

Trump's team shares plans for Ukraine

By JOHN VANDIVER
Stars and Stripes

STUTTGART, Germany — President-elect Donald Trump's team is considering a plan that would see European troops in charge of a demilitarized zone in Ukraine, where the U.S. would continue to provide arms in exchange for Kyiv giving up sizable territory and its NATO ambitions.

The proposal, reported by The Wall Street Journal on Wednesday, is one of several being batted around by Trump advisers tasked with coming up with a plan to negotiate an end to Russia's war in Ukraine.

Kyiv has thus far ruled out giving up its claim to Crimea, which was forcibly annexed by Russia in 2014, or to the land Russian forces overran in the aftermath of the 2022 invasion.

But Trump has vowed to bring about an end to the war on day one of his presidency, which comes when he is inaugu-

rated Jan. 20.

The Trump administration's approach to dealing with Ukraine and Washington's handling of the war amounts to a reversal of President Joe Biden's long-stated promise to stick with Ukraine as long as it takes.

All the plans being looked at call for the war to be frozen along current battle lines, which have Russia holding about 20% of Ukrainian territory.

Altogether, the occupied territory amounts to an area roughly the size of Pennsylvania.

The proposals also require Ukraine to suspend its NATO membership ambitions, with one postponing any such move for at least 20 years, The Wall Street Journal reported.

In return, the U.S. would continue to deliver large supplies of arms to Ukraine's military to help deter potential future invasions.

Meanwhile, Russia and Ukraine would need to agree to an

800-mile demilitarized zone policed by allies in Europe, with no U.S. forces involved, the Journal reported.

"We can do training and other support but the barrel of the gun is going to be European," a member of Trump's team told the Journal, speaking on condition of anonymity. "We are not sending American men and women to uphold peace in Ukraine. And we are not paying for it. Get the Poles, Germans, British and French to do it."

It's unclear whether Russia would have any interest in such a deal.

But Ukrainian neutrality and a demilitarized zone monitored by a United Nations peacekeeping force were among the ideas that had traction among a wide range of former Russian diplomats and analysts cited in a story by Foreign Policy Magazine in August.

Now in its third year, Russia has suffered hundreds of thou-

sands of casualties during the war that was mismanaged by its battle commanders at the outset.

In recent months, Russia has made incremental gains by overtaking outgunned and outmanned Ukrainian forces. Russian President Vladimir Putin also put the country on a war-time economy, which has ramped up its industrial base to replace weaponry lost during the war.

A deal that has Russia gaining Ukrainian territory is certain to upset many allies in NATO who could see such an arrangement as a victory for Moscow.

Still, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy is in a difficult spot. European allies aren't in a position to make up the difference if the United States stops arming Ukraine and Zelenskyy refuses a peace deal.

Without sufficient arms and ammunition, Ukrainian forces would be even more exposed.

50 European leaders assess their future with Trump

Associated Press

BUDAPEST, Hungary — Around 50 European leaders on Thursday called for a stronger defense posture across the Continent that no longer necessitates a fundamental dependence on Washington as they gave a guarded welcome to incoming President Donald Trump.

The European Political Community summit on Thursday in Hungary's capital, Budapest, reassessed trans-Atlantic relations in the hope that Trump's second U.S. presidency will avoid the strife of his first administration.

"He was elected by the American people. He will defend the American interests," French President Emmanuel Macron told the other leaders, adding that it was not the role of European Union leaders to "comment on the election ... to wonder if it is good or not."

"The question is whether we are willing to defend the European interest. It is the only question. It is our priority," Macron said.

Time and again, leaders stepped up to say European defense efforts should be increased.

During his 2017-21 presiden-

cy, Trump strongly pushed the European NATO allies to spend more on defense, up to and beyond 2% of gross domestic product, and to be less reliant on U.S. military cover. That point has totally sunk in.

"He was the one in NATO who stimulated us to move over the 2%. And now, also thanks to him, NATO, if you take out the numbers of the U.S., is above the 2%," NATO chief Mark Rutte said.

Charles Michel, the council president of the 27-nation EU, agreed that the Continent needed to become less reliant on the United States.

"We have to be more masters of our destiny," he said. "Not because of Donald Trump or Kamala Harris, but because of our children."

For now, European leaders hope a new beginning holds the promise of smoother relations.

Rutte, who was Dutch prime minister during Trump's first presidency, said, "I worked with him very well for four years. He is extremely clear about what he wants."

"He understands that you have to deal with each other to come to joint positions. And I think we can do that."

US allies in China's shadow congratulate Trump

By DAVID CHOI
AND SETH ROBSON
Stars and Stripes

CAMP HUMPHREYS, South Korea — U.S. friends and allies in Asia congratulated President-elect Donald Trump on his victory on the day after his opponent, Democratic candidate Kamala Harris, conceded that the former president won a second term on Tuesday.

Trump's return to the White House in January may bring a change in the United States' approach to foreign policy where conflict with China seems a single collision or stray round away.

South Korean President Yoon

Suk Yeol, whose government recently struck an early deal with President Joe Biden's administration over the cost to keep 28,500 U.S. troops in the country, expressed optimism over the future of the U.S. alliance.

Yoon phoned Trump with congratulations that day and spoke for about 12 minutes on national security and economic issues, he said at a news conference Thursday.

