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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

stripes.com

Improved Houthi capabilities raise concerns

BY ALISON BATH
AND LARA KORTE
Stars and Stripes

Increasingly advanced technology used by Iran-backed Houthis against ships in the Red Sea is raising the chances of a successful militant strike on U.S. forces, analysts and former defense officials say.

A replenishable supply of sophisticated Iranian and Russian weapons is bolstering the Houthis, whom U.S. forces have repeatedly attacked this week at dozens of sites across Yemen in a bid to cripple their offensive and command capabilities.

The Houthis have improved tactically since beginning their assaults on commercial and military shipping following the outbreak of the Hamas-Israel war, U.S. Navy officials have said.

Now they may be acquiring hydrogen fuel cells to power drones, which could give them new reconnaissance capabilities.

It would only take one strike and some American casualties

in the Red Sea to draw the U.S. into a prolonged conflict in the Middle East, Nadwa Al-Dawsari, a nonresident fellow at the Washington-based think tank Irregular Warfare Initiative, said recently during a briefing sponsored by the Middle East Institute.

"It's a matter of when, not if," said Al-Dawsari, adding that Navy officials have told her that some Houthi strikes have come dangerously close to U.S. ships.

In August, a weapons shipment seized by Yemeni National Resistance Forces uncovered hydrogen fuel cells, according to a March 12 report by Conflict Armament Research. The U.K.-based independent research group tracks illicit arms flows.

The discovery of the Chinese canisters mislabeled as oxygen was startling because it was the first time they had seen the technology used for drones by a non-state actor, said Taimur Kahn, the research group's head of regional operations for the Persian Gulf.

The canisters likely were acquired commercially and there was no evidence of Chinese government involvement, he added.

Hydrogen fuel cells would allow some Houthi drones to fly higher and longer than those powered by other means, Kahn and other analysts said.

"The Houthis may not need fuel cell-powered drones to conduct one-way attack missions in the Red Sea, but drones at 10,000 feet on long-endurance missions could find targets more than 100 miles away using passive electronic sensors or visual and infrared cameras," said Bryan Clark, a retired Navy officer and director of the Hudson Institute's Center for Defense Concepts and Technology.

That capability could come in handy as the Houthis work to find alternatives to radar and command centers destroyed in recent U.S. strikes, Clark said.

Hydrogen fuel cells also could be useful in powering underwater drones because they

have a lower sound and heat signature, making them more difficult to detect, analysts said.

"(The Houthis) have realized in their sort of learning curve in attacking shipping that if you want to sink a vessel, hitting it from above doesn't work, hitting it on the water line may or may not work, but hitting it under the water definitely works," said Ian Ralby, a maritime law and security expert and founder of I.R. Consilium, a research and consulting firm.

The Pentagon acknowledged Houthi counterattacks in response to their strikes this past week but said they haven't come close to U.S. ships yet.

There were at least a few Houthi attacks last year that required added defensive measures. In January 2024, the destroyer USS Gravely had to use its close-in weapons system to shoot down a cruise missile that came within a mile of the ship.

Houthi fighters also have employed swarm drone attacks and upgraded ballistic missiles, Navy officials said last year.

US, S. Korea drill underground warfare with North in mind

BY DAVID CHOI
Stars and Stripes

SEOUL, South Korea — U.S. and South Korean troops honed their underground combat skills using drones and breaching tools as part of a recent large-scale joint military exercise across South Korea.

More than 370 soldiers from both countries trained for four days at an underground facility in Paju, about 20 miles from the North Korean border, to defend against subterranean threats, according to a South Korean army news release.

South Korean multilegged robots searched for entrances and exits to underground bunkers before troops equipped with explosives and power tools deployed to destroy a mock enemy's water supply and ventilation access, the release said.

The allies also used micro unmanned aerial vehicles, about the size of a human hand, to sniff out enemy positions and improvised explosive devices, according to the release.

"South Korean and U.S. soldiers were able to work as a single team," South Korean army

Lt. Col. Hwang Hyun-cho said in the release. "In particular, it was a good opportunity to gain various combat experiences in underground facilities and come up with improvements."

The underground training was part of Freedom Shield, an annual, 11-day joint exercise that ended Thursday. More than 19,000 South Korean troops and an unspecified number of U.S. personnel participated in drills across the country.

U.S. and South Korean conventional and special oper-

ations forces train regularly for underground warfare. South Korea's military estimates that since the 1950-53 Korean War, North Korea has secretly dug thousands of tunnels in preparation for future conflict.

These tunnels could serve as storage sites for weapons of mass destruction or as subterranean transport routes for North Korean troops, the news release said.

South Korea has discovered and either destroyed or converted some tunnels into tourist attractions.

Trump, Hegseth: Musk not given China plans

BY COREY DICKSTEIN

Stars and Stripes

Billionaire entrepreneur and White House adviser Elon Musk visited the Pentagon on Friday to discuss cost cutting and technology within the Defense Department, Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth said later during a news briefing in the Oval Office.

"We welcomed him today to the Pentagon to talk about [the Department of Government Efficiency], to talk about efficiencies, to talk about innovations," Hegseth said later Friday during an appearance alongside President Donald Trump to announce a new Air Force fighter jet. "It was a great informal conversation."

Trump and Hegseth denied news reports that Musk was to be shown a highly classified briefing on sensitive battle plans to fight China.

