

NATO to boost defense by sevenfold

By JOHN VANDIVER

Stars and Stripes

Leaders of NATO countries meeting in Madrid this week will agree to a more than sevenfold increase of its quick-reaction force as well as take a series of other steps to thicken defenses in the east, the top alliance official said Monday.

The response force now stands at roughly 40,000 troops, but that number will swell to more than 300,000, Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg said on the eve of Madrid Summit.

Describing the summit as “transformative,” Stoltenberg also said allies will adopt a new strategic concept that will guide NATO’s direction in the coming years.

“Together, this constitutes the biggest overhaul of our collective deterrence and defense since the Cold War,” he said.

Events in Ukraine, where Russia launched a full-fledged war in February, have prompted allies to take steps to better reinforce countries to the east and be able to respond faster in the event of Russian aggression on NATO turf.

The new strategic concept will state the

obvious: that Russia is NATO’s top security threat. And for the first time, China’s military rise will also be accounted for in the strategy document, Stoltenberg said.

The summit will bring the first official update to NATO’s strategic concept since 2010, when allies characterized Russia as a potential partner and the war in Afghanistan was on the top of the NATO agenda.

President Joe Biden will lead discussions in Madrid, where the prospective NATO membership of Finland and Sweden also will be under discussion.

It’s not yet clear if the two countries will be invited into the alliance during talks, given Turkish opposition. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan will meet with his Finnish and Swedish counterparts in Madrid to work on a resolution, Stoltenberg said.

On troop increases along NATO’s eastern flank, allies now appear inclined toward making incremental adjustments rather than overhauling how forces operate in the region.

One measure likely to be agreed to is expanding the size of multinational battle-

groups in the east to brigade-size levels, Stoltenberg said. While he didn’t specify how many troops that would involve, brigades generally range between 3,000 and 5,000 people.

Only some of NATO’s eight current battlegroups would get such a boost, however, Stoltenberg said. While he didn’t provide a breakdown of the troop increases, he said Lithuania is one of the countries likely to get a boost.

Other initiatives on the table involve more pre-positioned weaponry and air defenses as well as updated defense plans that pair forces to defend specific allies in the east, Stoltenberg said.

“These troops will exercise together with home defense forces, and they will become familiar with local terrain, facilities and our new pre-positioned stocks so that they can respond smoothly and swiftly to any emergency,” Stoltenberg said.

Allies are gathering in Madrid as defense expenditures continue to rise in NATO. For the eighth consecutive year, European members and Canada collectively spent more, Stoltenberg said.

G-7 pledges support after plea from Zelenskyy

Associated Press

ELMAU, Germany — Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy on Monday underscored the urgency of helping his country’s military improve its position against Russia in a video meeting with leading economic powers, who in turn pledged to support Ukraine “for as long as it takes.”

Zelenskyy addressed the delicacy of the moment for Ukraine in its war with Russia to the Group of Seven summit as the leaders of the major economies prepared to unveil plans to pursue a price cap on Russian oil, raise tariffs on Russian goods and impose other new

sanctions.

In addition, the United States was preparing to announce the purchase of an advanced surface-to-air missile system for Kyiv to help Ukraine fight back against Vladimir Putin’s aggression, a day after Russian missiles hit the Ukrainian capital of Kyiv for the first time in weeks and as its military continued a full-on assault on the last remaining Ukrainian redoubt in the Luhansk region in the east.

Ukrainian officials stressed the need for air-defense systems after Russia launched a missile attack on a crowded shopping center in the central

city of Kremenchuk on Monday. Officials said 1,000 civilians were in the mall with at least 20 injured and two dead.

The new aid and efforts by the G-7 leaders to punish Moscow come as Zelenskyy has openly worried that the West has become fatigued by the cost of a war that is contributing to soaring energy costs and price hikes on essential goods around the globe. The Ukrainian leader discussed his strategy for the course of the war, which has transformed into a bloody artillery battle in the country’s west and east.

U.S. national security adviser Jake Sullivan said Zelenskyy’s

top request was for further air defense systems, followed by economic support to help his government meet its financial obligations. Zelenskyy also briefed the G-7 leaders on how his administration is using the assistance he’s received to date “to maximize Ukraine’s capacity both to resist Russian advances, and to pursue counterattacks where possible,” Sullivan said.

After hearing from Zelenskyy, the leaders pledged in a statement to support Ukraine “for as long as it takes.” They said it is up to Ukraine to decide on a future peace settlement.

Aquilino looking for new materiel to check China

BY ALEX WILSON
Stars and Stripes

A permanent contingent of Air Force fifth-generation fighters west of the International Date Line is a “desirable” option as the United States seeks to deter an increasingly assertive China, the head of U.S. Indo-Pacific Command said Friday.

China’s ongoing military buildup and February commitment to a “no-limits” partnership with Russia presents a serious threat to the Indo-Pacific region, Adm. John Aquilino said Friday. He was interviewed by Bradley Bowman of the Washington, D.C.-based Foundation for Defense of Democracies.

“That buildup encompasses all domains and all capabilities, whether it’s naval ships, whether it’s fifth-generation aircraft, whether it’s missile forces, whether it’s cyber capability or capability in space, to include strategic nuclear capability,” Aquilino said. “The concern for all Americans should be the pace, scale and scope that China is growing and what does that mean with regard to intent for a future peaceful globe.”

