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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

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Russia offers to mediate Syria resolution

Associated Press

CEYLANPINAR, Turkey — Russia offered Wednesday to mediate a resolution in northern Syria, further asserting Moscow's role as a regional force, ahead of a mission by U.S. Vice President Mike Pence to press Turkey for a cease-fire in its attack on Syrian Kurdish fighters.

Ahead of talks with Pence, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan defied U.S. economic sanctions, saying the only way its military offensive would end was if Syrian Kurdish fighters leave a designated border area.

Erdogan also said he had “no problem” accepting an invitation from Russian President Vladimir Putin to visit Russia soon to discuss Syria. But he threw into doubt a planned Nov. 13 meeting with U.S. President Donald Trump, citing anger over the sanctions that Washington imposed Monday on the NATO ally.

Russia has moved quickly to entrench its leadership role and fill the void after Trump ordered the pullout of American forces in northeastern Syria. Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said in remarks carried by Russian news agencies

that Moscow is committed to mediating between Syria and Turkey.

The American move effectively abandoned the Kurdish fighters allied with the U.S. and cleared the way for Turkey's invasion aimed at crushing them. After heavy criticism at home, Trump sought new leverage with Turkey by imposing the sanctions.

America's abrupt withdrawal of its troops pushed the Kurds to strike a deal with the Russia-backed government of Syrian President Bashar Assad, allowing his forces to return to regions of northern Syria they abandoned at the height of the 8-year-old civil war. It has also allowed Moscow to take a more prominent role as an interlocutor among Assad, the former U.S.-allied Kurds and Turkey.

“Syria's friendly with the Kurds. The Kurds are very well-protected. Plus, they know how to fight. And, by the way, they're no angels,” Trump told reporters at the White House while meeting with Italian President Sergio Mattarella.

In an address to his ruling party legislators, Erdogan said Turkey would not be coerced into halting its offensive or accepting offers for mediation with the Kurdish

fighters, which Turkey considers to be terrorists. He vowed to press ahead with the incursion until Turkish troops reach 18-20 miles inside Syria to form a “safe zone” along the border area.

“Our proposal is for the terrorists to lay down their arms, leave their equipment, destroy the traps they have created and leave the safe zone we designated, as of tonight,” Erdogan said. “If this is done, our Operation Peace Spring will end by itself.”

Erdogan's office confirmed he would meet Thursday with Pence and Secretary of State Mike Pompeo.

But anger over the sanctions hung over the upcoming talks. Trump has taken a tough tone, warning that the U.S. has “a lot in store” if Turkey doesn't comply with cease-fire demands. Pence said the U.S. is “simply not going to tolerate Turkey's invasion of Syria any longer.”

Erdogan said he was not concerned by the sanctions. He told reporters that chances for his November trip to Washington are “something to be assessed” after the talks with the American delegation, he said, adding that the sanctions and criticisms in the U.S. constituted “great disrespect toward the Turkish Republic.”

Trump says US has no stake in Turkey's fight

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump declared Wednesday that Turkey's attacks in Syria against Kurdish fighters who fought alongside American soldiers are not a U.S. concern.

“It's not our border,” he said. “We shouldn't be losing lives over it.”

Dismissing outrage among even some of his staunchest supporters, Trump said the U.S. has no stake in protecting the Kurds, and he brushed off suggestions that the U.S. military exit has created a new opening for Russia in Syria.

“Syria probably will have a partner of Russia,” Trump told reporters in the Oval Office. “Whoever they may have, I wish 'em all a lot of luck.”

The president appeared to make light of the desperate situation the Kurdish fighters face with the loss of U.S. military sup-

port. The Kurds in recent days struck a deal with the Syrian government and Russia to help them against the Turks.

“They've got a lot of sand over there,” Trump said. “So there's a lot of sand that they can play with.”

“Our soldiers are not in harm's way. As they shouldn't be,” he said. “And the Kurds are much safer right now. But the Kurds know how to fight and, as I said, they're not angels.”

Trump's characterization of the state of play in Syria encountered criticism from Republicans on Capitol Hill on Wednesday in the latest display of how his decision to pull U.S. troops from the area has drawn bipartisan condemnation.

