

US official: Allies must help Ukraine protect grid

By JOHN VANDIVER
Stars and Stripes

Civilian infrastructure has become the Russian military's primary target in Ukraine and steps must be taken to protect it, U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken said Wednesday, a day after allies agreed to help fund repairs to Ukraine's energy grid.

Russian President Vladimir Putin "has focused his ire and his fire on Ukraine's civilian population," Blinken said at the end of a two-day NATO ministerial meeting in Bucharest.

Blinken announced during the trip that the U.S. will commit more than \$53 million to help stabilize Ukraine's energy grid, a move aimed at keeping the lights and heat on as the population copes with the impending winter. The White House also submitted a request to Congress for \$1.1 billion to provide further support to Ukraine's energy sector, which is linked to that of neighboring Moldova.

In recent weeks, Russia has destroyed more than a third of Ukraine's energy system, plunging millions into the cold and darkness, Blinken said.

"These are President Putin's new targets. He's hitting them hard. This brutalization of Ukraine's people is barbaric," Blinken said. "We are clear-eyed about the difficult winter that lies ahead."

A challenge for the U.S. and other allies is finding ways to help Ukraine protect the equipment — including generators, transformers and related gear — needed to secure the energy grid.

Whatever allies send in may be blown up by Russian missile strikes upon arrival. It will be up to military strategists to figure out how to avoid an endless cycle of replacing what's been destroyed, Blinken said.

Blinken said allied commitment to Ukraine remains "ironclad" even as Putin aims to splinter a U.S.-led coalition in Europe that is grappling with the ripple effect of the war in the form of high energy prices.

"The cost of inaction would be far higher," he said.

Blinken said caving to Russia's aggression and "accepting his brazen attempts to redraw borders by force" in Ukraine would have security implications in Europe and beyond.

Russian, Chinese bombers fly joint patrols in Pacific

Associated Press

MOSCOW — Russian and Chinese strategic bombers on Wednesday flew a joint patrol over the western Pacific in a show of increasingly close defense ties between the two countries.

The Russian Defense Ministry said the Tu-95 bombers of the Russian air force and the Chinese H-6K bombers flew over the Sea of Japan and the East China Sea during an eight-hour mission.

As part of the drills, the Russian bombers for the first time landed in China and the Chinese bombers flew to an air base in Russia, the ministry said in a statement. It noted that the joint patrols weren't directed against any other country.

China's Defense Ministry described Wednesday's patrols as a "routine" part of an annual cooperation plan between the two militaries.

The exercise follows a series of joint drills intended to showcase a growing military cooperation between Moscow and Beijing as they both face tensions with the United States.

In September, Beijing sent more than 2,000 troops along with more than 300 military vehicles, 21 combat aircraft and three warships to take part in a sweeping joint exercise with Russia.

The maneuvers marked the first time China has sent forces from three branches of its military to take part in a single Russian drill, in what was described as a show of the breadth and depth of China-Russia military cooperation and mutual trust. Defense cooperation between Moscow and Beijing has grown stronger since Russian President Vladimir Putin sent troops into Ukraine on Feb. 24.

China, which has declared a "no limits" friendship with Russia, has refused to criticize Moscow's actions, blaming the U.S. and NATO for provoking the Kremlin, and has blasted the punishing sanctions imposed on Russia.

Russia, in turn, has strongly backed China amid the tensions with the U.S. that followed a visit to Taiwan by U.S. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi.

EU is considering special court to probe possible Russian war crimes

Associated Press

BRUSSELS — The European Union proposed Wednesday to set up a U.N.-backed court to investigate possible war crimes committed by Russia in Ukraine, and to use frozen Russian assets to rebuild the war-torn country.

European Commission president Ursula von der Leyen said in a video message that the EU will work with international partners to get "the broadest international support possible" for the tribunal, while continuing to support the work of the International Criminal Court.

Since Russian President Vladimir Putin ordered the invasion of Ukraine on Feb. 24, his military forces have been accused of abuses ranging from killings in the Kyiv suburb of

Bucha to deadly attacks on civilian facilities, including the March 16 bombing of a theater in Mariupol that an Associated Press investigation established likely killed close to 600 people.

Investigations of military crimes committed during the war in Ukraine are underway around Europe, and the Hague-based International Criminal Court has already launched investigations.

But since Russia does not accept the jurisdiction of the ICC, the Commission said it presented to the 27 EU countries two options to hold the Kremlin accountable: either a "special independent international court based on a multilateral treaty or a specialized court integrated in a national justice system with international judges — a hybrid court."

Toxic foam leak erupts at Hawaii fuel storage site

BY WYATT OLSON
Stars and Stripes

FORT SHAFTER, Hawaii — Federal firefighters responded Tuesday afternoon to a leak of hundreds of gallons of fire suppressant foam at the Red Hill Bulk Fuel Storage Facility on the outskirts of Honolulu.

The leak was quickly contained, and emergency personnel were expected to work through the night to clean up the affected area, Rear Adm. John Wade, commander of Joint Task Force-Red Hill, told reporters during a conference call Tuesday evening.

The task force is charged with the removal of roughly 100 million gallons of fuel from the World War II-era underground storage facility.

Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin in March ordered the site permanently closed after a jet fuel leak contaminated the Navy's drinking water supply used by thousands of people living on and nearby Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam.

About 1,100 gallons of Aqueous Film Forming Foam, or AFFF, was released from a tank near the top of the facility, Wade said. The cause of the leak is under investigation, he added.

AFFF is considered a hazardous material

because it contains PFAS, or perfluoroalkyl and polyfluoroalkyl, a class of chemicals widely used in manufacturing processes since the 1950s.

The Environmental Protection Agency refers to the PFAS components as "forever chemicals" because they persist in the environment. PFAS exposure may lead to a variety of health effects, including an increased risk of cancer, according to the EPA.

Kathleen Ho, deputy director of environmental health for the Hawaii Department of Health, described the leak as "egregious" in a Tuesday news release.

"AFFF contains PFAS forever chemicals — groundwater contamination could be devastating to our aquifer," she said.

"While details are limited at this time, the Joint Task Force and Navy need to be transparent about how this happened," Ho said. "Regulators will hold the Department of Defense accountable and will press the operator to take any and all appropriate corrective action throughout the defueling and de-commissioning process."

The Navy expects to have the fuel removed by summer 2024 and the facility shuttered by 2027.

Tokyo lines up support for new US landing site

BY MATTHEW M. BURKE
AND KEISHI KOJA
Stars and Stripes

An influential governor in southern Japan has lent his support for a central government plan to build a new Self-Defense Force base to accommodate carrier-landing practice for U.S. naval aviators.

Kagoshima Gov. Koichi Shiota cited a "deteriorating" security environment in his decision to support the proposed base on Mageshima, an island 20 miles south of Kyushu, the southernmost of Japan's four main islands. Shiota announced his decision to the prefectural assembly on Tuesday, according to his remarks posted on the prefectural website.

The U.S. Navy has conducted carrier-landing training on Iwo Jima, also known as Iwo To, for Carrier Air Wing 5 since 1991, according to the Japanese Ministry of Defense website.

However, Iwo Jima's distance from Japan's main island and the difficulty maintaining facilities there has had the Navy looking for another training site for years.

The Defense Ministry plans to complete its environmental impact assessment of the Mageshima site by the end of March before beginning construction on the approximately \$1.6 billion project, Japanese public broadcaster NHK reported Tuesday. The construction start date was not available Wednesday.

Tokyo released a draft environmental assessment on Nov. 22 addressing residents' concerns over noise, night flights, environmental impacts and emergency response, Shiota said. He said the report adequately addressed those concerns.

The Defense Ministry already owns part of the island and plans to buy out the few remaining commercial and private property owners, a spokesman for Nishinoomote city, which has jurisdiction over the island, told Stars and Stripes by phone Wednesday.

Approval by Shiota or Nishinoomote Mayor Shunsuke Yaita, who opposed U.S. military use of the island, is not required.

However, their support is essential, Chief Cabinet Secretary Hirokazu Matsuno said in an interview posted to Prime Minister Fumio Kishida's website on Tuesday.

Texas woman pleads guilty in connection to killing of Guillen

BY ROSE L. THAYER
Stars and Stripes

AUSTIN, Texas — Cecily Aguilar, the only person charged in connection to the killing of Army Spc. Vanessa Guillen at Fort Hood, pleaded guilty Tuesday in a federal courtroom to helping her boyfriend dispose of the soldier's body in April 2020.

Aguilar, 24, pleaded guilty to accessory to murder after the fact and three counts of making a false statement, according to the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Western District of Texas.

"Cecily Aguilar's guilty plea today was another step on the long path toward justice

for Vanessa, my client, and her courageous family," said Natalie Khawam, an attorney for the Guillen family. "I will never stop fighting for my clients and will continue to seek and demand justice for victims and their families until it's achieved."

Guillen went missing from Fort Hood, Texas, on April 22, 2020.

Spc. Aaron Robinson, another soldier in Guillen's squadron, killed her with a hammer, then moved her body, according to court documents.

Court records said Aguilar helped Robinson dismember, burn and bury Guillen's body near the Leon River in Bell County.

Oath Keepers founder guilty of Jan. 6 seditious conspiracy

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Oath Keepers founder Stewart Rhodes was convicted Tuesday of seditious conspiracy for a violent plot to overturn President Joe Biden's election, handing the Justice Department a major victory in its massive prosecution of the Jan. 6, 2021, insurrection.

A Washington, D.C., jury found Rhodes guilty of sedition after three days of deliberations in the nearly 2-month-long trial that showcased the far-right extremist group's efforts to keep Republican Donald Trump in the White House at all costs.

Rhodes was acquitted of two other conspiracy charges. A co-defendant — Kelly Meggs, who led the antigovernment group's Florida chapter — was also convicted of seditious conspiracy, while three other associates were cleared of that charge. Jurors found all five defendants guilty of obstruction of an official proceeding: Congress' certification of Biden's electoral victory.

The verdict, while mixed, marks a signif-

icant milestone for the Justice Department and is likely to clear the path for prosecutors to move ahead at full steam in upcoming trials of other extremists accused of sedition.