"We don't want to have a poten-

tial war with China, but I can tell you, if we did, we're very well equipped to handle it," Trump said Friday. "But I don't want to show that to anybody. But certainly, you wouldn't show it to a businessman (Musk) who is helping us so much. He's a great patriot. He's paying a big price for helping us cut costs, and he's doing a great job."

The Pentagon meeting with Musk lasted about 80 minutes and came one day after Hegseth announced some \$580 million in new spending cuts found by DOGE. Musk leads DOGE.

The cuts included grants aimed at eliminating carbon emissions from U.S. warships and developing equitable artificial intelligence capabilities and efforts to diversify the Navy, the defense secretary said Thursday.

Trump said the report by The New York Times late Thursday

indicating Musk would be shown the sensitive planning for a military campaign against China was false.

"I just wanted to make sure I called up Chief of Staff [Susie Wiles], and I called up Pete, and I said, 'Is there any truth to that?' Absolutely not," Trump told reporters at the White House. "He's there for DOGE, not there for China. And if you ever mentioned China, I think [he would] walk out of the room."

Trump appeared to be referring to conflicts of interest that Musk would have with dealing with intelligence about the Chinese. Musk — the CEO of electric automaker Tesla — does business with China, where the company has an assembly plant. Musk's companies, namely SpaceX, also have billions of dollars in Pentagon contracts. SpaceX provides launch services to the Defense

Department for new satellites, and the company also provides the military with Starlink satellite-based internet capabilities.

In videos posted by news organizations including CNN and Reuters, Musk did not respond to multiple reporters' questions as he exited the Pentagon early Friday following the meeting.

Musk has led DOGE efforts to cut dramatically the size and scope of the federal government, including the Pentagon. Last week, Pentagon officials said they plan to eliminate some 50,000 to 60,000 civilian jobs as part of the DOGE-led efforts.

Hegseth said he welcomed Musk's input on those efforts now and going forward.

"Elon Musk provides a lot of capabilities our government and our military rely on, and I'm grateful for that," the defense secretary said.

Hegseth to visit Philippines and Japan in first Asia trip

Associated Press

MANILA, Philippines — Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth is scheduled to visit the Philippines, the first stop in his first trip to Asia this week, for talks that will include increasing deterrence against aggression in the disputed South China Sea, a Philippine official said Friday.

Hegseth will be in Manila on March 28-29 to meet his Philippine counterpart, Gilberto Teodoro, and President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. Talks will touch on increasingly assertive actions by Beijing in the South China Sea and "more significant support" to Philippine security forces by the Trump administration, Philippine Ambassador to the U.S. Jose Manuel Romualdez said.

In the U.S., chief Pentagon spokesman Sean Parnell later

said Hegseth will visit Hawaii to meet civilian and military leaders in the Indo-Pacific Command, then tour U.S. military facilities on Guam before flying to the Philippines and Japan.

Hegseth would "advance security objectives with Philippine leaders and meet with U.S. and Philippine forces. In Japan, he would participate in a ceremony marking the 80th anniversary of the Battle of Iwo Jima and meet with Japanese leaders and U.S. military forces," Parnell said.

Trump's "America First" foreign policy thrust has triggered concerns about the scale and depth of U.S. commitment.

"It's a strong message to China on solid bilateral relations" between the U.S. and the Philippines," Romualdez said of Hegseth's upcoming visit.

Carl Vinson group vessels train with Japan, S. Korea

By ALEX WILSON

Stars and Stripes

The Carl Vinson Carrier Strike Group joined warships from Japan and South Korea for a four-day exercise in the East China Sea, according to the U.S. 7th Fleet and Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force.

At least seven warships from the three navies trained together through Thursday in formation sailing, communication operations, maritime interdiction and air combat, along with staff exchanges, 7th Fleet spokeswoman Lt. j.g. Sarah Merrill said Friday.

All three countries are "committed to further strengthening trilateral security cooperation" through exercises, improved information sharing, and increased cooperation on ballistic missile defense, Merrill said.

"Our ships and aircraft strengthen our combined deterrence by demonstrating our combat capabilities through integrated, high-end operations with our allies," she wrote.

Additional training included anti-surface warfare, anti-submarine warfare, and search-and-rescue drills, according to a news release from the Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force.

The exercise took place in the East China Sea, the release said.

The aircraft carrier USS Carl Vinson was accompanied by the guided-missile cruiser USS Princeton and guided-missile destroyers USS Sterett and USS Ralph Johnson. South Korea dispatched guided-missile destroyers ROKS Sejong the Great and ROKS Dae Jo-yeong, while Japan sent destroyer JS Ikkazuchi.

Boeing awarded \$20B to build F-47 jet

BY COREY DICKSTEIN

Stars and Stripes

Boeing will build the next generation U.S. fighter jet, President Donald Trump announced Friday from the Oval Office.

The aerospace giant was awarded an estimated \$20 billion initial contract to build the Pentagon's 6th Generation fighter jet, a replacement for the short-lived F-22 Raptor stealth fighter program, which was built by Boeing competitor Lockheed Martin. Boeing beat out Lockheed as the two finalists in the program that could

grow to be worth hundreds of billions of dollars, officials have said.

Trump announced the new aircraft will be called the F-47. The aircraft has been in development since 2018 under the Air Force's Next Generation Air Dominance program. The manned jet is expected to feature advanced stealth and artificial intelligence capabilities and work together with paired drones capable of penetrating air defense systems undetected.

