no earlier than this fall — there was no indication in the proposal about when an expanded playoff could be in place. The soonest would seem to be for the 2023 season. Implementation could also be as far off the 2026 season.

A selection committee would still be involved, and the proposed 12-team playoff would not limit how many teams can come from any one conference. The four highest-ranked conference champions would receive first-round byes and teams 5-12 would face each other in four games played on campus sometime during the two-week period follow-

ing conference championship weekend, typically early December.

Quarterfinals would be hosted by bowl games on New Year's Day — unless that falls on a Sunday, in which case games will be played Jan. 2 — and an adjacent day.

The semifinals would continue to be hosted by bowl games. The plan calls for no re-seeding of the bracket as teams advance.

Mountain West Commissioner Craig Thompson cited the history of the bowls in college football and the desire to keep them "relevant."

A 12-team field with six spots reserved for conference champions would guarantee at least one team from outside the Power Five conferences would be in the playoff each season. The Group of Five — which includes the Mountain West, American Athletic, Sun Belt, Mid-American Conference and Conference USA — has never had a team crack the field of four or been particularly close.

The proposal will be considered by the full CFP management committee during an in-person meeting at the Big Ten's offices outside Chicago on June 17-18. The subcommittee comprised of Swarbrick, Bowlsby, Thompson and Sankey presented the proposal to the rest of conference commissioners in a Zoom meeting Thursday, but got no feedback.

NBA intends to return to normal schedule next year

Associated Press

MIAMI — The NBA told its teams Thursday that it intends to return to a normal schedule next season, with training camps opening in late September and the regular season set to begin on Oct. 19.

A memo that was sent to teams, a copy of which was obtained by The Associated Press, does not specify when the 2021-22 regular season will end — and that's because it has yet to be officially decided if the play-in tournament will return. If it does, and there are no indications that it won't, the likely date to end the regular season would be April 10.

The return to the normal schedule is not an unexpected development, and Commissioner Adam Silver has said several times that the league's intention for the past several months — virus-permitting — was to get the league back onto its regular calendar after two seasons of schedule havoc because of the pandemic.

But it will lead to another quick turnaround for the teams that make this summer's NBA Finals.

The latest possible date for Game 7 of this season's title series is July 22; training camps for next season are set to begin on Sept. 28, meaning it is possible that this season's finalists are back in camp as little as 68 days following the end of the 2021 finals.

Last season's finalists, the champion Los Angeles Lakers and Miami Heat, had 51 days between the end of the 2020 finals and the start of this season's training camp — with this season's game schedule beginning 72 days after the Lakers won the title at the restart bubble at Walt Disney World.

And the Lakers and the Heat both were eliminated in the first round of this year's playoffs; only two of last season's final eight teams returned to the second round of the postseason in 2021. Questions about fatigued teams were a talking point around the league throughout this season, and likely will be again next season — especially for those clubs that go deepest in this year's playoffs.

"From the moment we entered the bubble to now today, it's been draining," Lakers forward LeBron James said after his team was eliminated. "Mentally, physically, spiritually, emotionally draining. ... Every team has to deal with it, obviously. But with us and Miami obviously going the long haul in the bubble and then coming right back on short notice to this season, it's been very draining."

Bucks rally, edge Nets

Associated Press

MILWAUKEE — Jrue Holiday figured the Brooklyn Nets expected him to call a timeout as soon as he got the ball with his team trailing by one in the final minute.

Instead, Holiday delivered just in time to keep the Milwaukee Bucks from falling into a hole from which no NBA team has ever recovered.

His driving layup with 11.4 seconds left put the Bucks ahead for good and they held on for an 86-83 victory Thursday night that cut Brooklyn's lead to 2-1 in the Eastern Conference semifinals.

"I felt like maybe they thought I was going to call a timeout," Holiday said. "I think in my head, I was thinking maybe I should run some clock. But I saw Bruce Brown one-on-one, so I made a move. It was a good one and I ended up getting a layup."

Kevin Durant's three-point attempt to tie bounced off the rim as the horn sounded. He scored the Nets' last nine points and finished with 30.

The Bucks will try to even the series Sunday in Milwaukee.

Milwaukee relied on its defense as a game featuring the NBA's two highest-scoring teams from the regular season turned into a

1990s-style defensive slugfest.