Aquilino emphasized the importance of deterrence through the presence of U.S. troops in Guam, Japan and South Korea and through investment in new technologies such as fifth-

generation aircraft like the F-22 Raptor or F-35 Lightning II.

The U.S. Marine Corps has established two squadrons of F-35Bs at Marine Corps Air Station Iwakuni, Japan, and the Navy has deployed F-35Cs aboard aircraft carriers, starting with the USS Carl Vinson in August. But the Air Force has thus far only deployed F-35s or F-22s into the region on a short-term basis, Aquilino said.

F-35As from Eielson Air Force Base, Alaska, and F-22s from Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam, Hawaii, took part this month in an Agile Combat Employment exercise at Iwakuni, for example.

Aquilino said the two types of aircraft have a wider role to play, and the possibility exists for a permanent presence in the region.

“I would envision that that capability is certainly — well, it’s certainly desirable, but we would like to get to that,” he said. “That ability to, like I said, operate in contested space, fifth-generation capabilities, whether they be F-22, F-35, are critically important to the ability to deliver deterrence.”

Despite the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the U.S. believes China remains its “pacing threat” and the Indo-Pacific its “priority theater.”

Army to touch base on suicide and sex assault

BY ROSE L. THAYER
Stars and Stripes

About 150 of the Army’s top enlisted leaders will gather in El Paso, Texas, this week for an annual in-person summit to discuss quick-action, low-cost solutions to eliminate suicide and sexual assault among the ranks.

After three days of brainstorming, discussions and guest speakers, the goal is for each sergeant major to come away with actionable solutions, said Sgt. Maj. Osvaldo Martinez of the Army’s People First Task Force and coordinator of the summit.

“The goal of the meeting is to really operationalize how we’re going to eliminate the harmful behaviors that we find ourselves working through every single day in the Army,” he said.

The summit is hosted by Sgt. Maj. of the Army Michael Grinston and builds upon monthly virtual meetings that offer updates on success and failures for each solution.

“[Grinston] is about putting ownership on senior mission command sergeants major,” Martinez said. “This meeting allows for collaborations between all those senior mission command sergeants major to really collaborate, learn from one another and put things into practice pretty easily. We don’t need months of studies and data and all these things that sometimes slow things down. The issue is today, and how do we fix it today?”

The Army has long been looking for ways to protect soldiers from sexual assault and harassment and suicide as statistics have remained the same or increased in recent years.

The fiscal 2020 report on sexual assault in the Army — the most recent statistics available — stated 3,250 reports were filed that year, or about 5.5 per 1,000 soldiers. That rate has increased during the previous decade from 2.4 per 1,000 soldiers and has not changed since 2018, according to the report.

Another recent Defense Department report stated the active-duty Army had 176 soldiers die by suicide in 2021. That’s a 35% increase in five years, according to the report.

Martinez said, however, that the Army has seen 29% fewer suicide deaths than it had at this time last year.

Hecker gets 4th star, takes charge of US airmen in Europe and Africa

BY JENNIFER H. SVAN
Stars and Stripes

RAMSTEIN AIR BASE, Germany — Gen. James Hecker on Monday became commander of more than 30,000 airmen and an air operations network spread across three continents, taking the reins in a ceremony that saw five four-star leaders on one stage.

Hecker, the Air Force’s newest four-star general, received his promotion shortly before his elevation to command of U.S. Air Forces in Europe and Air Forces Africa.

Gen. David Allvin, the Air Force’s vice chief of staff; Gen. Tod Wolters, U.S. European Command and NATO supreme allied

commander; and Gen. Stephen Townsend, U.S. Africa Command commander, were on hand to welcome Hecker to Europe and bid farewell to the outgoing Gen. Jeffrey Harrigan, who is retiring after a 37-year career.

A fighter pilot and 1989 Air Force Academy graduate, Hecker comes to Europe from Maxwell Air Force Base, Ala., where he was the commander and president of Air University, part of Air Education and Training Command, for more than three years.

In his new assignment at Ramstein, Hecker will also lead Allied Air Command, which coordinates air and space operations for the NATO alliance.

Sanctions slip Russia into historic default

Bloomberg News

Russia defaulted on its external sovereign bonds for the first time in a century, the culmination of ever-tougher Western sanctions that shut down payment routes to overseas creditors.

For months, Russia had found paths around the penalties imposed after the Kremlin's invasion of Ukraine. But at the end of the day on Sunday, the grace period on about \$100 million of trapped interest payments due May 27 expired, a deadline considered an "Event of Default" if missed.

The route to this point has been far from normal, as Russia has the resources to pay its bills — and tried to do so — but was blocked by the sanctions. Those restrictions also mean there's huge un-

certainty about what comes next, and about how investors can go about getting their money.

"With Russia benefiting from the high price of its energy exports, it clearly has both the means and the desire to pay its foreign debt," said Giles Coghlan, chief analyst at HYCM Group. It's a "default in a technical sense, so many investors may be prepared to wait it out."

Given the damage already done to the economy and markets, the default is also mostly symbolic for now, and matters little to Russians dealing with double-digit inflation and the worst economic contraction in years. But still, it's a grim marker in the country's rapid transformation into an economic, financial and political outcast. The nation's eu-

robonds have traded at distressed levels since the start of March, the central bank's foreign reserves remain frozen and the biggest banks are severed from the global financial system.