The contract marks a huge win for Boeing, which has been plagued in recent years by safe-

ty issues with their aircraft, quality control problems and production delays, including in the company's new Air Force One program and its KC-46 Air Force tankers.

It also marks a boost to the Next Generation Air Dominance program, after it was briefly halted last year under former President Joe Biden's administration over concerns about cost and necessity. Reviews of the program showed it was necessary to continue given advancements in Chinese air defenses, Air Force officials have said in recent months.

Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth said the F-47 would prove a dramatic step over the 5th generation F-22 and F-35 Lightning II stealth fighters now highlighting the Pentagon's fighter jet inventory.

The Lockheed-built F-35 remains the most combat capable fighter jet in the world, but it is the most expensive weapons system in history, costing the Pentagon more than \$1 trillion for about 700 aircraft. Defense officials plan to purchase hundreds more and fly the plane into the 2080s, according to the Defense Department.

DOD latest to announce leak probe, possible polygraphs

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Pentagon's intelligence and law enforcement arms are investigating what it says are leaks of national security information. Defense Department personnel could face polygraphs in the latest such inquiry by the Trump administration.

A memo late Friday from Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth's chief of staff referred to "recent unauthorized disclosures" of such information but provided no details about alleged leaks.

Earlier in the day, President Donald Trump rejected reports that adviser Elon Musk would be briefed on how the United States would fight a hypothetical war with China.

At the Homeland Security Department, Secretary Kristi Noem pledged this month to step up lie detector tests on employees in an effort to identify those who may be leaking information about operations to the media.

The Justice Department on Friday announced an investiga-

tion into "the selective leak of inaccurate, but nevertheless classified, information" from intelligence agencies about Tren de Aragua, a Venezuelan gang whose members in the U.S. are being targeted for removal by the Republican administration.

Leaks occur in every administration as a trial balloon to test how a potential policy decision will be received.

While polygraph exams are typically not admissible in court proceedings, they are frequent-

ly used by federal law enforcement agencies and for national security clearances. In 1998, the Supreme Court ruled they were also inadmissible in military justice proceedings.

They are inadmissible because they are unreliable and often result in false positives, said George Maschke, a former Army interrogator and reserve intelligence officer who went on to found AntiPolygraph.org. Maschke failed a polygraph himself when applying to the FBI.

IRS deal would share undocumented immigrants records

The Washington Post

The Internal Revenue Service is nearing an agreement to allow immigration officials to use tax data to confirm the names and addresses of people suspected of being in the country illegally, culminating weeks of negotiations over using the tax system to support President Donald Trump's mass deportation campaign.

Under the agreement, Immigration and Customs Enforcement could submit names and addresses of suspected undocu-

mented immigrants to the IRS to cross-reference with confidential taxpayer databases, said the people, who spoke on the condition of anonymity out of fear of professional reprisals.

Normally, personal tax information — even an individual's name and address — is considered confidential and closely guarded within the IRS. Unlawfully disclosing tax data carries civil and criminal penalties.

However, tax information may be shared with other federal law enforcement under cer-

tain, limited conditions — typically with court approval. It would be unusual for taxpayer privacy law exceptions to be used to justify cooperation with immigration enforcement.

The proposed agreement has alarmed career officials at the IRS, the people said, who worry that the arrangement risks abusing a narrow and seldom-used section of privacy law that's meant to help investigators build criminal cases, not enforce criminal penalties.

If approved, the agreement

would represent a significant shift in how federal agencies manage both taxpayer information and immigration enforcement. The IRS has for years reassured undocumented workers that their tax information is confidential and it is safe for them to file income tax returns without fear of being deported. About half of the roughly 11 million undocumented immigrants in the country file income tax returns to document their payments to the U.S. government, according to researchers.

Russia, Ukraine set for ceasefire talks

The Washington Post

Negotiators from Russia and Ukraine will both be in Saudi Arabia for ceasefire talks on Monday, but they won't be meeting face-to-face — illustrating the gulf that separates the warring sides despite White House assurances that they have “never been closer” to peace.

The U.S.-mediated talks will focus on a proposed maritime ceasefire in the Black Sea, according to Yuri Ushakov, a top foreign policy aide to Russian President Vladimir Putin.

Negotiators will be in separate rooms, relying on intermediaries to carry messages back and forth.

While Ukraine has said it supports a comprehensive ceasefire without preconditions, Pu-

tin so far has agreed only to a more narrow proposal calling for both sides to halt attacks on energy infrastructure.

The selective concession appears to favor Russia, which repeatedly targeted Ukraine's power grid over the winter months but was expected to shift away from the strategy with the approach of spring. Ukraine has used long-range drones to hit Russian oil storage facilities and cut into the country's domestic fuel supply.

In a social media post announcing Putin had agreed to the energy ceasefire, President Donald Trump said there was an “understanding that we will be working quickly to have a Complete Ceasefire.”

But there is no indication Mos-

cow has budged on its maximalist goals — including an end to Western aid to, and intelligence sharing with, Kyiv and Ukraine's renunciation of its NATO ambitions.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said Thursday that Putin “must stop making unnecessary demands that only prolong the war.”

How a broader potential ceasefire would be enforced also remains unclear, with Russia refusing any role for a NATO-backed peacekeeping force.