From Tokyo, Japanese Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba began a five-minute phone call with Trump at 9:30 a.m. Thursday, according to a Ministry of Foreign Affairs news release.

Ishiba congratulated Trump

on his victory and the two confirmed they would work to bring the U.S.-Japan alliance to "new heights," according to a read-out of the call. They also agreed to meet in person at the earliest opportunity that's "convenient for both sides."

Japan, facing a growing and assertive Chinese military, has spent ever greater sums in its defense budget the past several years while seeking tighter bonds and deeper cooperation with its American military partners.

From the Philippines, President Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos Jr. said "Trump has won, and the American people

have triumphed," in a post on social platform X on Wednesday evening.

Under Biden, the U.S. has repeatedly expressed support for the Philippines, a long-standing ally, as it parries territorial challenges off its western coast from China's coast guard and maritime militia.

Taiwan President Lai Ching-te also offered Trump congratulations. The island democracy faces direct challenges from China, including military exercises that surround and rehearse invasions of the island. Biden in September promised a substantial, \$567 million military aid package to Taiwan.

Trump vow for Mideast peace to face major test

Associated Press

TEL AVIV, Israel — Donald Trump will return to the U.S. presidency at a time of unprecedented conflict and uncertainty in the Middle East. He has vowed to fix it.

But Trump's history of strong support for Israel coupled with his insistence during the campaign that the war in Gaza should end quickly, the isolationist forces in the Republican party and his penchant for unpredictability raise a mountain of questions over how his second presidency will affect the region at this pivotal moment.

Barring the achievement of elusive cease-fires before the inauguration, Trump will ascend to the highest office in the country as a brutal war in Gaza still rages and Israel presses its offensive against the Lebanese Hezbollah militant group. A conflagration between Iran and Israel shows no signs of abating — nor do Israel's conflicts with Iranian proxies in

Iraq and Yemen — and Iran's nuclear program remains a top concern for Israel.

Throughout his campaign, Trump has vowed to bring peace to the region.

"Get it over with and let's get back to peace and stop killing people," Trump said of the conflict in Gaza in an interview with conservative radio host Hugh Hewitt in April.

International mediators from the U.S., Egypt and Qatar have tried unsuccessfully to bring about a lasting cease-fire. Yet Trump has repeatedly urged to Israel "finish the job" and destroy Hamas — but hasn't said how.

"Does finish the job mean you have a free hand to act in dealing with the remnants of Hamas? Or does finish the job mean the war has to come to an end now?" asked David Makovsky, director of the program on Arab-Israel Relations at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy. "That's part of the enigmas here."

Guardman who fled UK after collision sentenced to prison

By LORETTO MORRIS
Stars and Stripes

MILDENHALL, England — A Texas Army National Guardsman who severely injured a nurse last year in a head-on collision in England was sentenced Thursday by a British court to two years and eight months in prison.

Spc. Isac Alejandro Calderon's appearance in Worcester Crown Court brought an end to a case that included his extradition from the United States.

Calderon, 23, "tried to escape justice for his action behind the wheel by fleeing the country," Jennifer Winzor of the Crown Prosecution Service said in a statement Thursday. "Those who commit offenses in the U.K. cannot simply expect to walk away without accountability."

In October, Calderon pleaded guilty to causing serious injury by dangerous driving, a charge that stemmed from the crash near Shucknall on July 31, 2023.

At his sentencing hearing, Judge Martin Jackson described

Calderon's actions as appalling and said his roadway behavior "was the sort of driving one expects from arrogant, young boy racers," the BBC reported.

Calderon's first name has been spelled Issac and Isaac in court statements and media reports. A Sky News report in July displayed a picture of his military-issued common access card, which says Isac.

The collision occurred on the A4103 in a rural area less than 30 miles from the Welsh border. Elizabeth Donowho, a British nurse whose car was struck by Calderon, sustained broken bones and was temporarily unable to walk as a result.

Calderon was also injured in the crash and had to be treated in a hospital, West Mercia police said in an October statement to Stars and Stripes.

After that, he showed up for interviews with authorities, so he was not arrested and was allowed to keep his passport, according to the statement.

Harris concedes presidential race

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Faced with a sweeping rejection by American voters, Kamala Harris conceded the presidential election to Donald Trump on Wednesday and encouraged supporters to continue fighting for their vision of the country.

The Democratic vice president said the battle would continue “in the voting booth, in the courts and in the public square.”

“Sometimes the fight takes a while,” she said at Howard University, her alma mater, where she had hoped to make a victory speech after the election. “That

doesn’t mean we won’t win.”

Harris’ decisive defeat shattered hopes that she could rescue Democrats’ chances after President Joe Biden’s reelection effort stalled and she replaced him at the top of the ticket.

She trailed in every battleground state to Trump, a Republican whom she described as an existential danger to the country’s foundational institutions. And Trump appeared on track to win the popular vote for the first time in his three campaigns for the White House — even after two impeachments, felony convictions and his at-

tempt to overturn his previous election loss.

Despite her stark warnings about Trump, Harris reached for optimism on Wednesday.

“It is OK to feel sad and disappointed, but please know it’s going to be OK,” she told supporters as some of them wiped tears from their eyes.

Biden released a statement praising Harris after her speech, saying: “She will continue the fight with purpose, determination, and joy. She will continue to be a champion for all Americans. Above all, she will continue to be a leader our chil-

dren will look up to for generations to come as she puts her stamp on America’s future.”

Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz, Harris’ running mate, was in the audience with his family. So were Reps. Nancy Pelosi, the former House speaker, and Barbara Lee, both from Harris’ home state of California.

Before her speech, Harris called Trump to congratulate him on his victory. She told the crowd that “we will engage in a peaceful transfer of power,” an implicit reference to Trump’s unwillingness to do the same four years ago.

Harris allies place blame for election loss on Biden

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Joe Biden’s name wasn’t on the ballot, but history will likely remember Kamala Harris’ resounding defeat as his loss too.

As Democrats pick up the pieces after President-elect Donald Trump’s decisive victory, some of the vice president’s backers are expressing frustration that Biden’s decision to seek reelection until this summer — despite longstanding voter concerns about his age and unease about post-pandemic inflation as well as the U.S.-Mexico border — all but sealed his party’s surrender of the White

House.

“The biggest onus of this loss is on President Biden,” said Andrew Yang, who ran against Biden in 2020 for the Democratic nomination and endorsed Harris’ unsuccessful run. “If he had stepped down in January instead of July, we may be in a very different place.”

Biden will leave office after leading the United States out of the worst pandemic in a century, galvanizing international support for Ukraine after Russia’s invasion and passing a \$1 trillion infrastructure bill that will affect communities for years to come.

But having run four years ago against Trump to “restore the soul of the country,” Biden will make way after just one term for his immediate predecessor, who overcame two impeachments, a felony conviction and an insurrection launched by his supporters. Trump has pledged to radically reshape the federal government and roll back many of Biden’s priorities.

“Maybe in 20 or 30 years, history will remember Biden for some of these achievements,” said Thom Reilly, co-director of the Center for an Independent and Sustainable Democracy at Ari-

zona State University. “But in the shorter term, I don’t know he escapes the legacy of being the president who beat Donald Trump only to usher in another Donald Trump administration four years later.”

Biden on Thursday avoided directly addressing the electorate’s seeming repudiation of his presidency. Instead, he noted that Americans will feel the effects of the administration’s signature legislative efforts for years to come.

“Don’t forget all that we accomplished,” Biden said in a brief Rose Garden address.

Jan. 6 officers grappling with Trump’s second term

CQ-Roll Call

WASHINGTON — The decisive election of Donald Trump on Tuesday sent a clear message to Aquilino Gonell and other officers who protected the Capitol from rioters on Jan. 6, 2021.

“It means that the American people have accepted Jan. 6 as something that could be condoned,” the former Capitol Police sergeant said the morning after Trump won his second,

nonconsecutive term, handily beating Vice President Kamala Harris. “They have put Donald Trump above the law. ... He betrayed us. And the vast majority of the American people think that’s OK.”

Gonell has spent the last four years publicly sharing his experiences, one of a handful of officers to do so. They feel the events — when a mob of Trump supporters stormed the Capitol and assaulted police in an at-

tempt to stop the certification of election results — have been whitewashed, despite their best attempts to describe the violence. Now they are coming to terms with the reality of another Trump presidency.

“It feels like America said f— you, Mike Fanone. We don’t care about Jan. 6,” said former Metropolitan Police officer Michael Fanone, who was injured during the attack.

Watching America resound-

ingly elect Trump was a tough pill to swallow, Fanone said. It comes after House Republicans worked to absolve Trump, who falsely claimed the 2020 election was stolen from him, by poking holes in the work of the select committee that investigated the attack of Jan. 6, 2021, in the previous Congress.

And it means the Department of Justice will likely wind down its criminal cases against Trump.

Plea deals revived for alleged 9/11 plotters

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — A military judge has ruled that plea agreements struck by alleged Sept. 11 mastermind Khalid Sheikh Mohammed and two co-defendants are valid, voiding an order by Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin to throw out the deals, a government official said Wednesday.

The official spoke on condition of anonymity because the order by the judge, Air Force Col. Matthew McCall, has not yet been posted publicly or officially announced.

Unless government prosecutors or others attempt to challenge the plea deals again, McCall's ruling means that the three 9/11 defendants before long could enter guilty pleas in the U.S. military courtroom at Guantana-

mo Bay, Cuba, taking a dramatic step toward wrapping up the long-running and legally troubled government prosecution in one of the deadliest attacks on the U.S.

The plea agreements would spare Mohammed and two co-defendants, Walid bin Attash and Mustafa al-Hawsawi, the risk of the death penalty in exchange for the guilty pleas.

Government prosecutors had negotiated the deals with defense attorneys under government auspices, and the top official for the military commission at the Guantanamo Bay naval base had approved the agreements.

The plea deals in the Sept. 11, 2001, al-Qaida attacks that killed nearly 3,000 people spurred immediate political blowback by Republican lawmakers and oth-

ers after they were made public this summer.

Within days, Austin issued a brief order saying he was nullifying them.

Plea bargains in possible death penalty cases tied to one of the gravest crimes ever carried out on U.S. soil were a momentous step that should only be decided by the defense secretary, Austin said at the time.

The agreements, and Austin's attempt to reverse them, have made for one of the most fraught episodes in a U.S. prosecution marked by delays and legal difficulties. That includes years of ongoing pretrial hearings to determine the admissibility of statements by the defendants given their years of torture in CIA custody.

The Pentagon is reviewing the judge's decision and had no immediate further comment, said Maj. Gen. Pat Ryder, Pentagon press secretary.