Sen. Marco Rubio, R-Fla., told reporters he didn't know what could be done to undo the harm that has resulted from the withdrawal.

“There are some mistakes that are not

easy to reverse. And there are some that are irreversible,” said Rubio, who was a Trump rival for the GOP presidential nomination in 2016.

Sen. Mitt Romney, of Utah, the GOP's 2012 presidential nominee, said Turkey is “going into Syria and wiping out our friends” and “that's shame on us for having taken the decision.”

Trump, in his Oval Office remarks, said U.S. troops are “largely out” of the area.

However, a U.S. official familiar with planning for the withdrawal of the approximately 1,000 troops in northeastern Syria said that while the soldiers are consolidating onto two main bases, they have not yet begun flying out of Syria in significant numbers. Military equipment is being gathered and flown out, the official said, speaking on condition of anonymity due to the sensitivity of the withdrawal, which poses big security risks.

Army chief touts plan for longer tours

By JOHN VANDIVER
Stars and Stripes

Army Chief of Staff Gen. James McConville wants longer tour options for Army families, saying the traditional system of required moves to new duty stations every three years is an antiquated way of doing business.

"I don't see why people can't stay four, five, six, seven, eight, nine years," McConville said Tuesday during a town hall held at the Association of the United States Army's annual meeting in Washington.

For years, the military has generally struggled to manage permanent change-of-station

moving seasons, which peak during the summertime when school is out. McConville said the Army is reviewing how it handles moves and suggested that longer tours could be part of the solution.

"Part of the future that we see in the talent management system is we do look at preferences ... where you want to go and what you want to do," McConville said. "If we can accommodate that (longer tours), why shouldn't we?"

The Army's current approach — where most soldiers move every three years — was the product of an "industrial age" personnel management system, he said.

The idea of spreading moves around rather than concentrating them in the summer has been looked at and rejected, McConville said.

The proposed change to the length of tours was welcomed by some servicemembers with families, including Sgt. Franklin Santana, a truck driver with the Army's 2nd Cavalry Regiment in Vilseck, Germany.

"I think staying in one place for more than three years would benefit my family," said Santana, who recently became a father.

Others said the appeal of a longer tour length would depend on the situation.

McConville's comments

were made as the Army moves forward with a plan to build a new talent management system that will overhaul how jobs are assigned.

The goal is to better match a soldier's skills with the service's requirements, but the system will also log when a soldier wants to remain at a location for an extended period.

The Army has already begun to experiment with slightly longer deployments for single soldiers. In June, single-soldier tours in Europe and Japan increased from two to three years in a move designed to save money and reduce unit turnover.

Space Command sees erosion of US advantage

By JOHN VANDIVER
Stars and Stripes

STUTTGART, Germany — U.S. Space Command will dispatch teams of experts to combatant commands worldwide with the aim of adding expertise in a domain where other nations are catching up to America's capabilities, the general in charge of the Pentagon's space mission said.

"We are clearly the best in the world in space, but the advantage is eroding. Potential adversaries are moving fast," Air Force Gen. John Raymond said during a stop Tuesday in Stuttgart, where he met with leaders at U.S. European and Africa commands.

Raymond, who also met this week with leaders at NATO headquarters in Brussels, said the plan is to stand up "integrated planning elements" that will be based with other combatant commands.

Their task will be to incorporate space concerns into how the military trains and operates, Raymond said. Those concerns include the ability of adversar-

ies to jam GPS communication satellites, directed energy threats and ground-based missiles that can destroy satellites, Raymond said.

In late August, Space Command was officially launched to deal with challenges presented by Russia and China, whose military advances in recent years could pose threats to satellites that are crucial to all major U.S. military missions.

In recent years, the commercial space launch industry has also expanded. There are now about 1,500 satellites in orbit, and that number is expected to rapidly increase, Raymond said.

Another challenge is the amount of debris threatening satellites.

Once every three days, the military provides early warning when a satellite is in danger of colliding with a piece of debris. There are more than 20,000 different pieces of debris, much of it remnants of old satellites, that the military tracks, Raymond said.