Rhodes and Meggs are the first people in nearly three decades to be found guilty at a trial of seditious conspiracy — a rarely used Civil War-era charge that can be difficult to prove.

The offense calls for up to 20 years behind bars.

"Democracy depends on the peaceful transfer of power. By attempting to block the certification of the 2020 presidential election results, the defendants flouted and trampled the rule of law," Steven M. D'Antuono, assistant director in charge of the FBI Washington Field Office, said in an emailed statement. "This case shows that force and violence are no match for our country's justice system."

Rhodes intends to appeal, defense attorney James Lee Bright told reporters.

House votes to avert rail strike, force union deal

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The U.S. House moved urgently to head off the looming nationwide rail strike on Wednesday, passing a bill that would bind companies and workers to a proposed settlement that was reached in September but rejected by some of the 12 unions involved.

The measure passed by a vote of 290-137 and now heads to the Senate. If approved there, it will be quickly signed by President Joe Biden, who requested the action.

Biden on Monday asked Congress to intervene and avert the rail stoppage that could strike a devastating blow to the nation's fragile economy by disrupting the transportation of fuel, food and other critical goods. Business groups including the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and the American Farm Bureau Federation warned that halting rail service would cause a \$2 billion per day hit to the economy.

The bill would impose a compromise labor agreement brokered by the Biden administration that was ultimately voted down by four of the 12 unions representing more than 100,000 employees at large freight rail carriers. The unions have threatened to strike if an agreement can't be reached before a Dec. 9 deadline.

Lawmakers from both parties expressed reservations about overriding the negotiations. The intervention was particularly difficult for Democratic lawmakers who have traditionally sought to align themselves with the politically powerful labor unions that criticized Biden's move to intervene in the contract dispute and block a strike.

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi responded to that concern by adding a second vote Wednesday that would add seven days of paid sick leave per year for rail workers covered under the agreement. It will only take effect, however, if the Senate goes along and passes both measures.

The call for more paid sick leave was a major sticking point in the talks. The railroads have said the unions agreed in negotiations over the decades to forgo paid sick time in favor of higher wages and strong short-term disability benefits.

The unions maintain that railroads can easily afford to add paid sick time at a time when they are recording record profits. Several of the big railroads involved in these contract talks reported more than \$1 billion profit in the third quarter.

Senate passes landmark bill on same-sex marriage

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Senate passed bipartisan legislation Tuesday to protect same-sex marriages, an extraordinary sign of shifting national politics on the issue and a measure of relief for the hundreds of thousands of same-sex couples who have married since the Supreme Court's 2015 decision that legalized gay marriage nationwide.

The bill, which would ensure that same-sex and interracial marriages are enshrined in federal law, was approved 61-36 on Tuesday, including support from 12 Republicans. Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer said the legislation was "a long time coming" and part of America's "difficult but inexorable march toward greater equality."

Democrats are moving quickly, while the party still holds the majority in both chambers of Congress. The legislation now moves to the House for a final vote.

President Joe Biden praised the biparti-

san vote and said he will sign the bill "promptly and proudly" if it is passed by the House. He said it will ensure that LGBTQ youth "will grow up knowing that they, too, can lead full, happy lives and build families of their own."

The bill has gained steady momentum since the Supreme Court's June decision that overturned the federal right to an abortion, a ruling that included a concurring opinion from Justice Clarence Thomas that suggested same-sex marriage could also come under threat. Bipartisan Senate negotiations got a kick-start this summer when 47 Republicans unexpectedly voted for a House bill and gave supporters new optimism.

The legislation would not force any state to allow same-sex couples to marry. It would, however, require states to recognize all marriages that were legal where they were performed, and protect current same-sex unions, if the court's 2015 Obergefell v. Hodges decision were to be overturned.

China promises crackdown on 'hostile forces'

Associated Press

BEIJING — China's ruling Communist Party has vowed to "resolutely crack down on infiltration and sabotage activities by hostile forces," following the largest street demonstrations in decades staged by citizens fed up with strict anti-virus restrictions.

The statement from the Central Political and Legal Affairs Commission released late Tuesday comes amid a massive show of force by security services to deter a recurrence of the protests that broke out over the weekend in Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou and several other cities.

While it did not directly address the protests, the statement serves as a reminder of the party's determination to enforce its rule.

Hundreds of SUVs, vans and armored vehicles with flashing lights were parked along city streets Wednesday while police and paramilitary forces conducted random ID checks and searched people's mobile phones for photos, banned apps or other potential evidence that they had taken part in the demonstrations.

The number of people who have been detained at the demonstrations and in follow-up police actions is not known.

While reports and footage of the protests have flourished online before being scrubbed by government censors, they have been ignored entirely by the strictly controlled state media.

Further diverting attention was Wednesday evening's national news dominated by the death of former president and Communist Party leader Jiang Zemin at the age of 96.

Jiang was installed as leader just ahead of the bloody suppression of the 1989 student-led pro-democracy movement centered on Beijing's Tiananmen Square, and later presided over an era of breakneck economic growth during the 1990s and early 2000s while still maintaining rigid party control.