The New York Times first reported the ruling.

Military officials have yet to post the judge's decision on the Guantanamo military commission's online site. However, a legal blog that long has covered the prosecutions from the Guantanamo courtroom said McCall's 29-page ruling concludes that Austin lacked the legal authority to toss out the plea deals.

While families of some of the victims and others are adamant that the 9/11 prosecutions continue until trial and possible death sentences, legal experts say it's not clear that could ever happen.

Wicker is set to lead Senate Armed Services Committee

By SVETLANA SHKOLNIKOVA
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Republican Roger Wicker of Mississippi, a staunch ally of Ukraine and proponent of greater military spending, is set to become the next chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee.

Wicker won reelection to the Senate on Tuesday night. With the Republican takeover of the upper chamber, he is in line next year to lead the panel that oversees the Defense Department and helps set defense policy.

A former Air Force officer, Wicker became the committee's most senior Republican in 2023 following the retirement of former Sen. Jim Inhofe, R-Okla. The majority party member with the greatest seniority traditionally serves as chairman.

"I'll become chairman, and it will just give me another opportunity, a more significant opportunity, to back our military," Wicker told WDAM 7 news in Mississippi as he campaigned last weekend.

Wicker was the driving force behind a proposal to raise President Joe Biden's 2025 defense budget request by \$55 billion and successfully pushed the Senate Armed Services panel to agree to a \$25 billion hike. He also laid out a plan in the spring that called for a "generational investment" in the U.S. military, including boosting defense spending to 5% of the gross domestic product in the next five to seven years.

"We're not where we need to be in our Navy and our Air Force, and we don't compensate our men and women in uniform as we should," Wicker told Mississippi's WAPT News on Tuesday night. "That's going to be an opportunity for me as chairman of the Armed Services Committee."

Under Wicker's blueprint, the Navy's fleet would grow to 357 ships by 2035, and the Air Force would buy at least 340 additional aircraft in five years.

Wicker is poised to take over the chairmanship from Sen. Jack Reed, D-R.I.

Nuclear sample pulled from Fukushima key to cleanup

Associated Press

TOKYO — A robot that has spent months inside the ruins of a nuclear reactor at the tsunami-hit Fukushima Daiichi plant delivered a tiny sample of melted nuclear fuel on Thursday, in what plant officials said was a step toward beginning the cleanup of hundreds of tons of melted fuel debris.

The sample, the size of a grain of rice, was placed into a secure container, marking the end of the mission, according to Tokyo Electric Power Company Holdings, which manages the plant. It is being transported to a glove box for size and weight measurements before being sent to outside laboratories for detailed analyses over the coming months.

Plant chief Akira Ono has said it will provide key data to plan a decommissioning strategy, develop technology and robots and learn how the accident had developed.

Despite multiple probes in the years since the 2011 disaster that wrecked the plant and forced

thousands of nearby residents to leave their homes, much about the site's highly radioactive interior remains a mystery.

The sample, the first to be retrieved from inside a reactor, was significantly less radioactive than expected. Officials had been concerned that it might be too radioactive to be safely tested even with heavy protective gear, and set an upper limit for removal out of the reactor. The sample came in well under the limit.

That's led some to question whether the robot, nicknamed Telesco, extracted the nuclear fuel it was looking for from an area in which previous probes have detected much higher levels of radioactive contamination, but TEPCO officials insist they believe the sample is melted fuel.

On Oct. 30, the extendable robot clipped a sample weighing less than .01 ounces from the surface of a mound of melted fuel debris sitting on the bottom of the primary containment vessel of the Unit 2 reactor, TEPCO said.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

5 killed when small jet crashes into vehicle

AZ MESA — A small jet crashed into a vehicle Tuesday after taking off from a suburban Phoenix airport, killing five people, police said.

The plane crashed while taking off from Falcon Field Airport in Mesa, police there said in a statement. The Honda HA-420 light business jet struck the vehicle outside airport property at 4:40 p.m., according to the Federal Aviation Administration.

Five people were confirmed dead at the scene, police said. Authorities said five people were aboard the plane but didn't specify whether they all died or whether anyone in the vehicle may have been among the victims.

The FAA, the National Transportation Safety Board and Mesa authorities will investigate.

FBI recovers funds for scammed CEO's victims

KS WICHITA — Sobs of relief broke out in a federal courtroom in Kansas on Monday as dozens of people whose life savings had been embezzled by a bank CEO learned that federal law enforcement had recovered their money.

In August, former Kansas bank CEO Shan Hanes was sentenced to 24 years after stealing \$47 million from customer accounts and wiring the money to cryptocurrency accounts run by scammers. Prosecutors said Hanes also stole \$40,000 from his church, \$10,000 from an investment club and \$60,000 from his daughter's college fund and lost \$1.1 million of his own in the scheme.

Hanes' Heartland Tri-State Bank, drained of cash, was shut down by federal regulators and sold to another financial institution. Customers' savings and checking accounts amounting to \$47.1 million were insured by the Federal Deposit Insurance Corp., which paid off their losses. But there were still 30 shareholders of the community-owned rural bank Hanes helped found — including his close family friends and neighbors — who thought they lost \$8.3 million in investments.

On Monday the shareholders stood to cheer federal Judge John W. Broomes in Wichita after he told them, one at a time, that they'd be paid back in full. The FBI recovered the funds from a cryptocurrency account held by Tether Ltd. in the Cayman Islands.