The Russian delegation in Riyadh will be led by Grigory Karasin, a senator overseeing foreign affairs, and Sergey Beseda, a high-ranking adviser to the director of the Federal Security Service.

Ukraine will be represented by Defense Minister Rustem Umerov and Pavlo Palisa, deputy head of the presidential office, according to a senior Ukrainian official familiar with the talks, speaking on the condition of anonymity to discuss sensitive matters. Zelenskyy has said the delegation will also include energy experts and “people who have a deep understanding of port infrastructure.”

Among the American mediators will be Michael Anton, the policy planning director under Secretary of State Marco Rubio, along with aides to Trump's special envoy for Ukraine and Russia, Keith Kellogg, and representatives from the office of national security adviser Michael Waltz.

US lifts bounties on three senior Taliban figures

Associated Press

The U.S. has lifted bounties on three senior Taliban figures, including the interior minister who also heads a powerful network blamed for bloody attacks against Afghanistan's former Western-backed government, officials in Kabul said Sunday.

Sirajuddin Haqqani, who acknowledged planning a January 2008 attack on the Serena Hotel in Kabul, which killed six people, including U.S. citizen Thor David Hesla, no longer appears on the State Department's Re-

wards for Justice website. The FBI website on Sunday still featured a wanted poster for him.

Interior Ministry spokesman Abdul Mateen Qani said the U.S. government had revoked the bounties placed on Haqqani, Abdul Aziz Haqqani and Yahya Haqqani.

“These three individuals are two brothers and one paternal cousin,” Qani told The Associated Press.

The Haqqani network grew into one of the deadliest arms of the Taliban after the U.S.-led

2001 invasion of Afghanistan.

The group employed roadside bombs, suicide bombings and other attacks, including on the Indian and U.S. embassies, the Afghan presidency, and other major targets. They also have been linked to extortion, kidnapping and other criminal activity.

A Foreign Ministry official, Zakir Jalaly, said the Taliban's release of U.S. prisoner George Glezmann on Friday and the removal of bounties showed both sides were “moving beyond the

effects of the wartime phase and taking constructive steps to pave the way for progress” in bilateral relations.

“The recent developments in Afghanistan-U.S. relations are a good example of the pragmatic and realistic engagement between the two governments,” said Jalaly.

Another official, Shafi Azam, hailed the development as the beginning of normalization, also citing the Taliban's announcement they were in control of Afghanistan's embassy in Norway.

Pope Francis leaves hospital after surviving illness

Associated Press

ROME — A weak and frail Pope Francis left the hospital Sunday after surviving a five-week, life-threatening bout of pneumonia, giving a thumbs-up to an adoring crowd and taking a detour to apparently go pray at a Rome-area church before returning home to the Vatican.

A motorcade carrying the 88-

year-old pope wound its way through light Rome traffic Sunday morning and kept going after reaching Vatican City, where crowds of people had lined the streets to welcome him home. Security guards said Francis was heading to St. Mary Major basilica, where his favorite icon of the Madonna is located and where he always goes to pray af-

ter a foreign visit.

Before leaving Gemelli hospital, Francis gave a thumbs-up and acknowledged the crowd after he was wheeled out onto the balcony overlooking the main entry. Hundreds of people had gathered on a brilliant Sunday morning to say goodbye.

Chants of “Viva il papa!” and “Papa Francesco” erupted from

the crowd, which included patients who were wheeled outside to catch his brief appearance.

Doctors, who announced his planned release at a Saturday evening news conference, said he should refrain from meeting with big groups of people or exerting himself, but that eventually he should be able to resume all his normal activities.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Mayor charged with DUI after day care pickup

NJ LUMBERTON — Lumberton Mayor Gina LaPlaca was charged with DUI and child endangerment after allegedly driving drunk with her 2-year-old son in the car on St. Patrick's Day.

LaPlaca was arrested at her home after admitting she had drank alcohol before picking up her son from day care. An open container of alcohol was also found in the 2019 BMW, according to ABC 6.

A video taken by a witness showed the mayor driving "erratically" and swerving between lanes before "nearly hitting a utility pole" while her son was in the backseat. That motorist provided police with the license plate number, which allowed police to locate LaPlaca quicker.

Suit: Woman died after being left in wrecked van

CA SAN DIEGO — When San Diego Police investigated a 2023 crash where a suspected drunk driver plowed into a parked van, the driver was arrested and the van was placed in an impound yard.

But according to a \$50 million claim filed against the city, police should have investigated further. Inside the parked van was Monica Cameroni De Adams, a 65-year-old mother who was homeless and sleeping in the middle row when it was hit.

It wasn't until about a month later when an employee at the tow yard noticed a "pungent smell" emanating from the wrecked 2001 Honda Odyssey that Cameroni De Adams' body

was found, according to the claim.

The claim, a precursor to a lawsuit filed by Cameroni De Adams' children, alleges police officers were negligent and reckless when they failed to look inside the van, and notice that Cameroni De Adams had "sustained severe but survivable blunt force injuries from the collision that required medical attention."

Court blocks NYC from letting noncitizens vote

NY NEW YORK — New York state's top court put an end Thursday to New York City's effort to empower noncitizens to vote in municipal elections.

In a 6-1 ruling, the high court said "the New York constitution as it stands today draws a firm line restricting voting to citizens."