The commission's statement, issued after an expanded session Monday presided over by its head Chen Wenqing, a member of the party's 24-member Politburo, said the meeting aimed to review the outcomes of October's 20th party congress.

At that event, Xi granted himself a third five-year term as secretary general, potentially making him China's leader for life, while stacking key bodies with loyalists and eliminating opposing voices.

"The meeting emphasized that political

and legal organs must take effective measures to ... resolutely safeguard national security and social stability," the statement said.

"We must resolutely crack down on infiltration and sabotage activities by hostile forces in accordance with the law, resolutely crack down on illegal and criminal acts that disrupt social order and effectively maintain overall social stability," it said.

Yet, less than a month after seemingly ensuring his political future and unrivaled dominance, Xi, who has signaled he favors regime stability above all, is facing his biggest public challenge yet.

He and the party have yet to directly address the unrest, which spread to college campuses and the semi-autonomous southern city of Hong Kong, as well as sparking sympathy protests abroad.

Most protesters focused their ire on the "zero-COVID" policy that has placed millions under lockdown and quarantine, limiting their access to food and medicine while ravaging the economy and severely restricting travel. Many mocked the government's ever-changing line of reasoning, as well as claims that "hostile outside foreign forces" were stirring the wave of anger.

Supreme Court wrestles with Biden's policy on deportation

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Supreme Court on Tuesday wrestled with a politically tinged dispute over a Biden administration policy that would prioritize deportation of people in the country illegally who pose the greatest public safety risk.

It was not clear after arguments whether the justices would allow the policy to take effect, or side with Republican-led states that have so far succeeded in blocking it.

At the center of the case is a September 2021 directive from the Department of Homeland Security that paused deportations unless individuals had committed acts of terrorism, espionage or "egregious threats to public safety." The guidance, issued after Joe Biden became president, updated a Trump-

era policy that removed people in the country illegally regardless of criminal history.

On Tuesday, the administration's top Supreme Court lawyer told the justices that federal law does "not create an unyielding mandate to apprehend and remove" every one of the more than 11 million immigrants living in the country illegally.

Chief Justice John Roberts was among the conservative justices who pushed back strongly on the Biden administration's arguments.

"It's our job to say what the law is, not whether or not it can be possibly implemented or whether there are difficulties there, and I don't think we should change that responsibility just because Congress and the executive can't agree on something," Roberts said.

Tornadoes wrecking homes in South fueled by record highs

Associated Press

WETUMPKA, Ala. — Tornadoes damaged numerous homes, destroyed a fire station, briefly trapped people in a grocery store and ripped the roof off an apartment complex in Mississippi, while two people died as a tree crunched their mobile home in Alabama, authorities said Wednesday.

The National Weather Service had warned that strong twisters capable of carving up communities over long distances were possible as the storm front moved eastward from Texas.

They were fueled by record high temperatures and threatened a stretch of the United States where more than 25 million people live.

The "threat for supercells capable of all severe hazards con-

tinues" near the Gulf Coast in Mississippi, Alabama, Florida and Georgia, forecasters said. A total of 73 tornado warnings and 120 severe thunderstorm warnings were issued from Tuesday afternoon to Wednesday morning, said Matthew Elliott, a meteorologist at the Storm Prediction Center in Norman, Okla.

Two people were killed in the Flatwood community just north of the city of Montgomery. "They were in their home that was struck by a tree due to the tornado," said Christina Thornton, director of the Montgomery County Emergency Management Agency.

Thornton said others in the area were injured.

The sheriff's office said a shelter was being opened at a nearby church for the affected residents.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

200 people rescued from ice chunk on lake

MN RED LAKE — Officials in northern Minnesota said roughly 200 people were rescued after they became trapped when an ice chunk broke free on Upper Red Lake.

The Beltrami County Sheriff's Office said on its Facebook page that it got a 911 call from people who were ice fishing who reported that a large chunk of ice broke free from the shoreline, stranding about 100 people. The sheriff's office said first responders arrived to find about 30 yards of open water between the anglers and the shore.

Officials used a drone and found a narrow spot of open water on the southeast corner of Upper Red Lake. A temporary bridge was set up and dozens of people were evacuated.

Celery stalk in trash, luck lead to lost rings

NH WINDHAM — A celery stalk sighting and a little luck came together to help a New Hampshire man find his wife's wedding rings in a 20-ton trash trailer, the jewelry wrapped in a napkin he had accidentally thrown away.

Kevin Butler had taken the trash to a transfer station in Windham last week. Unwittingly he had tossed the napkin into the trash, not realizing his wife had cleaned the rings and wrapped them in the napkin to dry. Several hours later, he returned and asked for help in finding the rings.

Transfer station supervisor Dennis Senibaldi and his crew reviewed surveillance video to

see where Butler threw the bag. They used an excavator to start scooping up trash. After five or six scoops, they saw a white bag with a telltale clue.

"One of the things he said was (inside) was celery stalks, and I could see a celery stalk sticking out the side of the bag," Senibaldi said.

At the bottom, underneath some carrot or sweet potato peelings, there was a napkin. "Literally, I opened up the napkin, there were the two rings," Senibaldi said.