Process questioned in ammonia plant dispute

LA ELKINSVILLE — A dispute over a planned ammonia plant near a historic Black town in southeastern Louisiana ratcheted up a notch Friday with a challenge to the state's approval process.

The company claims it will store underground almost all of the climate-damaging carbon dioxide emitted in the production of ammonia, commonly used for fertilizers. Environmental groups warn this is an unrealistic expectation.

The Tulane University Environmental Law Clinic is asking the Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality to recuse itself from deciding on a permit for St. Charles Clean Fuels' ammonia plant next to the Elkinsville community. The agency appears to have already

decided to grant the permit, the clinic said, before weighing all public comment, which would be illegal under Louisiana law.

Governor OKs wind farm, urges turbine approvals

WA OLYMPIA — Washington Gov. Jay Inslee has approved a revised plan for a massive proposed wind farm after he rejected a sharply slimmed-down version earlier this year.

Inslee urged permitting officials to work quickly to allow the construction of as many Horse Heaven Wind Farm turbines as possible, The Seattle Times reported.

The original \$1.7 billion project included up to 222 wind turbines across 24 miles of hill-sides in the Tri-Cities area of eastern Washington and three solar arrays covering up to 8.5 square miles. But then Washington's Energy Facility Site Evaluation Council, a clearing-house for permits required by large projects, recommended slashing the proposal in half because nests of the endangered ferruginous hawk were found in the area. It wanted a 2-mile buffer around each nest.

In May, Inslee rejected the council's recommendation to shrink the project, prompting the panel to suggest a compromise that would examine turbines and nests on a case-by-case basis.

5 men now face charges in fatal nightclub shooting

GA ELBERTON — Four more South Carolina men have been arrested on charges connected with a fatal Oct. 12 shooting in Elberton, Ga., at a homecoming afterpar-

ty.

The Georgia Bureau of Investigation announced that it arrested Destanne Mathis, 20; Aannidras Parks, 18; Jerimiyah Hughes, 19; and Desmond Latimer, 18, last week. All four are residents of nearby Anderson, S.C., and face murder and gang charges.

More than a dozen shots were fired at the 7 Grand nightclub, where many teens were gathered after Elbert County High School's homecoming. Bry'shun Treviyus O'Brian Jordan, 15, of Hartwell, was killed. Four other teens were shot, and three additional teens were injured but not shot, officials have said.

Investigators had previously arrested Jarquavious Scott, 18, of Anderson.

Feds investigate after remains of dolphin found

NJ ALLENHURST — The butchered remains of a dolphin were found on a New Jersey beach, and federal authorities are investigating.

The Marine Mammal Stranding Center, which responds to reports of dead or distressed marine animals that come ashore in New Jersey, said the remains of a common dolphin were found Wednesday on the beach in Allenhurst, just north of Asbury Park.

The dolphin "appeared to have been butchered," the center said in a statement.

Witnesses had reported seeing a dolphin of the same species struggling in the surf Tuesday night a block from where the remains were found. But the animal was able to swim over a sand bar and back out to sea.

— From wire reports

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Army stays cool pursuing perfect season

Associated Press

DENTON, Texas — Army's pursuit of its first perfect season in 75 years doesn't seem to be causing much of a ripple among the Black Knights.

At least that's the view of coach Jeff Monken with his No. 18 team on a 12-game winning streak going back to last season, the longest in the nation right now and Army's best since 1949-50.

"I don't really know how to put into words the temperament of this team," said Monken, who has led Army to its highest ranking since 1962. "They seem to be unfazed by the victories, as crazy as that sounds. Sometimes, teams get in this position and you say, 'Oh, my gosh. Oh, my gosh.' There's almost a pressure that you have to win the next one. I don't think our guys feel that."

The next one is Saturday at North Texas, where the Black Knights (8-0, 6-0 American Athletic) will match their No. 5 defense nationally against the

third-best offense in the country.

That's enough for Monken to feel a little angst, even if he's not aware the Mean Green (5-3, 2-2) had a decisive victory over an undefeated team the last time they hosted a ranked opponent. UTSA was 11-0 when it lost 45-23 in Denton three years ago.

"I've just been watching their offense for the last two hours, and I want to throw up in my garbage can," Monken said. "They are so explosive and talented."

The Black Knights, who haven't trailed at any point during their winning streak, have long been methodical with their triple-option offense. Monken says he's not sure who will be in charge of it.

Bryson Daily missed last week's 20-3 victory over Air Force with an undisclosed injury and illness. He was leading the nation with 19 touchdowns rushing at the time.

Dewayne Coleman took over at quarterback, but the offensive

star against the Falcons was running back Kanye Udoh, who had a career-high 158 yards rushing and scored both touchdowns.

"His health is improving," Monken said of Daily. "We anticipate that before the end of the week, he's going to be able to practice and that will allow us to determine his status for the game on Saturday. I'm optimistic because there is a chance."

Defensive struggles

As good as the North Texas offense has been, a struggling defense is the biggest reason behind consecutive losses with a chance to gain bowl eligibility in coach Eric Morris' second season.

The Mean Green lost 52-44 at Memphis and 45-37 at home against Tulane before getting two weeks to prepare for Army's unique offense. UNT is 121st in total defense, allowing 449 yards per game.