Russia has pushed back against the default designation, saying it has the funds to cover any bills and has been forced into nonpayment. As it tried to twist its way out, it announced last week that it would switch to servicing its \$40 billion of outstanding sovereign debt in rubles, criticizing a "force-majeure" situation it said was artificially manufactured by the West.

Finance Minister Anton Siluanov dismissed the situation on Thursday as a "farce." He also said it makes little sense for creditors to seek a declaration of de-

fault through the courts because Russia hasn't waived its sovereign immunity, and no foreign court would have jurisdiction.

"If we ultimately get to the point where diplomatic assets are claimed, then this is tantamount to severing diplomatic ties and entering into direct conflict," he said. "And this would put us in a different world with completely different rules. We would have to react differently in this case — and not through legal channels."

The 30-day grace period was triggered when investors failed to receive coupon payments due on dollar- and euro-denominated bonds on May 27. Bondholders have time to assess the situation: the claims only become void three years on from the payment date, according to the bond documents.

Analysts: Firms' greed not top factor fueling inflation

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Furious about surging prices at the gas-line station and the supermarket, many consumers feel they know just where to cast blame: On greedy companies that relentlessly jack up prices and pocket the profits.

Responding to that sentiment, the Democratic-led House of Representatives last month passed on a party-line vote — most Democrats for, all Republicans against — a bill designed to crack down on alleged price gouging by energy producers.

Likewise, Britain last month announced plans to impose a temporary 25% windfall tax on oil and gas company profits and to funnel the proceeds to financially struggling households.

Yet for all the public's resentment, most economists say corporate price gouging is, at most, one of many causes of runaway inflation — and not the primary one.

"There are much more plaus-

ible candidates for what's going on," said Jose Azar an economist at Spain's University of Navarra.

They include: Supply disruptions at factories, ports and freight yards. Worker shortages. President Joe Biden's pandemic aid program. COVID 19-caused shutdowns in China. Russia's invasion of Ukraine. And, not least, a Federal Reserve that kept interest rates ultra-low longer than experts said it should have.

Most of all, though, economists have said resurgent spending by consumers and governments drove inflation up.

The blame game is, if anything, intensifying after the U.S. government reported that inflation hit 8.6% in May from a year earlier, the biggest price spike since 1981.

Just what combination of factors is most responsible for causing prices to soar "is still an open question," Azar acknowledges. COVID-19 and its aftermath have made it hard to assess the state of the economy.

Ruling highlights complex court-public relationship

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Supreme Court ruling to overturn its 1973 Roe v. Wade decision is unpopular with a majority of Americans — but did that matter?

The relationship between the public and the judiciary has been studied and debated by legal and political scholars. The short answer: it's complicated. There's evidence that the public has an indirect role in the judiciary, but that might be changing.

In the final opinion, Justice Samuel Alito wrote that the court "cannot allow our decisions to be affected by any extraneous influences such as concern about the public's reaction to our work."

The high court and public opinion have clashed at times, but they've entered into a "symbiotic relationship" over the last 60 years, Barry Friedman suggests in his 2009 book "The Will of the People". The court doesn't stray too far from popular opinion.

How that happens and whether it remains true are harder to know

for certain. "We don't have a viewfinder that shows us what the justices are doing," said Maya Sen, political scientist and professor at the Harvard Kennedy School. "It's a complicated chicken-and-egg situation where we can try to disentangle these forces, but it's very hard to do."

Public opinion on abortion is nuanced, but polling shows broad support for Roe; 70% of U.S. adults said in a May AP-NORC poll that the court should leave Roe as is, not overturn it.

Researchers have found — and some of the justices have acknowledged — that court decisions and public opinion are often aligned, but some experts have said it's probably not a direct link.

The most important thing in decision-making is justices' "set of political and judicial philosophies that give them preferences over the outcomes of the cases," said Joseph Ura, political science professor at Texas A&M University. "Everything else is kind of marginal around that."

Over 1M voters shift to GOP in alarm for Dems

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — A political shift is beginning to take hold across the United States as tens of thousands of suburban swing voters who helped fuel the Democratic Party's gains in recent years are becoming Republicans.

More than 1 million voters across 43 states have switched to the Republican Party over the last year, according to voter registration data analyzed by The Associated Press. The previously unreported number reflects a phenomenon that is playing out in virtually every region of the country — Democratic and Republican states along with cities and small towns — in the period since President Joe Biden replaced former President Donald Trump.

But nowhere is the shift more pronounced—and dangerous for Democrats — than in the suburbs, where well-educated swing voters who turned against

Trump's Republican Party in recent years appear to be swinging back. Over the last year, far more people are switching to the GOP across suburban counties from Denver to Atlanta and Pittsburgh and Cleveland. Republicans also gained ground in counties around medium-size cities such as Harrisburg, Pa.; Raleigh, N.C.; Augusta, Ga.; and Des Moines, Iowa.

Ben Smith, who lives in suburban Larimer County, Colo., north of Denver, said he reluctantly registered as a Republican earlier in the year after becoming increasingly concerned about the Democrats' support in some localities for mandatory COVID-19 vaccines, the party's inability to quell violent crime and its frequent focus on racial justice.