Brooklyn had its lowest scoring output of the season. Milwaukee matched its lowest point total of the season from its 125-86 Game 2 loss.

"Someone was going to win ugly," Nets coach Steve Nash said. "And it was them to-night."

Khris Middleton scored 35 points, and Giannis Antetokounmpo added 33 for the Bucks. Middleton bounced back in a big way after shooting a combined 13-for-43 in the first two games of the series.

That was barely enough.

"At the end of the day, a win is a win," Antetokounmpo said. "It doesn't matter if you win by 30. It doesn't matter if you win by one. You can go back home and celebrate the 'W.'"

The Bucks raced to a 21-point lead but had to come from behind, scoring the final six points after Durant's three-pointer made it 83-80 with 1:23 to play.

"We didn't make shots down the stretch," Durant said. "I think we rushed a couple opportunities there."

Holiday scored just nine points and shot 4-for-14 but made the biggest basket of the night.

Jazz up 2-0 over Clippers

Associated Press

SALT LAKE CITY — Donovan Mitchell's scoring sent the Utah Jazz into the lead and their defense closed the door.

Mitchell scored 37 points and the Jazz forced nine straight misses down the stretch to outlast the Los Angeles Clippers 117-111 on Thursday night and take a 2-0 lead in their Western Conference semifinal series.

Mitchell clinched the game with a driving shot with 43 seconds remaining but then appeared to hurt his leg slightly on a foul by Paul George with 10 seconds to play. He made one of two free throws after hobbling to the line.

"I'm fine now. I walked in here and if you want me to sprint for you, I can. I'm good," Mitchell said.

The guard is the first Jazz player with at least 35 points in back-to-back playoff games since Karl Malone in 1988, but the points became more difficult as the game wore on.

"I don't feel like I have to go out there

and do everything. I think that's a credit to the guys we have on this team because they can go out there and make plays. Everybody's elevated their game," Mitchell said.

Jordan Clarkson scored 24, including six three-pointers, while Joe Ingles had 19 points and Rudy Gobert contributed 13 points and a career playoff-high 20 rebounds.

Reggie Jackson led the Clippers with 29 points and George had 27. Kawhi Leonard scored 21 points but managed just two in the fourth quarter.

Once the Clippers took their only lead at 101-99 after consecutive three-pointers by Jackson, the Jazz forced nine consecutive misses to power a 14-2 run that was capped by Ingles' three-pointer to make it 113-103 with 3:07 to play.

"You can't dig yourself a hole like that against a good team. Then you got to expend all your energy trying to get back in the game and you don't have enough to finish," Clippers coach Tyrone Lue said.

Betts homer, double play lift Dodgers

Associated Press

PITTSBURGH — Mookie Betts hit his 25th leadoff home run and added a spectacular catch and throw for a double play to lead the Los Angeles Dodgers over the Pittsburgh Pirates 6-3 on Thursday.

Betts took the third pitch he saw from Mitch Keller (3-7) and sent it into the bullpen beyond the center-field fence for his sixth homer this season. He saved a run in the second by making a running grab on a sinking line drive by Ka'ai Tom then doing a 360-degree turn before firing a one-hop strike to home plate to throw out Erik Gonzalez.

Julio Urias (9-2) allowed three runs and six hits in six innings to become the major leagues' first nine-game winner. Phil Bickford got his first save when the game was called with one out in the eighth after a rain delay of 1 hour, 15 minutes.

Los Angeles completed its sixth series sweep.

Red Sox 12, Astros 8: J.D. Martinez hit his 13th homer, Christian Arroyo had a three-run drive and host Boston capitalized on a pair of dropped balls in a five-run sixth inning to beat Houston, avoiding a three-game sweep.

Twins 7, Yankees 5: Josh Do-

naldson and Nelson Cruz hit two-run homers off Aroldis Chapman in the ninth inning, and host Minnesota beat New York to avoid a three-game sweep.

Royals 6, Athletics 1: Jorge Soler and Andrew Benintendi homered to help back Mike Minor (5-3), and visiting Kansas City snapped a five-game losing streak by beating Oakland.

Phillies 4, Braves 3: Jean Segura hit a two-run single against Chris Martin (0-2) in the 10th inning to lead host Philadelphia past Atlanta.