New York City never actually implemented its 2022 law. Supporters estimated it would have applied to about 800,000 noncitizens with legal permanent U.S. residency or authorization to work in the nation. The measure would have let them cast a ballot for mayor, city council and other local offices, but not for president, Congress or state officials.

State Republican officials quickly sued over the law, and state courts at every level rejected it.

Ex-candidate convicted in drive-by shootings

NM ALBUQUERQUE — A jury has convicted a failed political candidate of numerous federal charges in connection with a series of drive-by shootings at the

homes of state and local lawmakers in Albuquerque in the aftermath of the 2020 election.

Former Republican candidate Solomon Peña had pleaded not guilty to 13 charges including conspiracy, weapons-related charges and interference with federally protected activities in connection with the shootings in December 2022 and January 2023 on the homes of four Democratic officials, including the current state House speaker.

The attacks took place after President Donald Trump and his allies called into question the outcome of the 2020 presidential election won by President Joe Biden.

Prosecutors allege that Peña resorted to violence in the belief that a "rigged" election had robbed him of victory in his bid to serve in the state Legislature.

Charges dismissed in storage unit death

MI KENTWOOD — A Michigan judge dismissed a manslaughter charge Thursday in the death of a homeless woman whose body was discovered in a friend's locked storage unit after a fire.

Morgan Wingeier, 32, wiped away tears when the judge threw out charges of involuntary manslaughter and unlawful imprisonment, WOOD-TV reported.

Wingeier "made a poor choice locking her friend in the storage unit, but is it better to leave a friend in the wind with no roof over her head?" Kentwood District Judge Amanda Sterkenburg said.

Wingeier had allowed Corinne Abosamra, 33, to stay in her storage unit in Kentwood.

Abosamra's body was found when firefighters responded to a fire there on Nov. 7.

A drug overdose — not the fire — killed Abosamra, who had been living in the unit for three days, authorities said.

Wingeier told investigators that she locked the unit on the day of the fire only because of questions by her mother, who was present and didn't know a person was inside. The cause of the fire has not been determined, WOOD-TV said.

Collared wolf killed after deaths of livestock

CO DENVER — A federal agency killed a collared wolf that appears to have crossed from Colorado into Wyoming and killed several sheep, government officials said.

The wolf was part of a voter-driven reintroduction of the predators, a move that angered ranchers who feared losing livestock and agitated political divisions between urban and rural communities. The animals are protected in Colorado, but in large parts of Wyoming it's legal to kill them.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Wildlife Services responded to reports of a predator killing five sheep in north-central Wyoming on Saturday. The agency found evidence pointing to a wolf attack, including bite marks and tracks, according to spokesperson Tanya Espinosa.

Later that day, the agency killed the wolf it believed was the culprit and discovered it had a collar from Colorado Parks and Wildlife, Espinosa said. The wolf and collar were returned to the Colorado agency.

— From wire reports

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Calipari tops Pitino to reach Sweet 16

Arkansas coach bests longtime rival, St. John's for 16th career trip to regional semifinals

Associated Press

PROVIDENCE, R.I. — John Calipari is back in the Sweet 16 after sending a second straight Hall of Famer home from the NCAA Tournament's "Region of Coaches."

One game after knocking out good friend Bill Self and the Kansas Jayhawks, Calipari's 10th-seeded Arkansas Razorbacks beat longtime nemesis Rick Pitino and St. John's 75-66 on Saturday.

That earned Calipari an especially sweet 16th trip to the Sweet 16, with his fourth school. And, perhaps more deliciously, it ended Pitino's chances of making a long March Madness run with his second-seeded Red Storm.

"Rick did a great job with his team all year," Calipari said. "If they made a few shots, they would probably beat us. We were fortunate to get out."

Pitino and Calipari have crossed paths for almost 50 years, with a rivalry that peaked when Calipari was at Kentucky, where Pitino had won an NCAA title, and Pitino was down the road in Louisville. Although the Hall of Famers insist they have no ill will toward one another, they are most definitely not

friends.

The coaches shared a polite pregame handshake and met at center court when it was over, with the Arkansas' fans chants of "Wooo pig sookie!" finally heard over the Pitino-loving crowd.

"They outplayed us. They deserve to move on and we don't," Pitino said. "That's what March Madness is all about. No matter how good a regular season you have, you play this way, you're going to get beat."

Calipari is 17-13 against Pitino, including the six NBA matchups they split, and he is 3-2 against his elder in the NCAA Tournament; in fact, he entered this year's tournament with 56 March Madness wins, tied for the most among active coaches with Michigan State's Tom Izzo. Both are still in the field.

Calipari has now taken UMass, Memphis, Kentucky and Arkansas to the Sweet 16. Pitino made it with Providence, Kentucky and Louisville, but never got out of the first weekend with Boston University, Iona or — so far — St. John's.

Pitino, however, has two national titles — with Kentucky and Louisville — to one for Cali-

pari.

"You know, he's on Chapter 2 of his new book and we're on Chapter 1," Calipari said this week.

"As a matter of fact, we're probably on the first few pages of the chapter. It's both of us writing another story and being able to come back here."

Calipari led Kentucky to the 2012 national title — 16 years after Pitino won in Lexington — but after a five-year span in which the Wildcats won just one March Madness game, he defected to Arkansas to start fresh.

Beset by early injuries, the Razorbacks lost their first five games in a Southeastern Conference that featured unprecedented depth before earning their way into the NCAA Tournament after missing just one year.