Airman tapped as adviser to chairman of Joint Chiefs

By BRIAN FERGUSON
Stars and Stripes

Air Force Chief Master Sgt. Ramon Colon-Lopez will be the next senior enlisted adviser to the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, defense officials said Wednesday.

"Our brothers and sisters in service are in the best hands possible with our newest Senior Enlisted Advisor to the Chairman," Chief Master Sgt. of the Air Force Kaleth O. Wright said in a Facebook post. "I'm proud to say that Chief CZ, our SEAC #4, is a friend and an exceptional leader."

Colon-Lopez, currently the senior enlisted leader for U.S. Africa Command, joined the Air Force in 1990 and served as an air traffic controller before becoming a pararescue man. He will replace Army Command Sgt. Maj. John W. Troxell, who has served as the SEAC since December 2015.

Troxell gained popularity among soldiers and on social media during his term for his straightforward messages. In January 2018 on Twitter, he

told Islamic State that they needed to surrender or die, even if it meant beating them to death with shovels.

He was temporarily removed last year after an investigation by the Army Inspector General found that he improperly used military personnel to carry out tasks and improperly endorsed commercial fitness and nutrition products on military social media accounts.

Troxell was reinstated in March after Marine Gen. Joseph Dunford, then chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said he had weighed the gravity of the ethics violations against Troxell's 37 years of military service, which included five combat tours.

Colon-Lopez will be the first airman to serve in the position.

The SEAC position, created in 2005, is the senior noncommissioned officer in the U.S. armed forces. The SEAC is appointed by the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff to serve as an adviser to the Joint Chiefs and the secretary of defense.

Debate rivals assail front-runner Warren

Associated Press

Elizabeth Warren repeatedly came under attack during the Democratic presidential debate as rivals accused the Massachusetts senator of ducking questions about the cost of Medicare for All and her signature wealth tax plan in an attempt to derail her rising campaign.

The pile-on Tuesday reinforced her new status as a front-runner in the contest to take on President Donald Trump next year. With first state primaries rapidly approaching, her many challengers have dwindling opportunities to emerge as powerful alternatives to the progressive agenda she's championing.

The night's confrontations were mostly fought on familiar terrain for the Democrats, who have spent months sparring over the future of health care with former Vice President Joe Biden and other moderates pressing for a measured approach while Warren and Vermont Sen. Bernie Sanders call for a dramatic, government-

funded overhaul of the insurance market. Still, unlike Sanders, Warren refused to say whether she would raise taxes on the middle class to pay for a Medicare for All universal health insurance plan — a stance that's increasingly difficult to maintain given her more prominent status.

Her rivals seized on the opportunity to pounce.

"I appreciate Elizabeth's work but, again, the difference between a plan and a pipe dream is something you can actually get done," said Minnesota Sen. Amy Klobuchar.

Pete Buttigieg, the mayor of South Bend, Indiana, added: "We heard it tonight. A 'yes' or 'no' question that didn't get a 'yes' or 'no' answer."

Warren insisted that she has "made clear what my principles are here," arguing that lower premiums would mean that overall costs would go down for most Americans.

California Sen. Kamala Harris tried to get in on the action on another subject, scolding Warren for not echoing her calls

for Twitter to suspend Trump's account. Warren responded: "I don't just want to push Trump off of Twitter. I want to push him out of the White House."

Featuring a dozen candidates, the debate, sponsored by CNN and The New York Times and held in Ohio, was the largest in modern history. It was the first time the White House hopefuls gathered in a little more than a month.

In that time, the political landscape has changed with Trump facing an impeachment inquiry in the House centered on his quest to get Ukraine to dig up unflattering details about Biden, another front-runner among the Democrats hoping to unseat the Republican president.

The debate also served as Sanders' return to the campaign trail following a heart attack earlier this month. The Vermont senator failed to show all the fire of previous debates but made his points with force. He was applauded when he thanked supporters and rivals for their good wishes and declared, "I'm feeling great."

Study: 'Medicare for All' not only path to goal

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Health care memo to Democrats: There's more than one way to get to coverage for all.