Fireworks show likely sparked hotel blaze

CA RIVERSIDE — A famous Southern California fireworks display likely sparked a small blaze atop a historic inn's roof, officials said.

No injuries were reported in the fire, which occurred on the roof of the Mission Inn Hotel and Spa in Riverside, according to Battalion Chief Pat Hopkins.

The blaze was reported about six minutes after the fireworks began. Firefighters with hoses were already on the rooftop as a precaution, Hopkins said.

The Mission Inn is a National Historic Landmark and its roots date back to 1876 when it was an adobe boardinghouse, according to the inn's website. The fireworks display kicked off the inn's holiday celebration.

Passenger dies in crash at end of test drive

FL WINTER HAVEN — A 76-year-old passenger was killed when a vehicle being test driven by an 86-year-old man turned into the path of a car just outside the Florida car dealership.

Investigators said the man test driving the 2023 Nissan Rogue made a left turn in front of an oncoming vehicle as they were returning to the car lot.

First responders found Jean Worme dead, officials said. The driver suffered minor injuries. The sales representative from the dealership, who had gone on the test drive, and the driver of the other vehicle were not injured, the report said.

Bridge being rebuilt along tourism train route

WV CASS — A West Virginia railroad bridge destroyed by floodwaters 37 years ago is being replaced to enable a tourism train to resume trips through the area, officials said.

Braving harsh conditions and long commutes, Department of Transportation workers are rebuilding the Trout Run bridge in remote Pocahontas County. It was part of the Cass Scenic Railroad since it opened in 1963, and the rail line itself dates back to the early 1900s. Floodwaters destroyed the tracks on the stone railroad bridge in 1985.

The project would reopen the rail line between Cass and Durbin.

Police chief faces 5 counts of malfeasance

LA PLAQUEMINE — A south Louisiana police chief facing five counts of malfeasance in office surrendered to authorities and was later released after posting \$25,000 bond.

Plaquemine Police Chief Kenny Payne was indicted by an Iberville Parish grand jury, news outlets reported.

Most of the charges against Payne are related to Payne allegedly asking for sexual favors from a woman in exchange for having charges dropped against the woman's boyfriend, according to the indictment. The indictment also says Payne ordered a lieutenant to delete text messages received from the alleged victim and that Payne also asked Iberville Parish Sheriff Brett Stassi "to not conduct or to cease conducting an investigation of him."

Woman dies on hike in park, husband rescued

UT SPRINGDALE — A woman died and a man was rescued and treated for hypothermia after they were caught in extreme cold weather while hiking in Utah's Zion National Park, officials said.

The married couple were on a permitted, 16-mile hike through the park area known as the Narrows, the National Park Service said in a statement.

The woman, 31, and the man, 33, were not identified by the park service.

The Zion National Park Search and Rescue Team responded after shuttle drivers said visitors reported an injured man and a non-responsive woman in the Narrows. The rescue team found the man on a trail being helped by other hikers and transported him to the Zion Emergency Operations Center for treatment. Rescuers moved further up the Narrows and found the woman near the Virgin River. They administered emergency aid but determined the woman had died, the park service said.

— From wire reports

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Pulisic goal puts US in round of 16

Associated Press

DOHA, Qatar — Christian Pulisic kicked the ball, scored the goal and crashed into the goalkeeper, a collision that sent the American star to a hospital and the United States into the second round of the World Cup.

More than an hour later, he contacted his teammates by FaceTime to join the celebration.

Pulisic's 38th-minute goal had held up, and the United States had beaten Iran 1-0 on Tuesday night in their politically charged rematch to advance to the World Cup's knockout stage.

"Every single player is ready to lay their body on the line to make sure this team is successful," midfielder Weston McKennie said.

After finishing second in Group B with five points, two behind England, the U.S. plays the Netherlands on Saturday with the chance to reach the quarterfinals for the first time since 2002.

"I always say it's us against the world," winger Tim Weah said, "cause no one believed that the U.S. could play good football."

Back in the World Cup after missing the 2018 tournament, the U.S. needed a victory to reach the round of 16. Iran finished third in

the group with three points and has failed to advance in six World Cup appearances.

"The dream is over," Iran coach Carlos Queiroz said.

McKennie started the play for the goal when he lofted the ball from just past the center circle to Sergiño Dest at the edge of the 6-yard box. Dest headed the ball in front of the net on a bounce as Pulisic charged up the center of the field past Ramin Rezaeian and Majid Hosseini.

Twisting his body, Pulisic redirected the ball with his right foot for his 22nd international goal and first in World Cup play. His momentum carried him into goalkeeper Ali-reza Beiranvand.

"Christian makes those runs. That's what he does. That's the special quality he has," U.S. coach Gregg Berhalter said. "As soon as the ball is wide, he goes in with intensity to the penalty box and good things happen."

Pulisic was sprawled on the field for about three minutes as he received treatment. He tried to continue playing but was substituted at the start of the second half and taken by athletic trainer Harris Patel for abdominal scans at Hamad General Hospital, where Pulisic followed the game on phone apps.

The U.S. Soccer Federation said Pulisic was diagnosed with a pelvic contusion, returned to the team hotel and is day to day.