"It's more so a rejection of the left than embracing the right," said Smith, 37, a professional counselor whose transition away from the Democratic Party began five or six years ago when he

registered as a libertarian.

The AP examined nearly 1.7 million voters who had likely switched affiliations across 42 states for which there is data over the last 12 months, according to L2, a political data firm. L2 uses a combination of state voter records and statistical modeling to determine party affiliation. While party switching is not uncommon, the data shows a definite reversal from the period while Trump was in office, when Democrats enjoyed a slight edge in the number of party switchers nationwide.

But over the last year, roughly two-thirds of the 1.7 million voters who changed their party affiliation shifted to the Republican Party. In all, more than 1 million people became Republicans compared to about 630,000 who became Democrats.

The broad migration of more than 1 million voters, a small portion of the overall U.S. electorate, does not ensure widespread Re-

publican success in the November midterm elections, which will determine control of Congress and dozens of governorships. Democrats are hoping the Supreme Court's decision on Friday to overrule *Roe v. Wade* will energize supporters, particularly in the suburbs, ahead of the midterms.

Roughly four months before Election Day, Democrats have no clear strategy to address Biden's weak popularity and voters' overwhelming fear that the country is headed in the wrong direction with their party in charge. And while Republicans have offered few policy solutions of their own, the GOP has been working effectively to capitalize on the Democrats' shortcomings.

At least some of the newly registered Republicans are actually Democrats who crossed over to vote against Trump-backed candidates in GOP primaries. Such voters are likely to vote Democratic again this November.

Cyberattack forces Iran steel company to halt production

Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates — One of Iran's major steel companies said Monday that it was forced to halt production after being hit by a cyberattack, apparently marking one of the biggest such assaults on the country's strategic industrial sector in recent memory.

The state-owned Khuzestan Steel Company said experts had determined the plant had to stop work until further notice "due to technical problems" following "cyberattacks." The company's website was down on Monday.

The company's CEO, Amin Ebrahimi,

claimed Khuzestan Steel managed to thwart the cyberattack and prevent structural damage to production lines that would impact supply chains and customers.

"Fortunately with time and awareness, the attack was unsuccessful," the semiofficial Mehr news agency quoted Ebrahimi as saying, adding that he expected the company's website to be restored and everything to return to "normal" by the end of Monday.

A local news channel, Jamaran, reported that the attack failed because the factory happened to be non-operational at the time due to an electricity outage.

The company did not blame any specific group for the assault, which constitutes just the latest example of an attack targeting the country's services that has embarrassed authorities in recent weeks. In a major incident last year, a cyberattack on Iran's fuel distribution paralyzed gas stations across the country, leading to long lines of angry motorists.

Train stations in Iran have been hit with fake delay messages. Surveillance cameras in the country have been hacked. State-run websites have been disrupted. Footage showing abuse in the country's notorious Evin prison has leaked out.

Owner's poisonous bite leads German police to over 110 snakes

Associated Press

BERLIN — Police in Germany said Sunday they discovered more than 110 dangerous snakes on a farm after a woman who lived there sought medical treatment for

a poisonous bite.

The 35-year-old woman drove to a hospital in Salzgitter, near Hannover, early Sunday and told doctors there that one of her rattlesnakes bit her finger.

While the woman's condition deteriorated and authorities hastily ordered an antidote from a specialist institute in Hamburg, police visited the farm in central Germany and found dozens of snakes.

In a statement, police said specialists determined the snake collection included both constrictors and poisonous varieties, which weren't housed in appropriate terrariums.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Alleged dealer caught with 24 kilos of fentanyl

CA FULLERTON — A suspected Southern California drug dealer was caught with 24 kilos of fentanyl in his car and home, along with \$250,000 worth of fentanyl pills, prosecutors said.

The 60-year-old suspect was arrested following a traffic stop on Wednesday during which California Highway Patrol officers found 4 kilos of fentanyl in his vehicle, according to a statement the Orange County District Attorney's Office. A search of his home led to the discovery of more fentanyl, plus methamphetamine, the statement said.

The Fullerton resident pleaded not guilty on Friday to multiple felony counts, The Orange County Register reported.

Sheriff: 2 divers drown in cave diving expedition

FL BROOKSVILLE — Two men drowned while on a diving expedition in a mazelike Florida cave system that extends deep below the surface, authorities said Thursday.

The Hernando County Sheriff's Office said three teenagers saw the two divers go into the Buford Springs Cave on Wednesday, but one surfaced and was floating unresponsively. Rescue divers found the second man 137 feet down into the cave.

They were identified as Todd Richard McKenna, 52, and Stephen Roderick Gambrell, 63. The medical examiner will determine the cause of the deaths.

According to the sheriff's office, the teenagers heard the two divers discussing going into the cave and whether they had

enough air in their tanks, with one mentioning a possible leak. Both then went down into the water, the sheriff's office said.

Man who was pardoned charged with assault

KY COVINGTON — A Kentucky man pardoned by former Gov. Matt Bevin, who said the man will do "great things with his life," is facing assault and strangulation charges.

The Kentucky Enquirer reported 20-year-old Johiem Bandy, of Covington, is charged with strangulation, assault and second-degree criminal mischief for incidents that happened in March and April, according to court documents.