A study out Wednesday finds that an approach similar to the plan from former Vice President Joe Biden can deliver about the same level of coverage as the government-run "Medicare for All" plan from presidential rival Bernie Sanders.

The study from the Commonwealth Fund and the Urban Institute think tanks concludes that the U.S. can achieve a goal that has eluded Democrats since Harry Truman by building on former President Barack Obama's health care law.

Health care has sparked sharp exchanges in the Democratic presidential debates, and Tuesday night was no exception. Massachusetts Sen. Elizabeth Warren was challenged for being unwilling to say whether her support for Medicare for All would translate to higher taxes for the middle class. Warren said "costs" would be lower, but Sen. Amy Klobuchar, of Minnesota, suggested that was a dodge.

"I'm sorry, Elizabeth," said Klobuchar. "I think we owe it to the American people to tell them where we're going to send the invoice." She urged Democrats not to "trash Obamacare" but build on it.

The study suggests such heated discussions may have more to do with differences

over the scope and reach of government than with the ultimate objective of providing universal coverage.

"A goal that they all share — universal coverage — can be reached in different ways," said Sara Collins, the Commonwealth Fund's vice president for coverage and access.

The researchers modeled a range of health care overhaul scenarios from tweaks to Obama's law to a full government-run single-payer plan like Sanders is proposing. Collins said the options studied are not carbon copies of the candidates' proposals, partly because many details are still in flux. However, they are generally similar.

Campaign: Warren's call to exit Mideast means combat troops

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Sen. Elizabeth Warren's call Tuesday night for the United States to "get out" of the Middle East, if implemented, would end a generations-long U.S. military presence in the volatile region. Her campaign later softened that statement, saying she was talking about combat troops only.

"I think that we ought to get out of the Middle East," Warren said in a Democratic

presidential debate during a discussion of President Donald Trump's decision to pull troops out of Syria.

"I don't think we should have troops in the Middle East," she added.

Warren has advocated shrinking the U.S. presence overseas and has said she wants to withdraw troops from Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria. But a call to pull back from all of the Middle East would appear to go a step further.

In a statement after the debate, Warren spokeswoman Alexis Krieg said the candidate "was referencing combat troops, not those stationed in the Middle East in non-combat roles."

"She believes we need to end the endless wars. That means working to responsibly remove U.S. troops from combat in the Middle East, and using diplomacy to work with allies and partners to end conflicts and suffering in the region," Krieg said.

Officials shared unease about Ukraine

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The impeachment inquiry is revealing vivid new details about the high-level unease over President Donald Trump's actions toward Ukraine and those of his personal lawyer Rudy Giuliani as the swift-moving probe by House Democrats shows no signs of easing.

The testimony from the witnesses, mainly officials from the State Department and other foreign policy posts, is largely corroborating the account of the government whistleblower whose complaint first sparked the impeachment inquiry, according to lawmakers attending the closed-door interviews.

One witness, former White House aide Fiona Hill, testified that national security adviser John Bolton was so alarmed by Giuliani's back-channel ac-

tivities in Ukraine that he described him as a "hand grenade who is going to blow everybody up."

Another, career State Department official George Kent, testified Tuesday he was told by administration officials to "lay low" on Ukraine as "three amigos" tied to the White House took over U.S. foreign policy toward the Eastern European ally.

Speaker Nancy Pelosi, despite intensifying calls from Trump and Republicans to hold a formal vote to authorize the impeachment inquiry, showed no indication she would do so. She said Congress will continue its investigation as part of the Constitution's system of checks and balances of the executive.

"This is not a game for us. This is deadly serious. We're on a path that is taking us, a path

to the truth," Pelosi told reporters after a closed-door session with House Democrats.

With Ukraine situated between the United States' Western allies and Russia, Pelosi noted the inquiry raises fresh questions about Trump's relationship with Russian President Vladimir Putin.

Trump calls the impeachment inquiry an "illegitimate process" and is blocking officials from cooperating.

Democratic leaders had been gauging support for a vote to authorize the impeachment inquiry after Trump and Republicans pushed them for a roll call. Holding a vote would test politically vulnerable Democrats in areas where the Republican president is popular.