Brewers 7, Reds 2: Jace Peterson drove in three runs, and Daniel Vogelbach hit a two-run

homer to lead visiting Milwaukee past Cincinnati.

Tigers 8, Mariners 3: Jonathan Schoop homered and Isaac Paredes hit a go-ahead single as host Detroit rallied from a first-inning deficit and took advantage of two errors by shortstop Kyle Seager and one by second baseman Donovan Walton to score two unearned runs.

Marlins 11, Rockies 4: Starling Marte had four hits, including a homer and double, and host Miami beat Colorado.

White Sox 5, Blue Jays 2: Dallas Keuchel (5-1) pitched six effective innings, Yasmani Grandal homered and host Chicago beat Toronto.

Golden Knights oust Avs

Associated Press

LAS VEGAS — When Alex Pietrangolo signed with the Vegas Golden Knights in October, he didn't mince words as to why he left St. Louis after 12 seasons.

"Obviously the atmosphere; I mean, I think everybody agrees it's probably the best place to play in the NHL right now," he said. "They play the way I think the game should be played, so you want to go somewhere you feel comfortable and that you can help."

His contributions Thursday night helped the Golden Knights move into the NHL's final four for the third time in the franchise's four years.

Pietrangolo scored his first goal of the postseason to break a tie late in the second period, and the Golden Knights defeated the Colorado Avalanche 6-3 in Game 6 of their second-round series to advance to the Stanley Cup semifinals.

Pietrangolo, who finished the series with 22 shots, 21 blocks, and a point in all four wins, now has 16 career points in 17 potential series-clinching games played.

"I thought he was the best player in the series, on either team," Vegas coach Peter DeBoer said. "He was an absolute monster for us. Defensively, blocking shots, offensively, the goal tonight — that's what we brought him here for, for this time of year, and those situations."

Nick Holden, William Karlsson, Keegan Kolesar, William Carrier and Max Pacioretty also scored for Vegas, which won four straight in the series and will next face the Montreal Canadiens.

Marc-Andre Fleury stopped 30 shots and moved into sole possession of fourth place all-time with 89 playoff wins.

Devin Toews, Mikko Rantanen, and Andre Burakovsky scored for Colorado. Philipp Grubauer made 17 saves for the Avalanche.

After firing a team-high 45 shots during the postseason, Pietrangolo's 46th attempt found the back of the net with 18 seconds left in the second after he gathered a rebound from Alex Tuch's shot that caromed off the end board, and he sent the puck top shelf to beat Grubauer and put Vegas up 4-3.

Juarez pitches Sooners to their fifth WCWS title

Associated Press

OKLAHOMA CITY — Giselle Juarez re-emerged as the star pitcher Oklahoma needed to complement its high-powered offense, and now the Sooners are national champions again.

Juarez threw her second consecutive complete game, and Oklahoma beat Florida State 5-1 on Thursday for its fifth Women's College World Series title.

The Sooners lacked a dominant pitcher heading into the series but Juarez answered the call, allowing one run on two hits in the decisive Game 3. Oklahoma won Game 2 6-2 behind Juarez, who went 5-0 at the World Series and was named Most Outstanding Player. The left-hander allowed four runs in 3 1/3 innings.

Juarez, a super senior, was a first-team NFCA All-American in 2019 but had surgery on her left arm last year and struggled to regain her form.

"The beginning of the season wasn't great for me, but I just kept grinding and trusting God's plan for myself. He had this mo-

ment planned for me," Juarez said.

Much of the crowd stood when Juarez took the circle in the seventh inning. Fittingly, the final out was a popup into her glove.

After Juarez secured the catch, teammates mobbed her and "Boomer Sooner" blared over the sound system as the crowd of 10,830 at USA Softball Hall of Fame Stadium — mostly Oklahoma fans — celebrated the win just 25 miles from campus.

It wasn't easy for the top-seeded Sooners — they came out of the losers' bracket after dropping a stunner to Odicci Alexander and unseeded James Madison in the tournament's opening game. But Oklahoma beat James Madison twice in the semifinal round, then recovered from a loss to Florida State in the championship series opener.

Oklahoma (56-4) also won titles in 2000, 2013, 2016 and 2017, all under coach Patty Gasso. The Sooners set the Division I single-season record with 161 home runs this season.