"We're going to have to pre-

pare for both," Morris said of Daily and Coleman. "That doesn't make it any easier by any stretch of the imagination. Teams have had trouble figuring them out all year."

Prolific passing

Chandler Morris of North Texas leads the FBS in passing yards per game at 359.1 and is tied for second with 29 TDs passing.

The former Dallas high school standout who started his career at Oklahoma and transferred to TCU, about 40 miles south of UNT's Denton campus, has four games of at least 400 yards this season.

Morris' top target is DT Sheffield, who is tied for second nationally with 10 touchdowns receiving.

"He's the most explosive player that we have faced this year," Monken said. "He's electrifying, dangerous and gets everyone's attention."

Boras hints Soto may try to top Ohtani's record \$700M deal

Associated Press

SAN ANTONIO — Agent Scott Boras indicated Juan Soto may be seeking to top Shohei Ohtani's record \$700 million contract because he is three years younger than the Japanese two-way star was when he reached his deal with the Los Angeles Dodgers.

Boras gave a pun-filled, 48-minute assessment of the market at the general managers meetings on Wednesday, calling Soto "the Mona Lisa of the museum." Boras said only a handful of players have matched Soto's accomplishments at age 26, mentioning Willie Mays, Hank Aaron and Ted Williams, and boasted "he has literally 15 years more of his prime to offer."

"You're talking about a business opportunity where you can make literally billions of dollars by acquiring somebody," Boras said. "You can really see that owners, general managers, that they're kind of called upon to be championship magicians. ... It's hard to do, to put together that magic of a championship run, but behind every great magician obviously is the magic Juan."

Ohtani agreed to his 10-year contract late

last year and helped lead the team to its second World Series title in five years. The deal contains \$680 million in deferred money payable from 2034-43, reducing its average annual value for purposes of baseball's luxury tax to approximately \$46.08 million.

"I don't think Ohtani has much to do with Juan Soto, at all," Boras said. "It's not something we discuss or consider. Juan Soto is — he's in an age category that separates him from all."

He wouldn't publicly discuss specifics of what Soto is seeking.

"I'm not going to talk about dollars and cents. That's something we'll take care of with the clubs," Boras said.

He dismissed the idea of Soto accepting deferred money similar to Ohtani.

"I don't think that tax considerations are the focal point when you're talking about a business opportunity where you can make literally billions of dollars by acquiring somebody," he said.

Boras sprinkled in attempts at humor when discussing several of his top free agents:

■ First baseman Pete Alonso, nicknamed

the Polar Bear: "We hear a lot about the bear market for power-hitting first basemen and for Pete's sake, it's the polar opposite."

■ Pitcher Corbin Burnes: "He continues to be a Corbin copy of his previous seasons."

■ Pitcher Blake Snell: "There's no doubt that the Snelling salts have created a lot of whiffs."

■ Third baseman Alex Bregman: "He's provided the Astros with an infusion of championship blood. I'd say everything about him is AB positive."

Soto is expected to be pursued by the New York Mets and billionaire owner Steve Cohen.

"The Mets are obviously trying to get to their goal, which is winning a world championship," Boras said. "I think they've been very clear about pursuing this aggressively."

Soto intends to meet with owners who want him.

"I'm going to commit my career to it and I want the owner to commit his resources to it," Boras said of his client's mindset. "That's really why Juan Soto became a free agent."

Warriors top Celtics behind Curry's 27

Associated Press

BOSTON — Stephen Curry scored 27 points, Buddy Hield had 16 and the Golden State Warriors beat the Boston Celtics 118-112 on Wednesday night for their fifth straight victory.

Andrew Wiggins also added 16 points for Golden State (7-1). Curry played his second straight after missing three with an ankle injury.

Jayson Tatum led Boston (7-2) with 32 points, and Derrick White had 26 with six rebounds.

Warriors coach Steve Kerr was booed by the TD Garden crowd that showed its displeasure over how he used Tatum at the Paris Olympics.

With Warriors holding a 115-112 lead, Draymond Green hit a free throw with 11 seconds left. Kyle Anderson sealed it with two free throws with 2.4 seconds to play.

Boston forward Jaylen Brown missed his third straight game with a strained left hip flexor. Warriors guard Brandin Podziemski was out with an illness.

Hornets 108, Pistons 107: Brandon Miller scored off an offensive rebound at the buzzer to lift host Charlotte to a thrilling victory over Detroit.

Miles Bridges had 27 points and LaMelo Ball added 25 points on five 3-pointers for the Hornets, who snapped a three-game losing streak. Miller finished with 19 points.

Cade Cunningham had a triple-double for Detroit with 20 points, 10 rebounds and 10 assists. Jaden Ivey added 21 points for the Pistons.

Miller's putback avenged a huge turnover just seconds earlier.

With the Hornets leading by one and trying to run out the clock, Miller got caught in a double team and the Pistons wrestled the ball away from him.

Ronald Holland picked up the

loose ball and drove from half-court for a go-ahead layup with 6.3 seconds left to give the Pistons the lead, stunning the home crowd.

But on Charlotte's final possession, Miller grabbed Grant Williams' missed 3-pointer on the left side of the lane and quickly put it back in off the backboard for the winner and was promptly mobbed by his teammates.

Pacers 118, Magic 111: Benedict Mathurin scored 20 points, four teammates each had 17, and host Indiana defeated Orlando.