But several Democratic freshmen who are military veterans or had careers in na-

tional security before joining Congress spoke up during the meeting Tuesday, warning Pelosi and her leadership team a vote was unnecessary and would be playing into Republicans' hands, according to a person granted anonymity to discuss the private session.

The inquiry is moving quickly as a steady stream of officials appears behind closed doors this week, some providing new revelations about the events surrounding the July 25 phone call between Trump and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy.

It is on that call that Trump urged Zelenskyy to investigate a firm tied to political rival Joe Biden's family and Ukraine's own involvement in the 2016 presidential election.

GM, workers union reach tentative contract deal

Associated Press

DETROIT — Bargainers for General Motors and the United Auto Workers reached a tentative contract deal on Wednesday that could end a monthlong strike that brought the company's U.S. factories to a standstill.

The deal was hammered out after months of bargaining but won't bring an immediate end to the strike by 49,000 hourly workers. They will likely stay on the picket lines for at least two more days as two union committees vote on the deal, after which the members will have to approve.

Terms of the tentative four-year contract were not released, but it's likely to include some pay raises, lump sum payments to workers and requirements that GM build new vehicles in U.S. factories. Early on, GM offered new products in Detroit and Lordstown, Ohio, two of the four U.S. cities where it planned to close factories.

The company offered to build a new electric pickup truck to

keep the Detroit-Hamtramck plant open and to build an electric vehicle battery factory in or near Lordstown, where GM is closing an assembly plant. The battery factory would employ far fewer workers and pay less money than the plant.

GM and the union have been negotiating at a time of troubling uncertainty for the U.S. auto industry. Driven up by the longest economic expansion in American history, auto sales appear to have peaked and are now heading in the other direction. GM and other carmakers are also struggling to make the transition to electric and autonomous vehicles.

Meanwhile, President Donald Trump's trade war with China and his tariffs on imported steel and aluminum have raised costs for auto companies. A revamped North American free trade deal is stalled in Congress, raising doubts about the future of America's trade in autos and auto parts with Canada and Mexico, which last year came to \$257 billion.

Book: Trump once mulled closing parts of VA system

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Eager to make changes to the Department of Veterans Affairs, President Donald Trump toyed early on with issuing an executive order to close parts of the VA health system without consulting Congress, according to an upcoming book by his former VA secretary.

In the book, obtained by The Associated Press, David Shulkin describes a March 6, 2017, conversation in the Oval Office at which Trump explored ways his administration could act quickly to shutter government-run VA medical centers that he viewed as poorly performing. Trump was fresh off his 2016 campaign in which privatizing VA had become a political hot button after he pledged to steer more veterans to private-sector doctors outside the VA. He had said the VA was "the most corrupt" and "probably the most incompetently run" Cabinet department.

Democrats and veterans'

groups oppose "privatization" and say VA facilities are best suited to treat battlefield injuries such as post-traumatic stress disorder.

At the meeting, Trump asked whether "we should begin to close the VAs," according to the book. Legislation prohibited that, so Shulkin responded that the VA was working with Congress to set up a systemwide review to address underperforming facilities, whether by fixing or closing.

"But this takes time," Shulkin said.

Trump exclaimed, "So let's just do an executive order!"

"This is a legislative issue," Shulkin said.

Trump then offered, "Can't we just declare a national emergency?"

According to the book, Trump's son-in-law and White House adviser, Jared Kushner, then chimed in, "Yes. We're still in a war, so we could."

Shulkin told the AP that ultimately he dissuaded Trump from pursuing that route.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Firefighters let upset girl paint their nails

UT CLEARFIELD — Two Utah firefighters received praise after they found a creative way to keep a young girl calm at the scene of a car accident.

North Davis Fire District Fire Chief Mark Becraft said the firefighters let the young girl paint their fingernails after she and her mother were in a car accident in the northern Utah city of Clearfield.

Chief Allen Hadley and Captain Kevin Lloyd checked on the crying girl while medics evaluated her mother. They asked her about the nail polish she was holding and offered to have their nails painted.

Becraft said the girl was instantly soothed. Hadley and Lloyd left the scene with purple fingernails.