Now, Arkansas will face third-seeded Texas Tech in the West Region semifinals Thursday night in San Francisco.

"We had a long, up-and-down season," said Arkansas freshman Billy Richmond III, who scored 16 points Saturday. "We all came together, put our egos to the side and became one heartbeat."

Pitino, 72, remains beloved in

Providence, where he led the Friars to the 1987 Final Four.

Although Arkansas led most of the game, the Pitino fans outshouted the Razorback backers, rising to a thunderous cheer when Zuby Ejiofor responded to a flagrant foul with a rim-shaking dunk. RJ Luis Jr., the Big East Player of the Year, followed with a steal and a dunk to tie it 24-all, and the crowd sent St. John's into a timeout with a chant of "Let's go, Johnnies!"

Arkansas led by as many as 13 in the second half and still had an eight-point edge before the Johnnies cut it to 62-60 with 6:11 to play. But Pitino, who built his career on full-court defense and 3-point shooting, could only summon one of them when he needed it.

St. John's shot 2-for-22 from 3-point range — Arkansas was 2-for-19 — and the Red Storm missed six straight from beyond the arc in the final minutes.

"We thought we were championship-driven in our minds, but I have been disappointed before with this," Pitino said. "I don't mind going out with a loss, I just hate to see us play that way offensively. It's just a bitter pill to swallow with that type of performance."

BYU edges Wisconsin for 1st Sweet 16 since 2011

Associated Press

DENVER — For one night only, let's just call them BYU. Whew!

The BYU Cougars led the entire game Saturday but still had to make one, final defensive stop against Wisconsin's irrepressible guard, John Tonje, to seal a 91-89 victory over the Badgers and the program's first trip to the Sweet 16 since 2011 — the days of Jimmer Fredette.

In a much-welcomed and rare March Madness nail-biter,

Tonje scored 37 points to become the first player to crack 30 in this year's tournament.

That included eight points during a desperate comeback down the stretch. But trailing by two, he shot a fadeaway airball just before the buzzer that allowed the Cougars to escape.

"You watched the game and you're kind of like, 'How did we get to a two-point game here, you know?'" said Fredette, who took things in from about 10 rows up in the stands in the

same arena where he led BYU to its last Sweet 16 trip. "But look, I think that describes this team."

Richie Saunders had 25 points and seven rebounds for the sixth-seeded Cougars, who will play Alabama or Saint Mary's next Thursday in Newark, N.J., at the East Regional.

BYU (26-9) kept its lead between six and 14 points for most of the second half, but things turned when officials ejected Cougars guard Dawson Baker

(eight points) after ruling he intentionally elbowed Wisconsin's Max Klesmit in the groin during a scrum in the corner with 3:11 left.

Tonje took over from there, making a 3, two free throws and a three-point play to trim a 10-point deficit to two.

Wisconsin (27-10) got a BYU miss with 13.5 seconds left, then worked the ball to Tonje, but with Mawot Mag draped all over him, the senior never got a good look.

Houston holds off Gonzaga comeback

Associated Press

WICHITA, Kan. — LJ Cryer matched a career high with 30 points, including two free throws with 14.2 seconds left, and No. 1 seed Houston held on to beat eighth-seeded Gonzaga 81-76 on Saturday night to reach the Sweet 16 for the sixth straight NCAA Men's Basketball Tournament.

J'Wan Roberts added 18 points and Milos Uzan made two last free throws with 2.1 seconds left, giving the Cougars (32-4) their 15th consecutive win and pushing them into a regional semifinal against No. 4 seed Purdue on Friday night in Indianapolis.

Houston also ended Gonzaga's run of nine straight Sweet 16s, which had been the longest active streak in the nation.

"It's not just winning the game," Cougars coach Kelvin Sampson said. "It's beating a great program like Gonzaga."

The Bulldogs (26-9) trailed 76-67 with just over 2 minutes to go when Graham Ike made two free throws to start their comeback bid, and most of it wound up coming at the foul line. And when Uzan turned the ball over and Khalif Battle made two free throws of his own, Gonzaga had pulled to 77-76 with 21 seconds remaining.

Houston got the ball to Cryer, who was fouled, and he made both of his free throws to extend the lead. At the other end, Ja'Vier Francis stuffed Battle's tying 3-point try from the corner, and Uzan knocked down his foul shots to seal the win.

Ike finished with 27 points for the Bulldogs. Battle scored 17 and Ryan Nembhard had 10 points and 11 assists.

Tennessee 67, UCLA 58: Chaz Lanier made 4 of 5 3-pointers and finished with 20 points, and the No. 2 seed Volunteers advanced to a program-record third straight Sweet 16, beating the seventh-seeded Bruins.

Tennessee (29-7) will play either sixth-seeded Illinois or No. 3 seed Kentucky.

Zakai Zeigler added 15 points for Tennessee, and Jordan Gaineey had 13 points to help the Vols take a 19-point lead with 5:15 left.

UCLA (23-11) made its earliest exit from the tournament in the six-year tenure of coach Mick Cronin. Skyy Clark, limited to barely three minutes of play in the first half by foul trouble, finished with 18 points for the Bruins. Tyler Bilodeau added 15.

Purdue 76, McNeese 62: Trey Kaufman-Renn had 22 points and 15 rebounds, and

Purdue used a fast start to roll to a 76-62 win over McNeese.