Ahead two in the final minute, the Pacers' Tyrese Haliburton sank a 3 and Mathurin made two foul shots. Six of nine Pacers scored in double digits. Haliburton, Myles Turner, Pascal Siakam and Jarace Walker each scored 17. T.J. McConnell had 15.

Orlando's Franz Wagner led all scorers with 28. Jalen Suggs added 15 and Moritz Wagner had 14 off the bench.

Hawks 121, Knicks 116: No. 1 overall pick Zaccharie Risacher scored 33 points and had seven rebounds and host Atlanta rallied late to beat New York 121-116.

Risacher's 33 points were the most by a rookie this season. He also had three assists, three steals and two blocked shots.

The Hawks trailed 110-105 with 2:57 to play, but went on a 13-1 run to put the game away.

Jalen Johnson had 23 points and 15 rebounds.

Karl-Anthony Towns led the Knicks with 34 points and 16 rebounds.

Rockets 127, Spurs 100: Jalen Green and Fred VanVleet had 21 points each and host Houston built a huge lead early and coasted to a win over San Antonio.

Houston never trailed and had built a 25-point lead by half-time. The Rockets were up by 27 points when coach Ime Udoka

cleared the bench with about 6½ minutes remaining.

Alperen Sengun added 16 points for the Rockets, who won for the fourth time in five games. VanVleet had 10 assists and seven rebounds — both season-highs — to go with his top scoring effort of the season.

Grizzlies 131, Lakers 114: Ja Morant scored 20 points before leaving in the third quarter with a right hamstring injury and host Memphis used their 3-point shooting to beat Los Angeles.

Rookie Jaylen Wells and Jarren Jackson Jr. also scored 20 points each for the Grizzlies. There was no immediate word on the extent of Morant's injury.

LeBron James led the Lakers with 39 points.

The Lakers played without starting center Anthony Davis, who was suffering from left heel soreness.

Cavaliers 131, Pelicans 122: Donovan Mitchell scored 29 points and visiting Cleveland defeated New Orleans to open 9-0 for the first time in their 55-year NBA history.

Caris LeVert and Jarrett Allen each added 16 points, and Allen grabbed 14 rebounds as the Cavaliers surpassed an 8-0 start by the 1976-77 squad that finished 43-39 under coach Bill Fitch.

Zion Williamson returned from a two-game absence and had 29 points for the Pelicans.

Mavericks 119, Bulls 99: Luka Dončić had 27 points and 13 assists, Kyrie Irving scored 17 points and Daniel Gafford also scored 17 playing a season-high 24 minutes as host Dallas beat Chicago.

The defending Western Conference champions scored the first 13 points of the second half and led by as many as 30 while improving to 2-2 on a five-game homestand.

Nikola Vucevic had 14 points and 10 rebounds while sitting out the fourth quarter to lead the

Bulls, who have lost three straight games.

Suns 115, Heat 112: Kevin Durant scored 32 points, Jusuf Nurkic had 20 points and 18 rebounds, and host Phoenix rallied from a 15-point deficit to defeat Miami and extend their winning streak to six games.

The Suns trailed 79-64 in the third quarter but finished the period on a 15-3 run to cut the Heat's lead to three.

Neither team could take control in the fourth, but Durant's jumper from the free-throw line with 16 seconds to play gave Phoenix a four-point lead.

Nuggets 124, Thunder 122: Russell Westbrook scored 29 points, Peyton Watson blocked a shot in the closing seconds after missing a pair of free throws at the other end and injury-riddled Denver rallied to beat host Oklahoma City to hand them their first loss of the season.

Nikola Jokic finished with 23 points, 20 rebounds and 16 assists as the Nuggets rebounded from a 16-point deficit in the third quarter. Christian Braun added 24.

Clippers 110, 76ers 98: Norman Powell scored 26 points — his seventh straight game with 20 or more — and host Los Angeles beat Philadelphia in Paul George's return to face his old team.

George had 18 points on 7 of 9 shooting and seven rebounds in 24 minutes for the Sixers in his second game of the season. He's on a minutes restriction since a left knee injury delayed his season debut.

Kings 122, Raptors 107: DeMar DeRozan scored 27 points in a record-setting performance and host Sacramento beat Toronto.

Domantas Sabonis added 17 points, 13 assists and 11 rebounds for his third triple-double of the season for Sacramento. He shot 6-for-6 from the field and 5-for-5 at the free-throw line.

UConn opens title defense with victory

Associated Press

STORRS, Conn. — Alex Karaban had 20 points, seven rebounds, seven blocks and six assists as No. 3 UConn opened the season with a 92-56 win over Sacred Heart on Wednesday night.

Liam McNeeley added 18 points and 10 rebounds for the Huskies, seeking their third consecutive national championship. Solo Ball scored 16.

Tarris Reed finished with 15 points and 11 rebounds as Connecticut outrebounded Sacred Heart 47-25.

Amiri Stewart had 13 points and Bryce Johnson added 10 for the Pioneers (0-2).

Tanner Thomas, who scored 22 points in Sacred Heart's season-opening loss to Temple, had just six this time.

No. 11 Auburn 94, Vermont 43: Miles Kelly scored 21 points, Denver Jones added 16 and the Tigers cruised to a season-opening home victory over the Catamounts.