Man's hand freed from chimney flue

CT STAMFORD — Firefighters and emergency medical responders in Connecticut rescued a man whose hand was crushed after it got caught in a chimney flue.

Stamford fire officials told the Advocate the man was cleaning up a construction area when a 5-foot piece of unsupported chimney fell and pinned his arm.

Fire crews dismantled the chimney to free the man's arm.

National park allows e-bikes on road, trails

AK FAIRBANKS — A rule change will allow electronically assisted bikes anywhere that traditional bicycles are permitted in Denali National Park and Reserve.

The Fairbanks Daily News-

Miner reported that the National Park Service issued the e-bike directive at the end of August.

The park service said the policy aimed at expanding recreational opportunities and accessibility allows the motorized vehicles on the entire length of the Denali Park Road.

An official said that beyond the 92 miles of the road, e-bikes can travel on a single trail of Denali's front country and into the backcountry via a limited number of access points.

Brazen thief steals \$20,000 Dali artwork

CA SAN FRANCISCO — Authorities said a brazen thief stole a Salvador Dali etching valued at \$20,000 from a San Francisco gallery, then walked off down the street with the work in his hand.

KGO-TV said the etching titled "Burning Giraffe" vanished from an easel at Dennis Rae Fine Art off Union Square.

Gallery Director Angela Kellert said the 1960s etching was normally secured with a lock and cable but they're missing.

It's unclear whether the thief cut them off earlier or during the 30 seconds he was in the store before stealing the piece.

Surveillance cameras caught the man strolling down Geary Street with the etching.

Orville Wright bust stolen from memorial

NC KILL DEVIL HILLS — The National Park Service said a bust of Orville Wright that was stolen from the Wright Brothers National Memorial on the North Carolina coast has been found.

A news release from the park service Tuesday says a visitor to the beach at Kill Devil Hills called authorities in Dare

County to say the bust was tucked into some dunes.

The park service said the monument was damaged Saturday evening or Sunday morning.

The granite base on which the bust was mounted had been toppled and damaged.

Telegram from 1913: Big Louie was very big

MI HANCOCK — Big Louie was, indeed, a big man.

The archive at Finlandia University in Michigan's Upper Peninsula was given a document that appears to settle the height of a legendary man, Louis Moilanen.

Moilanen, known as "Big Louie," died in 1913. The grandson of the founder of Crawford Funeral Home discovered a telegram that said Moilanen's casket was 8 feet 3 inches long.

Don Crawford told The Mining Gazette it was the measurement of the inside of the casket. He said it means that Moilanen was 8 feet 3 inches tall. Moilanen's height led to a job with a circus.

School's solution for food waste: pig farms

ME PORTLAND — A new law in Maine that says schools can give food waste away to pig farmers took effect.

The practice of feeding human food waste to pigs goes back millennia, but some school districts in Maine have expressed confusion about the rules. The Maine Legislature passed a clarifying bill, and it took effect Sept. 19.

Supporters of the new rules said it will help school districts cut down on food waste.

They state any individual or institution, including a school,

can donate garbage to a swine producer for use as feed even if they're unaware of the producer's licensure status.

Firefighter hurt by exploding ammunition

OK TALIHINA — Authorities in southeastern Oklahoma said a firefighter was injured during a weekend house fire when ammunition inside the burning residence exploded and struck him in the face.

Latimer County Emergency Management officials said the firefighter was injured while battling a blaze in the Buffalo Valley community, located about 148 miles southeast of Oklahoma City.

Officials said flames caused the ammunition to overheat and ignite, wounding a firefighter in the face and head.

The firefighter was transported to a hospital in Tulsa. His condition was not immediately available.

190-pound dog rescued from canyon

UT MILLCREAK CANYON — First responders rescued an injured 190-pound dog from Grandeur Peak in Millcreek Canyon.

The Salt Lake County Sheriff's Search and Rescue team was alerted that a 3-year-old male mastiff was hurt while walking on the trail with his owner.

The owner was unable to carry the large canine to safety.

Rescue team members put the dog named Floyd on a litter and carried him down the mountain.