One female victim told police Bandy "pinned her against the wall, placing his hands around her neck and restricting her ability to breathe," according to a complaint. In another complaint, Bandy is charged with choking and assaulting a woman following a dispute over money.

Bandy was sentenced at age 15 to 13 years in prison for robbery and assault, according to court documents. He had served two years when he was fully pardoned by Bevin in 2019.

Gang members convicted of trafficking 13-year-old

VA ALEXANDRIA — Seven members and associates of the MS-13 street gang were convicted of sex trafficking in federal court after taking in a 13-year-old runaway and coercing her into commercial sex acts in Maryland and Virginia.

The seven defendants all face a mandatory minimum prison

term of 15 years when they are sentenced in November.

The U.S. Attorney's Office for the Eastern District of Virginia, which prosecuted the case, announced the jury verdict Friday.

According to an FBI affidavit, the girl ran away from a youth home in Fairfax, Va., in 2018. She was sex trafficked for nearly two months in that year before she was recovered by the bureau's Child Exploitation and Human Trafficking task force.

The seven defendants — six men and a woman — range in age from 22 to 50.

Hospital patient fatally stabs 1, wounds another

NV LAS VEGAS — A knife-wielding psychiatric patient fatally stabbed one man and wounded another inside a Las Vegas hospital Thursday, according to police.

The stabbings occurred in a secured area where psychiatric patients are treated at University Medical Center, said Lt. Jason Johansson, a spokesperson for Las Vegas Metropolitan Police.

Johansson said the suspect, a man in his 40s, was under investigation. The suspect's name wasn't immediately released by police and neither were the identities of the two stabbing victims, both men in their 20s.

Harvard returns Standing Bear tomahawk to tribe

MA BOSTON — A tomahawk once owned by Chief Standing Bear, a pioneering Native American civil rights leader, has been returned to his tribe after being housed for decades in a museum at Harvard University.

Members of the Ponca tribes in

Nebraska and Oklahoma visited the Cambridge, Mass., university June 3 for the ceremonial return of the artifact, the tribes said in a recent announcement.

Standing Bear had originally gifted the pipe-tomahawk to one of his lawyers after winning the 1879 court case that made him one of the first Native Americans granted civil rights.

The tomahawk changed hands several times before being acquired by Harvard in 1982.

"This is a good homecoming and a good step in the many steps we have to do to get back to our identity, to our ways of our people," Angie Starkel, a member of the Ponca Tribe of Nebraska who made the trip to Cambridge, said in a statement.

Woman, dog attacked by coyote behind home

VT PANTON — A Vermont woman is recovering after she said she was attacked by a coyote.

The woman said she was walking with her young dog through a pasture behind her home in Pantan last weekend when she saw what she thought was a dog running across the field. She then realized that it was a coyote and the animal attacked her 8-month-old puppy and then went after her, WCAX-TV reported.

"I knew that I couldn't watch my dog be ripped to shreds and I knew that everything I had seen on any television show or read in any book had said to be big and scary and fight — and I did," she told the news station.

The coyote tried to bite her and broke skin on her face, she said. She's receiving rabies treatment as a precaution.

— From wire reports

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Avs dethrone Lightning, win Cup

Associated Press

TAMPA, Fla. — Nathan MacKinnon could not find the words. Gabriel Landeskog cracked a smile and a joke.

After years of playoff disappointments, the Colorado Avalanche are back atop hockey's mountain after dethroning the two-time defending champions.

Behind a goal and an assist from MacKinnon, the Avalanche won the Stanley Cup for the third time in franchise history and first in more than two decades by beating the Tampa Bay Lightning 2-1 in Game 6 of the final Sunday night.

"It's just been building over time," playoff MVP-winning defenseman Cale Makar said about the Avalanche's journey. "I've been here only three years. A couple of tough exits in the playoffs. It was just all leading up to this."

It's the first title for the Avs' core group led by MacKinnon, captain Landeskog, Mikko Rantanen and Makar, following several early postseason exits — in the second round the past three seasons and the first round in 2018. The 2016-17 team was the worst in hockey, finishing with 48 points.

"It's hard to describe," said MacKinnon, who led the way in the clincher by blocking shots and taking big hits in addition to his offensive production. "Some tough years mixed in there, but it's all over now. We never stopped believing."

With a mix of speed, high-end talent and the experience gained from those defeats, Colorado broke through this time — earning every bit of the championship by knocking off a deep and gritty team that hoisted the Cup the past two years.

"To beat them is probably a little more satisfying, to be honest, because they are champions," said veteran forward Andrew Cogliano, who hoisted the Cup for the first time at age 35. "They know how to win. And, ultimately, when you can beat the champions, you know you really earned it."

Like the Avs expected, it wasn't easy.

An early turnover by Makar led to an easy goal by Steven Stamkos, putting Colorado in a hole and several more bumps and bruises followed. The Avalanche tied it when MacKinnon beat 2021 playoff MVP Andrei Vasilevskiy with a near-perfect shot and went ahead on another big goal by trade deadline acquisition Artturi Lehkonen. They locked things down by holding on to the puck and held Tampa Bay without a shot on Darcy Kuemper until midway through the third period.