Weah nearly doubled the lead in the seventh minute of first-half stoppage time but was ruled offside.

Raucous Iranian fans with horns and drums in the crowd of 42,127 filled the lower bowl behind one goal at Al Thumama Stadium, a circular venue shaped like a gahfiya, a traditional hat.

While the U.S. outshot Iran 9-0 in the first half, Iran had a 4-3 advantage in the second, knowing it needed only a draw to advance. Berhalter inserted Walker Zimmerman in the 82nd minute and shifted to a five-man defense.

Nine minutes of stoppage time were announced. Morteza Pouraliganji's diving header in the third minute went just wide. In the eighth minute, Cameron Carter-Vickers had a hand on Mehdi Taremi's shoulder as the striker slid into Matt Turner, and the ball squibbed through the goalkeeper only for Zimmerman to clear it. Spanish referee Antonio Mateu denied Iran's appeal for a video review, and the final whistle blew after the 10th extra minute.

Australia advances, France wins Group D despite loss

Associated Press

AL WAKRAH, Qatar — Australia advanced to the round of 16 at the World Cup, beating favored Denmark 1-0 Wednesday on Mathew Leckie's 60th-minute goal.

It is Australia's first time in the knockout stage since 2006, the only other time it advanced out of the group stage.

Leckie took a pass near the center circle and moved around a Danish defender before hitting a left-footed shot past goalkeeper Kasper Schmeichel diving to his left.

Australia finished with six points in Group D. Defending champion France won the group on goal difference despite losing to Tunisia 1-0 in the other group match.

The World Cup proved to be a major disappointment for Denmark after reaching the semifinals

in the 2020 European Championship. It slogged through a 0-0 draw in its opening match with Tunisia and then recovered in a 2-1 loss against France.

Denmark dominated possession through much of the game but could not generate enough chances.

Denmark's Mathias Jensen had one of his team's best chances of the game in the 10th minute, but Australia goalkeeper Matthew Ryan came up with a point-blank save.

Referee Mustapha Ghorbal handed a yellow card early to defender Aziz Behich as Australia defended tenaciously from the start and counterattacked when possible.

Australia started the second half on the front foot as Jackson Irvine fired a good chance over the crossbar. But the Socceroos

quickly reverted to defending before breaking through with Leckie's goal.

On two late corners Schmeichel sprinted upfield to put himself into the mix in front of the goal as Denmark searched for a goal. Aussie keeper Ryan caught one corner and Schmeichel scurried back. He came all the way back on a second corner with about a minute remaining, but that attempt also amounted to nothing.

It was Tunisia's third victory at a World Cup, and it was France's first loss at the tournament since the 2014 quarterfinals, when Germany beat the team 1-0.

Wahbi Khazri scored in the 58th minute to give the Tunisians the victory, but it wasn't enough to get them into the round of 16. Australia beat Denmark 1-0 in other Group D game

and finished second on goal difference.

Khazri ran at the heart of the French defense and beat two players before poking the ball into the bottom corner. He fell to his knees and was mobbed by teammates. When he got back up, he made a heart shape to the Tunisian fans behind the goal and then limped off, appearing to hurt himself as he fell when scoring his 25th international goal and his third at World Cups.

France forward Antoine Griezmann thought he had evened the score in the eighth minute of stoppage time but he was ruled offside following a video review. At the same time, Tunisia's players on the bench crowded around a TV monitor hoping for a Denmark goal that would have changed the group standings.

Top 4 play for titles; Buckeyes wait

Associated Press

Ohio State was No. 5 on Tuesday night in the second-to-last College Football Playoff rankings, positioned to possibly take advantage if one of the top four slips up on championship weekend.

Georgia (12-0) was No. 1 again. No. 2 Michigan (12-0) and No. 3 TCU (12-0) both moved up a spot, and Southern California (11-1) climbed two spots into the fourth slot.

The Buckeyes (11-1) dropped three spots after losing 45-23 to the rival Wolverines on Saturday at home. That game was 24-20 heading into the fourth quarter and 31-23 with 7:23 to go before Michigan blew it open.

"It was talked about in the committee room that going into, really early in the fourth quarter, the game was still close," said selection committee chairman Boo Corrigan, who is North Carolina State's athletic director. "That being said, you can't completely dismiss the way the fourth quarter ended with Michigan kind of taking over the game there late."

Alabama (10-2) moved up a spot to No. 6 and was followed by Southeastern Conference rival Tennessee, which beat the Crimson Tide in October.

The final rankings and the four-team field for the College Football Playoff will be set Sunday. The semifinals will be played Dec. 31 in the Peach Bowl in Atlanta and the Fiesta Bowl in Glendale, Ariz.

The top four play in their conference championship games this weekend. The undefeated teams might not need to win this weekend to lock up a spot.

Georgia plays LSU (9-3), which fell nine spots to 14th, in the SEC title game. Michigan plays Purdue (8-4) for the Big Ten championship. TCU faces Kansas State, which is 10th in the latest rankings and has already lost to the surprising Horned Frogs.

USC and Heisman Trophy frontrunner Caleb Williams face Utah, No. 11 in the rankings, on Friday night in Las Vegas for the Pac-12 championship.