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Nationals sweep way to World Series

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — As the Washington Nationals moved a party 86 years in the making from their ballpark's infield to a booze-filled clubhouse, manager Dave Martinez paused near the dugout and thrust the silver NL Championship Series trophy overhead, to the delight of loud, delirious fans still in the stands.

Who would have thought this was possible five months ago, when the team was flailing, trade talk was swirling around Washington and folks figured Martinez's job was in jeopardy?

From 19-31 during a mediocre May to the Fall Classic in an outstanding October — and the city's first World Series appearance since 1933.

Extending their stunning turnaround, the wild-card Nationals got RBIs from middle-of-the-order stars Anthony Rendon and Juan Soto in a seven-run first inning Tuesday night, and Patrick Corbin's 12-strikeout performance plus a trio of relievers helped hold on to beat the St. Louis Cardinals 7-4 in Game 4 to complete a sweep in the NLCS.

"Often, bumpy roads lead to beautiful places," said Martinez, who underwent a heart procedure in September, "and this is a beautiful place."

Right from the first inning Tuesday, most in a sellout crowd of 43,976 rose from their seats to applaud or yell or twirl their red towels, to chant "Let's go, Nats!" and "M-V-P!" and various players' names, enjoying every moment of that game-deciding outburst.

And then, a couple of hours and several innings later, as Tanner Rainey, Sean Doolittle and Daniel Hudson were protecting a shrinking lead, those same spectators stood and shouted and reveled some more.

"I just kept counting down: We're 12 outs from the World Series. We're nine outs from the World Series," shortstop Trea Turner said. "Six. Three."

Now the Nationals get plenty of time to rest and set up their so-far terrific rotation before beginning the last series of the season against the Houston Astros or New York Yankees in a week. Houston leads the best-of-seven AL Championship Series 2-1 after winning Game 3 at New York 4-1 on Tuesday.

The Nationals became the fourth team to reach the World Series after being 12 games under .500 (2005 Astros, 1973 New York Mets, 1914 Boston Braves).

The last time the World Series came to the nation's capital, more than eight decades ago, the Washington Senators lost to the New York Giants in five games. You

have to go even further back, to 1924, for the city's lone baseball championship, when the Senators defeated the Giants.

The Senators eventually left, and the town didn't have a major league team for more than three decades until the Montreal Expos — who were founded in 1969 and never made it to the World Series — moved to Washington in 2005.

The Nationals had never advanced in the postseason since arriving, going 0-4 in the NLDS over the past seven years, including three Game 5 losses at home.

First baseman Ryan Zimmerman, the Nationals' first draft pick in Washington, was there for all of that heartache.

"Sometimes," he said, "you got to wait for good things."

This month alone, the Nationals also beat the Milwaukee Brewers in the NL wild-card game after trailing 3-1 heading to the eighth, and the Los Angeles Dodgers, who had the league's best record, in Game 5 of the NL Division Series after trailing 3-1 heading to the eighth again.

Then came this lopsided dismissal of the NL Central champion Cardinals, who were outscored 20-6 in the series.

"Of course, we could've played better," said St. Louis first baseman Paul Goldschmidt, who was 1 for 16 with nine strikeouts in the NLCS, "but we didn't."

Cole stymies Yanks for 19th straight, puts Astros up 2-1

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Gerrit Cole is making his pitch to own this October.

A gritty Cole held the New York Yankees scoreless without his sharpest stuff, Jose Altuve sparked Houston at the plate and the Astros locked down a 4-1 victory Tuesday to take a 2-1 lead in the AL Championship Series.

Altuve and Josh Reddick homered early off Luis Severino, who labored into the fifth while keeping the Yankees close. But they never broke through against Cole, who grinded through seven innings to win his 19th straight decision despite walking five batters for the second time in his career.

"Just boiled down to making some good pitches under pressure," he said.

Cole escaped a bases-loaded jam in the first and stranded

nine runners through five, improving to 3-0 with a 0.40 ERA in three playoff outings this year. Poised to become a prized free agent who could command more than \$200 million, he's putting together a dominant run that's beginning to rival some of baseball's greatest postseason pitching performances.