When the Lightning finally did, he was there. Brought in from Arizona in a trade last summer to shore up the sport's most important position, Kuemper was solid again and made his most important save with under seven minutes left when he slid over to deny star Nikita Kucherov.

His teammates finished the job and Colorado improved to 9-1 on the road this postseason.

Much like the Lightning went all in multiple times by trading high draft picks and prospects to load up for the best chance to win the Cup, Avalanche general manager Joe Sakic was not afraid to ante up in March to acquire Lehkonen, defenseman Josh Manson and Cogliano. They became the perfect complement to Colorado's core that had showed plenty of playoff promise but until now hadn't produced a championship.

Sakic, who captained Colorado's first two title-winning teams in 1996 and 2001, used a familiar recipe to get his team over the hump. Much like Pierre Lacroix, the architect of those Avalanche teams that had so much success after the organization moved to Denver, Sakic prioritized skill, speed and versatility.

That speed overwhelmed every opponent on the way to the final, from an opening sweep of Nashville through a hard-fought, six-game series against St. Louis and a sweep of Edmonton. It was a different challenge against Tampa Bay, when the Avs needed to absorb counterpunches from the back-to-back champs.

Tampa Bay ended up two victories short of becoming the NHL's first three-peat champion since the early 1980s New York Islanders dynasty.

Colorado's Makar named MVP

Associated Press

Cale Makar led the Colorado Avalanche in scoring on the way to winning the Stanley Cup. It was no surprise the dynamic defenseman was the unanimous choice for the Conn Smythe Trophy as playoff MVP.

"It's surreal to me," Makar said. "You grow up, you see that as a kid, you have pictures on your wall. All I could think about was everybody that got me here."

No one played or produced more during this Cup run than Makar, 23, who won the Norris Trophy as the NHL's top defenseman during the regular season. Makar skated 27 minutes a game and led the Avs with 29 points in 20 games.

Asked after the Cup-clinching victory how other teams could emulate Colorado, captain Gabriel Landeskog thought for a second and said with a grin, "Get a Cale Makar somewhere."

He showed during this run why he's one of a kind. Makar's free-wheeling play led to eight goals to his credit and many more he helped create along the way.

Makar is the second defenseman to win the award over the past three years. He follows Victor Hedman of the Tampa Bay Lightning, the back-to-back defending champions eliminated by Colorado in the Stanley Cup Final on Sunday night.

"We've seen him play this way from Day 1 of the season," coach Jared Bednar said. "This guy is elite, and with him, the job he does for us offensively and defensively, watching him play, how dynamic he is, he's just the best defenseman in the game right now."

Makar began putting his stamp on the series with two goals in Colorado's 7-0 rout of Tampa Bay in Game 2 to take a 2-0 series lead.

Djokovic makes more history

Associated Press

WIMBLEDON, England — These days, Novak Djokovic makes history just about every time he wins another match. On Monday, the top-ranked Serb did just that at Wimbledon.

Djokovic, a six-time champ at the All England Club, beat Kwon Soon-woo 6-3, 3-6, 6-3, 6-4 on Centre Court, his 80th victory at the grass-court major. He became the first man or woman to win that many matches at each of the four Grand Slam tournaments.

Djokovic was playing for the first time since losing to Rafael Nadal last month in the French Open quarterfinals.

The first player to reach the second round was Alison Riske. The 28th-seeded American defeated Ylena In-Albon of Switzerland 6-2, 6-4.

Mississippi sweeps to first CWS title

Associated Press

OMAHA, Neb. — The last team to get into the NCAA baseball tournament was the last team standing.

Mississippi scored twice on wild pitches in a three-run eighth inning and the Rebels won their first national baseball title, sweeping Oklahoma in the College World Series finals with a 4-2 victory Sunday.

The Rebels (42-23) became the eighth national champion since 2009 to come out of the Southeastern Conference and third straight, and the trophy will stay in the Magnolia State for another year. Mississippi State won last year.

“There is so much to be said for how much we overcame this year, how much we had to fight through, how much we had to pick each other up and never let ourselves get down,” team captain Tim Elko said.

“The story of our season is going to be told for year and years to come.”

Ole Miss benefited from a runner-interference call that took a run away from Oklahoma (45-24) in the sixth inning. The Rebels also overcame a spectacular pitching performance by Cade Horton, who set a CWS finals record with 13 strikeouts.

Brandon Johnson struck out the side in a 1-2-3 ninth inning to set off a celebration on the field and in the stands where the majority of the 25,972 were Rebels fans dressed in Ole Miss powder blue. Catcher Hayden

Dunhurst ran to the mound to embrace and then tackle Johnson after Sebastian Orduno swung and missed on the final pitch.

It was an improbable journey for the Rebels and 22nd-year coach Mike Bianco, who was under fire when his team sat at 22-17 overall and 7-14 in SEC play on May 1.

“I think they’ve showed a lot of people that you can fall down, you can stumble and you can fail, but that doesn’t mean you’re a failure,” Bianco said. “If you continue to work hard, you continue to push and you continue to believe, you can accomplish anything. That’s not some poster or some tweet to motivate you. We’ve all heard that. These guys have lived that this season.”

Ole Miss beat out North Carolina State for the final at-large bid and had to go on the road for regionals and super regionals. The Rebels finished the season on a 20-6 run, including 10-1 in the national tournament.