Fletcher Loyer added 15 points. C.J. Cox finished with 11 points for the Boilermakers (24-11), who advanced to the Sweet 16 for the second straight season.

Purdue will meet top-seeded Houston in the Midwest Region semifinals in Indianapolis. Coach Matt Painter has reached the Sweet 16 in eight of his 16 NCAA Tournament appearances with the Boilermakers.

Sincere Parker scored 17 points for McNeese (28-7).

Michigan 91, Texas A&M 79: The Wolverines are going back to the Sweet 16 a year after a 24-loss season, using Roddy Gayle's surge to beat the Aggies.

Gayle scored 21 of his season-high 26 points in the second half to help restocked Michigan overcome a 10-point deficit and advance to Atlanta to face Auburn.

Vladislav Goldin had 23 points and 12 rebounds as fifth-seeded Michigan (27-9) overcame another big day for Pharrel Payne, who led Texas A&M with 26 points on 10-of-13 shooting.

Auburn 82, Creighton 70: Auburn coach Bruce Pearl said a trip to the second weekend of

the NCAA Tournament was no sure thing, and experienced Creighton made his top-seeded team work for it before the Tigers found their defensive mojo in the second half and closed out the ninth-seeded Bluejays.

Tahaad Pettiford scored 16 of his 23 points after halftime and Chad Baker-Mazara added 17 points for Auburn, which held Creighton scoreless for more than six minutes during a 10-0 second-half run. Pettiford scored six points during that burst to push the Tigers to a 68-54 lead.

The No. 1 overall seed in the tournament, Auburn (30-5) moves on to the South Region semifinals in Atlanta next weekend, where it will face No. 5 seed Michigan.

Texas Tech 77, Drake 64: Darrion Williams scored a season-high 28 points, JT Toppin had 25 points and 12 rebounds, and the No. 3 seed Red Raiders dominated the No. 11 seed Bulldogs in the paint on its way to a victory.

Elijah Hawkins added 16 points for Texas Tech (27-8), who denied Drake its first Sweet 16 trip in more than five decades and will play No. 10 seed Arkansas in the West Region semifinals Thursday night in San Francisco.

Bulls rout Lakers, spoil James' return from injury

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — Coby White scored 36 points, Josh Giddey flirted with a quadruple-double and the Chicago Bulls wrecked LeBron James' return from injury with a 146-115 win over the Los Angeles Lakers on Saturday night.

Matas Buzelis scored 31 points for Chicago, and Giddey recorded 15 points, 17 assists, 10 rebounds and eight steals. White was dominant while hitting six 3-pointers, and eight of his teammates scored at least

nine points on the fifth stop of a six-game road trip.

Luka Doncic scored 29 of his 34 points in the first half and hit eight 3-pointers, while James had 17 points after a seven-game absence.

Pacers 108, Nets 103: Pascal Siakam scored eight of his 26 points in the final 3 1/2 minutes and Myles Turner made five 3-pointers and finished with 22 points to help host Indiana hold off charging Brooklyn.

The Pacers swept their two home games against Brooklyn

last week. Indiana has won four straight and six of seven.

Hawks 124, Warriors 115: Trae Young had 25 points with 10 assists for his 41st double-double of the season and host Atlanta beat Golden State.

The Warriors were without star guard Stephen Curry, who was injured Thursday night in a victory over Toronto.

Knicks 122, Wizards 103: Karl-Anthony Towns had 29 points and 11 rebounds, Mikal Bridges scored 27 points and host New York beat Washington

ton.

OG Anunoby had 23 points and Cam Payne chipped in 13 for the Knicks, who snapped a two-game losing streak.

Bucks 114, Kings 108: Giannis Antetokounmpo had 32 points and 17 rebounds and visiting Milwaukee shook off a sluggish start to beat Sacramento.

Kyle Kuzma added 14 points and 14 rebounds for the Bucks, who trailed 25-17 after one quarter and were down by 14 early in the third.

Kings rout Hurricanes, snap 8-game win streak

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — Andrei Kuzmenko had a goal and an assist for his first points for Los Angeles since being acquired in a trade, and the Kings beat the Carolina Hurricanes 7-2 on Saturday.

Anze Kopitar, Tanner Jeannot, Quinton Byfield and Kevin Fiala also had a goal and an assist, Adrian Kempe and Trevor Moore scored, and LA won its fifth straight on home ice. David Rittich made 34 saves.

Dmitry Orlov and Mark Jankowski scored and Pyotr Kochetkov made 18 saves for the Hurricanes, whose eight-game winning streak was emphatically snapped.

Carolina's leading scorer, Seth Jarvis, did not return after suffering an apparent head injury in the third period. Hurricanes head coach Rod Brind'Amour expressed optimism in his postgame press conference that Jarvis had avoided serious injury.

"I think he looks actually all right, but I don't want to say that because you never know when they wake up the next day," Brind'Amour said. "But I think we avoided the worst and move on."

Rangers 5, Canucks 3: Johnny Brodzinski scored his second goal late in the third period and Igor Shesterkin made 36 saves as host New York downed Vancouver to snap a three-game losing streak.

Brodzinski rifled his ninth goal of the season past Canucks netminder Kevin Lankinen at 15:47 to give the Rangers the lead 37 seconds after Vancouver's Brock Boeser tied the contest.

K'Andre Miller and Adam Fox also scored for New York. Alexis Lafreniere had two assists.