If the Trojans slip up, that could give Ohio State a second chance.

New Year's Six scenarios

Most of these scenarios involve the top four winning out and/or remaining the same after this weekend's games.

Alabama being ahead of Tennessee would mean the Crimson Tide would go to the Sugar Bowl, which is contractually

bound to get either the SEC champ or the highest-ranked SEC team available after the playoff has been filled.

That would put Tennessee in the Orange Bowl or the Cotton Bowl, depending on what the Rose Bowl does.

If Ohio State doesn't make it into the playoff, the Buckeyes could go to the Rose Bowl for the second straight season.

But with Penn State moving up to No. 8 this week, that opens up the possibility the Rose Bowl could select Penn State, leaving Ohio State to go to the Orange Bowl as the highest-ranked available Big Ten or SEC team.

If Ohio State ends up in the Rose Bowl, Penn State is a good bet for the Cotton.

The Buckeyes in the Orange Bowl against the winner of the Atlantic Coast Conference title game between Clemson and North Carolina bumps Tennessee to the Cotton against the highest-ranked champion from a Group of Five conference.

The latest rankings pretty much guaranteed that will be the winner of the American Athletic Conference championship between Tulane, ranked 18th, and No. 22 UCF.

No other team from a non-Power Five conference is ranked.

Ovechkin sets record for road goals in Capitals' win

Associated Press

VANCOUVER, British Columbia — Alex Ovechkin scored twice, passing Wayne Gretzky for the most road goals in NHL history, and the Washington Capitals beat the Vancouver Canucks 5-1 on Tuesday night.

Ovechkin has scored 403 of his 793 career goals away from home. Gretzky holds the overall record with 894.

"It's always nice when you beat the Great One," Ovechkin said. "It doesn't matter what kind of milestone it is. It's history."

Anthony Mantha added a goal and an assist for the Capitals (10-11-3). John Carlson and Martin Fehervary also scored, and Darcy Kuemper stopped 31 shots.

Nils Hoglander scored for the Canucks (9-11-3), who had won three in a row.

The 37-year-old Ovechkin nearly netted a hat trick when Vancouver pulled Martin for an extra skater with just over six minutes left, but his rocket of a shot skimmed the outside of the post.

"I think he has 13 goals this year and I want to say like eight or nine have been like

a new record. So it's been cool," Washington center Dylan Strome said. "Any time you pass Wayne Gretzky in anything, it deserves a standing ovation, which he got."

Kraken 9, Kings 8 (OT): Andre Burakovsky had two goals, including the winner in overtime, and visiting Seattle defeated Los Angeles in the highest-scoring NHL game this season.

Burakovsky scored on a power play at 2:08 of the extra session to give Seattle its first six-game winning streak in franchise history.

Jets 5, Avalanche 0: Blake Wheeler had three goals and an assist, Connor Hellebuyck made 40 saves and host Winnipeg routed reigning Stanley Cup champion Colorado.

Flames 6, Panthers 2: Dillon Dube scored short-handed and had two assists and host Calgary spoiled Matthew Tkachuk's return by beating Florida.

Rasmus Andersson, Jonathan Huberdeau, Tyler Toffoli and Andrew Mangiapane each had a goal and an assist for the

Flames.

Bruins 3, Lightning 1: Taylor Hall scored twice and host Boston extended its NHL-record streak of home victories to open a season to 13 games with a win over Tampa Bay.

Flyers 3, Islanders 1: Kevin Hayes scored two goals, Carter Hart made 23 saves and host Philadelphia snapped a 10-game losing streak.

Hurricanes 3, Penguins 2 (OT): Brett Pesce scored at the end of a two-on-none 2:20 into overtime to lift visiting Carolina past Pittsburgh.

The Penguins forced the extra period on Jake Guentzel's deflection with 58 seconds to go, but the Hurricanes escaped with the extra point when a weird carom led to a breakaway that Pesce converted.

Sharks 4, Canadiens 0: Kaapo Kahkonen stopped 28 shots for his first shutout for visiting San Jose in a win over Montreal.

Predators 2, Ducks 1 (OT): Roman Josi scored at 3:50 of overtime and host Nashville dealt Anaheim its third straight loss.

Mavs edge Warriors in replay of West finals

Associated Press

DALLAS — Tim Hardaway Jr. had to watch when his Dallas Mavericks lost to the Golden State Warriors in last season's Western Conference finals.

He found himself in the middle of some playoff intensity in their first meeting this season.

Hardaway hit a go-ahead three-pointer late, Luka Dončić scored 41 points in his NBA-leading fifth triple-double and the Mavericks held off the Warriors 116-113 on Tuesday night.

Dallas ended a four-game losing streak, the longest in two seasons under coach Jason Kidd. Golden State, a winner in five games last spring on the way to the title, lost for just the second time in seven games after a slow start to its season.

"For me, it was," Hardaway, who missed the 2022 postseason recovering from a broken foot, said of whether he felt the playoff

vibe.

"Just because of the excitement, and me not being able to play in the Western Conference finals. Just wanting to go out there and compete, have fun. Playing against the champs."