Their only loss at the CWS was 3-2 to Arkansas on Wednesday. The next day, Dylan DeLucia pitched a four-hit shutout to beat the Razorbacks and send the Rebels to the finals.

DeLucia was named CWS Most Outstanding Player after allowing one earned run, striking out 17 and walking none in 16⅓ innings.

Ole Miss, which won the CWS finals opener 10-3, was down 2-1 going into the eighth inning Sunday. Trevin Michael relieved

Horton with one out, and Jacob Gonzalez singled through the right side to drive in the tying run.

“Kind of knew we were going to start the scoring in the eighth or ninth,” said Gonzalez, 3 for 23 in the CWS before singling twice and homering Sunday. “That’s how we are. We’re going to put the pressure on. We’re not going to strike out and sit down. Luckily, I got a hit and I finally got to help the team out this week.”

Michael (4-2) then uncorked the wild pitches that brought in Justin Bench for the go-ahead run and another to bring in Gonzalez. On the first one, catcher Jimmy Crooks got crossed up on a breaking ball. On the second, Michael’s low pitch got under Crooks’ glove.

“I wouldn’t want anybody behind the plate other than Jimmy Crooks or Trevin to close the game,” OU coach Skip Johnson said.

Ole Miss starter Hunter Elliott scattered three hits while allowing two runs in 6⅓ innings. Mason Nichols and John Gaddis (4-2) got the game to Johnson in the ninth.

“We made it here, and we accomplished a lot this year,” said Horton, a projected first-round pick next month in the Major League Baseball draft.

“But we’ll be back. I know that because this team laid the foundation for the future of Oklahoma baseball.”

Griner drug charges trial in Russia to start on Friday

Associated Press

MOSCOW — Shackled and looking wary, WNBA star Brittney Griner was ordered to stand trial Friday by a court near Moscow on cannabis possession charges, about 4½ months after her arrest at an airport while returning to play for a Russian team.

The Phoenix Mercury center and two-time U.S. Olympic gold medalist also was ordered to remain in custody for the duration of her criminal trial. Griner could face 10 years in prison if convicted on charges of large-scale transportation of drugs. Fewer than 1% of defendants in Russian criminal cases are acquitted, and unlike in the U.S., acquittals can be overturned.

At Monday’s closed-door preliminary hearing at the court in the Moscow suburb of Khimki, Griner’s detention was extended for another six months. Photos obtained by The Associated Press showed the 31-year-

old in handcuffs and looking straight ahead, unlike a previous court appearance where she kept her head down and covered with a hood.

Her detention and trial come at an extraordinarily low point in Moscow-Washington relations. She was arrested at Shermetyevo Airport less than a week before Russia sent troops into Ukraine, which aggravated already-high tensions with sweeping sanctions by the United States and Russia’s denunciation of U.S. weapon supplies to Ukraine.

Amid the tensions, Griner’s supporters had taken a low profile in hopes of a quiet resolution, until May, when the State Department reclassified her as wrongfully detained and shifted oversight of her case to its special presidential envoy for hostage affairs.

Griner’s wife, Chelle, urged President

Joe Biden in May to secure her release, calling her “a political pawn.”

Her supporters have encouraged a prisoner swap like the one in April that brought home Marine veteran Trevor Reed in exchange for a Russian pilot convicted of drug trafficking conspiracy.

Russian news media have repeatedly raised speculation that she could be swapped for Russian arms trader Viktor Bout, nicknamed “The Merchant of Death,” who is serving a 25-year sentence on conviction of conspiracy to kill U.S. citizens and providing aid to a terrorist organization.

Russia has agitated for Bout’s release for years. But the discrepancy between Griner’s case — she allegedly was found in possession of vape cartridges containing cannabis oil — and Bout’s global dealings in deadly weapons could make such a swap unpalatable to the U.S.

Yankees' Judge walks off Astros again

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Aaron Judge walked over to the stands and gave his bat to Spike Lee, a Yankees fan famous for scripting Hollywood dramas.

This weekend's Astros-Yankees series had all the ups, downs and twist endings audiences could handle. And when baseball's award season arrives, bet on critics taking a hard look at Judge's leading role.

"I told him I have to quit taking him for granted," manager Aaron Boone said.

Judge drove a three-run homer in the 10th inning for his second walk-off hit against the Astros in four days, and New York recovered after nearly being no-hit for the second consecutive game to beat Houston 6-3 on Sunday.

"These guys, they never waver," Judge said. "They stick to their plan, stick to their approach and continue to grind it out. And then Big G hit one about 120 (mph) to center, so it was all good."

Giancarlo Stanton ended a historic hitless drought for New York with a one-out, 111 mph homer in the seventh inning, and DJ LeMahieu followed with a tying two-run drive in the eighth as New York split a four-game series between the AL's top teams.

"Ended up Judge 2, Us 2," Astros manager Dusty Baker said.

Angels 2, Mariners 1: When Los Angeles made a late decision Sunday to go with little-used reliever Andrew Wantz as its opener on the mound, visiting Seattle suspected it might be about to get payback for a fastball that got awfully close to Mike Trout's head the previous night.

The Halos insist that wasn't their intent — and yet Wantz threw a pitch behind Julio Rodriguez's head in the first inning and then hit Jesse Winker in the hip to start the second.