Wild 4, Sabres 1: Marco Rossi, Justin Brazeau, Mats Zuccarello and Frederick Gaudreau scored as host Minnesota beat Buffalo.

Comfortably in the first Western Conference wild-card spot, the Wild moved within two points of the third-place Avalanche in the Central Division. Minnesota finished a season-long seven-game homestand 4-2-1.

JJ Peterka scored and Ukkopekka Luukkonen stopped 17 shots for Buffalo, which lost its second straight game and is 3-8-1 in its past 12 outings.

Stars 3, Flyers 2 (OT): Defenseman Thomas Harley scored his second goal of the game nine seconds into overtime, giving Dallas a win over Philadelphia.

Defenseman Esa Lindell also scored for the Stars, who are 9-0-1 in their past 10 home games. Jake Oettinger made 22 saves to record his seventh consecutive home win and 32nd overall, third in the NHL. Harley's second score was the fifth regular-season overtime goal of his career.

Travis Konecny and Ryan Poehling scored for the Flyers, who are 0-3-1 in their past four games and 1-8-1 in their past 10.

Blues 4, Blackhawks 1: Alexey Toropchenko had a goal and an assist and goalie Joel Hofer made 26 saves, leading host St. Louis to a win over Chicago.

Robert Thomas, Nathan Walker and Zach Bolduc also scored for the Blues. Hofer improved to 4-0-1 in his last five starts as St. Louis won its fifth straight to remain in sole possession of the second wild-card spot in the Western Conference.

Ilya Mikheyev scored and Arvid Soderblom stopped 21 shots as the Blackhawks slipped to 0-6-1 in their past seven games.

Flames 4, Islanders 3 (OT): Nazem Kadri scored at 3:51 of overtime as visiting Calgary beat New York.

Matt Coronato had two goals and Jonathan Huberdeau, playing in his 900th career NHL game, had a goal and two assists for Calgary in its third straight win. Dan Vladar fin-

ished with 26 saves.

Bo Horvat, Marc Gatcomb and Kyle MacLean scored for the Islanders. Maxim Tsyplakov and Noah Dobson each had two assists, and Marcus Hogberg had 31 saves as New York snapped a three-game win streak but extended its point streak to five games (3-0-2).

Capitals 6, Panthers 3: Tom Wilson scored his 31st goal of the season, Alex Ovechkin had two assists and host Washington beat defending Stanley Cup champion Florida to win its fourth game in a row and pad its lead atop the NHL.

Anthony Beauvillier, John Carlson and Andrew Mangiapane also scored for the Capitals, who were the first team in the league to clinch a playoff spot and have won nine of their past 10. Logan Thompson made 33 saves to improve to 31-4-5 in his first season with Washington.

Ovechkin had five shots on net but remained at 888 career goals, seven back of breaking Wayne Gretzky's record.

Utah 6, Lightning 4: Logan Cooley had two goals and an assist and Alexander Kerfoot also scored twice to lead host Utah over Tampa Bay.

Josh Doan and Nick Schmaltz also had goals, and Karel Vejmelka made 22 saves for Utah.

Brayden Point had two goals for the Lightning, and Anthony Cirelli and Jake Guentzel also scored. Brandon Halverson made 19 stops in his first career NHL start.

Predators 5, Maple Leafs 2: Filip Forsberg had two goals and an assist, Luke Evangelista had a goal and two assists, and host Nashville snapped a four-game losing streak.

Michael Bunting and Kieffer Bellows also scored, Fedor Svechkov had two assists and Juuse Saros made 24 saves for the Predators.

Mitch Marner had a goal and an assist, John Tavares also scored and Joseph Woll made

27 saves for Toronto, which had its three-game winning streak ended. Auston Matthews had two assists.

Senators 5, Devils 2: David Perron scored a power-play goal to cap Ottawa's three-goal second period, and the visiting Senators held on to beat New Jersey.

Brady Tkachuk and Drake Batherson also scored to help Ottawa win for the seventh time in its past nine games. Linus Ullmark finished with 25 saves.

Avalanche 5, Canadiens 4 (SO): Brock Nelson scored the shootout winner in the fourth round as visiting Colorado spoiled a third-period comeback try by Montreal.

Nelson had a goal and an assist in regulation, and Martin Necas, Sam Malinski and Ryan Lindgren also scored for the Avalanche. Mackenzie Blackwood stopped 25 shots.

Golden Knights 6, Red Wings 3: Tomas Hertl scored his second hat trick this month and host Vegas knocked off Detroit.

Jack Eichel had a goal and three assists while Nicolas Roy and Mark Stone also scored for the Golden Knights, who got 28 saves from Adin Hill.

Oilers 5, Kraken 4: Ryan Nugent-Hopkins scored three goals for his fourth career hat trick, and host Edmonton held on to beat Seattle.

Adam Henrique and Jeff Skinner also scored, and Matthias Ekholm and Darnell Nurse each had two assists for the Oilers, who moved to 4-0-1 in their past five games despite playing without star forwards Connor McDavid and Leon Draisaitl. Stuart Skinner finished with 27 saves.

Sharks 3, Bruins 1: Lucas Carlsson scored the go-ahead goal — his first of the season — with 3:23 left in the game as host San Jose topped Boston.

William Eklund and Barclay Goodrow also scored and Alexander Georgiev made 22 saves for the Sharks.