Chaney Johnson had 13 points and nine rebounds for Auburn, which has now won 55 consecutive non-conference home games. Auburn led Vermont by 25 at halftime and opened the second half on a 35-4 run. Kelly, a Georgia Tech transfer, hit sev-

en 3-pointers — more than any Auburn player had in a single game last season.

Seth Joba led Vermont (1-1) with eight points, while Illeri Ayo-Faleye added seven. The Catamounts' 43 points tied for the fewest they have scored in a game under 14th-year head coach John Becker.

No. 15 Creighton 99, Texas-Rio Grande Valley 86: Big East preseason player of the year Ryan Kalkbrenner scored a career-high 49 points and the host Bluejays needed just about every one of them in a season-opening win over the Vaqueros.

The 7-foot-1 Kalkbrenner's point total was the second-highest in program history behind Bob Portman's 51 against UW-Milwaukee in 1967. The fifth-year center was an astonishing 20-for-22 from the field, including 2-for-2 on 3-pointers, and he made 7 of 8 free throws. He also grabbed 11 rebounds and blocked three shots.

Hasan Abdul-Hakim had 24 points and Cliff Davis and DK Thorn added 17 apiece for the Vaqueros (0-2), who were with-in 87-82 when Howie Fleming Jr. made a fifth-chance basket with 2:37 left.

No. 16 Arkansas 76, Lip-

scomb 60: John Calipari won his debut with his new team when the host Razorbacks held off a second-half rally by the Bisons.

Freshman guard Boogie Fland scored 17 points and Florida Atlantic transfer Johnell Davis added 15 for Arkansas.

Calipari, who left Southeastern Conference rival Kentucky after last season, had previously been booed incessantly whenever stepping foot in Bud Walton Arena.

That all changed when Eric Musselman, who coached Arkansas to three Sweet 16s in five seasons, departed last spring and Calipari bolted from the bluegrass of Kentucky for the foothills of the Ozarks.

Zvonimir Ivisic, one of seven players to make their Razorbacks debut Wednesday, hit a 3-pointer, a layup and two free throws in the span of a minute to stop the Bisons.

Ivisic finished with 12 points. Jacob Ognacevic led Lipscomb with 16.

No. 17 Indiana 80, SIU Edwardsville 61: Mackenzie Mgbako scored 19 of his career-high 31 points in the first half and Malik Reneau added 15 points and seven rebounds to

lead the host Hoosiers past the Cougars.

Mgbako made 8 of his first 10 shots and finished 13-for-17 from the field while going 4-for-5 on 3-pointers, making his only free-throw attempt and grabbing nine rebounds.

SIU Edwardsville (1-1) was led by Ray'Sean Taylor with 17 points and Arnas Sakenis, who had eight points and nine rebounds.

No. 25 Rutgers 75, Wagner 52: Freshman standout Dylan Harper scored 20 points in his highly anticipated debut to lead the host Scarlet Knights to a win over the Royals.

Harper, a combo guard, is considered one of the top freshmen in the country and together with fellow first-year forward Ace Bailey, a major reason why the Scarlet Knights entered the season at No. 25. He is the younger brother of Ron Harper Jr., who also starred at Rutgers, and whose father, Ron Harper Sr., was a 15-year NBA veteran.

Rutgers was without Bailey, who was sidelined with an undisclosed injury he suffered Monday in practice. His status is day-to-day.

Keyontae Lewis led Wagner with 12 points.

Ovechkin scores winner as Capitals down Predators

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Alex Ovechkin scored the go-ahead goal midway through the third period to reach 861 in his career, and the Washington Capitals beat the struggling Nashville Predators 3-2 on Wednesday night.

Ovechkin beat Juuse Saros with 9:35 left in regulation for his eighth goal of the season, tying Connor McMichael for the team lead. Ovechkin is now just 34 goals from breaking Wayne Gretzky's NHL career goals record and is on pace to do it before this season is over.

McMichael and Aliaksei Protas also scored for the Capitals, who have won nine of their first 12 games. Logan Thompson made 33 saves to improve to 6-0-0 in his first

six starts with Washington.

The Predators' woes continued despite 33 saves from Saros and goals by Juuso Parssinen and Steven Stamkos. Nashville has opened 4-8-1 after signing Stamkos, 2023 playoff MVP Jonathan Marchessault and defenseman Brady Skjei in a \$100 million-plus free-agency spending spree.

Red Wings 4, Blackhawks 1: Dylan Larkin and Alex DeBrincat each had a goal and an assist, and visiting Detroit beat Chicago.

Joe Veleno and Andrew Copp also scored for Detroit, and Cam Talbot stopped 28 shots. The Red Wings have won two straight after a three-game skid.

Nick Foligno scored for Chicago, which snapped a two-game winning streak. Petr Mrazek finished with 21 saves.

DeBrincat beat Mrazek from the doorstep with 1.5 seconds left in the first period, and Larkin snapped a 1-1 tie by lifting a hard wrist shot past him with 7:33 left in the second.

Veleno and Copp scored in the third.

Golden Knights 4, Oilers 2: Noah Hanifin scored twice and visiting Vegas rallied to beat Edmonton, spoiling Connor McDavid's return to the lineup.

Jack Eichel had a goal and two assists and Mark Stone also scored for the Golden Knights (9-3-1), who got their first road win of the season and sixth of their last seven overall. Adin Hill stopped 27 shots.

Brett Kulak and Zach Hyman scored for the Oilers, who have lost two straight. Stuart Skinner had 31 saves.