A wild, angry brawl ensued, resulting in the ejections of six players and both managers. The fracas will be remembered by both teams a whole lot longer than the Angels' victory over Seattle.

"That probably shouldn't happen in the game, what happened out there today," Seattle manager Scott Servais said. "Emotions running high, but it was pretty clear what was going on. They switched, put an opener in there to throw some balls at us. Got out of hand from there, and kind of a black eye."

Both teams threw numerous punches in the melee that began when Winker charged the Angels' emptying dugout after yelling at Angels interim manager Phil Nevin.

Dodgers 5, Braves 3 (11): Chris Taylor had three hits, including the go-ahead double in the 11th, lifting visiting Los Angeles over Atlanta.

The Dodgers, who scored two runs in the ninth to force extra innings, won two of three games in the weekend series between the last two World Series champions.

Taylor's double off Darren O'Day (1-2) glanced off the glove of third baseman Austin Riley as Cody Bellinger scored from third base.

"When I hit it, I knew it was going to hook foul," Taylor said. "I'm just glad he didn't catch it. Then I realized he kind of hit it into fair territory."

Trea Turner padded the lead with an RBI single to center field.

Atlanta's Kenley Jansen and the Dodgers' Craig Kimbrel (1-3) each had blown saves against their former teams. Jansen gave up two runs in the ninth to blow a 2-0 lead, and Kimbrel gave up Matt Olson's tying single to lead off the 10th.

Phillies 8, Padres 5: Kyle Schwarber hit a go-ahead, three-run homer in the seventh off San Diego's Nabil Crismatt (4-1) as visiting Philadelphia rallied from a 5-2 deficit, one day after losing NL MVP Bryce Harper with a broken left thumb.

The Phillies are 17-6 since Rob Thomson replaced Joe Girardi as manager.

Red Sox 8, Guardians 3: Trevor Story drove in two runs to reach 500 career RBIs, Rafael Devers and J.D. Martinez each had three hits and visiting Boston finished a three-game sweep of Cleveland that extended its winning streak to seven.

Boston had 15 hits and drew 11 walks, its highest total since May 2019. The Red Sox are 19-4 in June, improving to a season-high 11 games over .500 at 42-31.

Marlins 3, Mets 2: Rookie Nick Fortes homered off Adam Ottavino (2-2) with two outs in the ninth, helping host Miami avoid a three-game sweep by NL East-leading New York.

Tanner Scott (3-2) walked J.D. Davis leading off the ninth. Davis advanced on a wild pitch and reached third on Luis Guillorme's one-out groundout. Scott struck out James McCann to end the threat.

Rays 4, Pirates 2: Shane McClellan (8-3) struck out 10 in seven innings, allowing one run and four hits for host Tampa Bay. He lowered his major league-leading ERA to 1.77 and took the MLB lead in strikeouts with 123.

Tampa Bay took a 4-1 lead in the seventh

on Ji-Man Choi's run-scoring double and RBI singles by Josh Lowe and Isaac Paredes.

White Sox 4, Orioles 3: Dylan Cease (6-3) struck out a career-high 13 and allowed four hits in seven innings, Gavin Sheets hit a two-run homer in the second against Jordan Lyles (4-7) and host Chicago avoided a four-game sweep.

Kendall Graveman struck out Trey Mancini for his third save as the White Sox snapped a four-game skid. Baltimore's season-high four-game winning streak ended.

Twins 6, Rockies 3: Byron Buxton had three hits, including an RBI triple for the second straight game, as host Minnesota beat Colorado and opened a two-game lead over the second-place Guardians going into a five-game series at Cleveland.

Athletics 5, Royals 3: Seth Brown hit his 10th homer of the season and Nick Allen hit a go-ahead two-run single off Brady Singer (3-3) to overcome a 3-2, seventh-inning deficit for visiting Oakland.

Oakland took two of three from Kansas City, ending an eight-series losing streak.

Cubs 6, Cardinals 5 (10): Willson Contreras hit a tiebreaking single in the 10th off St. Louis' Zack Thompson (1-1) to drive in his third run of the game, and host Chicago overcame a 5-0 deficit.

Brewers 10, Blue Jays 3: Rowdy Tellez hit a pair of two-run homers against Toronto, his former team, going deep in the first and second off José Berríos (5-4), and host Milwaukee took two of three.

Nationals 6, Rangers 4: Jackson Tretault (2-1) allowed one Texas run in six-plus innings in his third major league start, Josh Bell had his second three-hit game of the weekend and Nelson Cruz drove in three runs for visiting Washington.

Reds 10, Giants 3: Tyler Mahle (3-6) struck out seven in 6⅓ innings while allowing three runs and four hits for his first win since May 13 for visiting Cincinnati.

Nick Senzel singled three times on a day when every Reds starter had at least one hit against San Francisco.

Diamondbacks 11, Tigers 7: Daulton Varsho hit a three-run homer, Pavin Smith had a career-high four hits with three RBIs and host Arizona stopped a five-game losing streak.

Former AL Cy Young winner Dallas Keuchel debuted for Arizona after signing a minor league contract June 6. He gave up four runs and six hits to Detroit in 4⅓ innings while striking out seven and walking three.