Stephen Curry scored 32 points for Golden State, including a quick-draw three-pointer over Maxi Kleber for a 110-108 lead, but Dallas responded by scoring the next five points to go ahead for good.

Clippers 118, Trail Blazers 112: Norman Powell scored 22 of his 32 points in the fourth quarter, sending Los Angeles to the road victory.

Reggie Jackson had 24 points and 12 assists, helping the Clippers to their second straight win. Ivica Zubac added 12 points and 13 rebounds.

Los Angeles trailed 95-82 after three quarters, but outscored Portland 36-17 in the final period. Powell, a reserve, was 7 for

9 from the field in the fourth.

Portland wasted a terrific performance by Anfernee Simons, who made nine three-pointers and scored 37 points. Jerami Grant had 32 points.

Knicks 140, Pistons 110: Julius Randle scored a season-high 36 points, and visiting New York extended its win streak against Detroit to 11 games.

Quentin Grimes, RJ Barrett and Jalen Brunson each scored 16 points for New York, which had lost four of five. Mitchell Robinson grabbed 13 rebounds, and reserve Immanuel Quickley had 15 points.

Isaiah Stewart scored 19 points for Detroit, which hasn't beaten New York since Jan. 7, 2020. Bojan Bogdanovic and Marvin Bagley III each had 13 points.

The Pistons were missing two starters — Cade Cunningham (shin) and Jalen Ivey (knee) — but Bogdanovic and Stewart returned from injuries.

Gardner, No. 3 Virginia rally for win at Michigan

Associated Press

ANN ARBOR, Mich. — Tony Bennett's team passed all its tests in the opening month of the season.

Jayden Gardner made a go-ahead jumper with 39.9 seconds left and blocked Jett Howard's three-point shot before the buzzer, allowing No. 3 Virginia to stay undefeated with a 70-68 win over Michigan in the ACC/Big Ten Challenge on Tuesday night.

The Cavaliers (6-0) won their first true road game against a team that was ranked in the first two polls this season, a little more than a week after beating then-No. 5 Baylor and then-No. 19 Illinois in Las Vegas.

"It got pretty intense in here," Bennett said.

Virginia trailed by 11 points at halftime, rallied to go ahead with 7:25 left and built a five-point lead that didn't last.

The Wolverines (5-2) went ahead 66-65 at the 1:42 mark when Hunter Dickinson made one of two free throws.

Michigan missed chances to stay or go ahead when Dickinson missed a hook shot with 1:01 to go and Princeton transfer Jaelin Llewellyn turned the ball over with 16 seconds left.

"Hunter has made that running hook before," coach Juwan Howard said. "The turnover, yes, down the stretch, it hurt, but overall that's not the reason we lost the ball-

game.

"We could've easily put our heads down when they came out in the second half and made a run."

No. 1 Houston 100, Norfolk State 52: Marcus Sasser scored 25 points, Tramon Mark added 16 and host Houston routed Norfolk State in the Cougars' first game as the top-ranked team in nearly 40 years.

Sasser finished 7-for-12 on three-pointers, rebounding nicely after making only one of 10 from behind the arc in Houston's win over Kent State on Saturday.

Houston (7-0) was 17-for-33 on threes, including 10-for-18 in the first half. The Cougars went on a 42-7 first-half run.

Marquette 96, No. 6 Baylor 70: Olivier Maxence Prosper scored 24 points and the host Golden Eagles capitalized on a dominant start from its defense to roll past the Bears in the Big 12-Big East Battle.

Marquette (6-2) raced to a 51-25 halftime lead thanks to a 24-0 edge in points off turnovers. This was the highest-ranked team Marquette has beaten under second-year coach Shaka Smart.

Kam Jones had 20 points and David Joplin added 19 as Marquette shot 58.3% overall to win its third straight.

No. 16 Illinois 73, Syracuse 44: Coleman Hawkins had 15 points, 10 rebounds and 10 assists, and host Illinois thumped Syracuse.

Illinois (6-1) hit six of its 15 three-point attempts in the second half to send the Orange (3-4) home with their third straight loss.

Terrence Shannon Jr. had 17 points on 5-of-17 shooting for the Illini. All of his makes were threes. RJ Melendez scored 15 points.

No. 19 Kentucky 60, Bellarmine 41: Antonio Reeves scored 18 points to lead the host Wildcats past Bellarmine.

Jacob Toppin had 12 points and CJ Fredrick finished with 11 as Kentucky (5-2) overcame a slow start. Trailing 32-28 with 15 minutes left, the Wildcats used a 23-3 run to pull away.

Curt Hopf led Bellarmine (2-6) with 15 points.

No. 22 Maryland 79, Louisville 54: Don-ta Scott scored 18 points and visiting Maryland made five consecutive three-pointers to open the second half and run away from Louisville.

The Terrapins (7-0) led throughout, including 37-26 at halftime, before Don Carey sank the first of two from long range during the 15-6 surge that featured two threes from Scott and one from Hakim Hart.

No. 24 San Diego State 72, UC Irvine 69: Micah Parrish hit a three-pointer from the left corner with 2.4 seconds left and the host Aztecs rallied to beat UC Irvine.

Nathan Mensah scored 18 points to lead San Diego State (5-2).