The 29-year-old right-hander, unbeaten in 25 starts since late May, allowed four hits and struck out seven. That ended a streak of 11 consecutive games with double-digit strikeouts — the previous big league record was eight. Cole led the majors with 326 Ks this season.

"I think he's the best pitcher in baseball right now," Astros manager AJ Hinch said. "Gerrit is locked in. And to see him do it on the big stage in a playoff game with the magnitude of this game, it was pretty awesome."

Game 4 in the best-of-seven playoff is scheduled for Thursday night after Wednesday's game was canceled because of a rainy forecast.

Gleyber Torres homered in the eighth off Houston reliever Joe Smith, one batter after replay umpires reversed a call and ruled Edwin Encarnacion out at first base. That led to a little trash and a ball being thrown onto the field before public address announcer Paul Olden reminded fans not to toss any objects out of the stands.

Roberto Osuna got three quick outs in the ninth for a save.

"Two more to go," Osuna said. "I'm excited."

The bushy-haired Cole grew up in California rooting for the Yankees and was drafted by them 28th overall in 2008. He didn't sign, choosing instead to attend UCLA before the Pitts-

burgh Pirates selected him with the top pick in 2011.

Making his second career start at Yankee Stadium, he got away with several pitches in key situations. Other times, Cole flashed the filthy breaking balls and 98-100 mph heat that have made him so unhittable in October — and unbeatable since May. His winning streak is the longest by a pitcher in one year since Rube Marquard began 19-0 for the 1912 New York Giants.

"He's exceptional. And he gets better and better and better," Hinch said. "Once he found his curveball, it was pretty lights out. I think he finished his outing as strong as ever."

After rolling to a 7-0 victory in the series opener, the Yankees — the highest-scoring team in the majors this season — have totaled three runs on two homers in the last 20 innings.

Chiefs' run-pass option has gone awry

Associated Press

KANSAS CITY, Mo. — Patrick Mahomes takes the snap from Chiefs center Austin Reiter, pulls away from the line of scrimmage and then, in a little more than a split-second, must identify the best way to make the chosen play work.

Are the second-level defenders breaking toward the line of scrimmage, forcing him to keep the ball and look downfield? Or are they dropping into coverage, in which case the MVP quarterback will jam the ball in the gut of running back LeSean McCoy or Damien Williams and keep things on the ground.

The Chiefs' use of that very run-pass option is a big reason why their offense has been so successful the past season-plus. It has largely kept defenses uncertain where the ball is going, opening up the field for the Kansas City fleet of fast, athletic wide receivers.

Only the past two weeks, the RPO has been more like R-P-Oh no!

After rolling through their first four games, and with

Mahomes on another incredible statistical pace, one of the Chiefs' signature offensive plays has lost its effectiveness. The Colts held the Chiefs in check in a 19-13 victory two weeks ago, and the Texans stopped them in the second half of a 31-24 win Sunday.

"I mean, obviously, we have to be better," Chiefs offensive coordinator Eric Bieniemy said. "There are a number of things that go into it, but everyone has to be on the same page."

Indeed, it's not just one issue that has conspired against their RPO game. Injuries have forced the Chiefs to use backups on the entire left side of the offensive line, Mahomes has been hobbled just about the entire season by a sore ankle, and injuries at wide receiver and running back have hardly helped.

Then there is what the defenses are doing.

The Colts may have published the blueprint for stopping the Chiefs by using an aggressive form of man-to-man defense, jamming receivers at the line of scrimmage and harassing them downfield. Teams will

often run the ball when they see a zone defense during an RPO play, but they tend to pass when teams are man-to-man, because there are so many bodies at the line of scrimmage that it's a challenge to decipher who is in run support.

With the Colts running man-to-man defenses on three out of every four plays, the Chiefs largely abandoned the run entirely, and Mahomes and the passing game was unable to pick up the slack.

Kansas City ran the ball 23 times with its running backs Week 1 against Jacksonville. It was 21 against Oakland, 20 against Baltimore and 19 against Detroit. But that total dropped to nine against the Colts and was still nine last week against the Texans, even though McCoy was having a productive afternoon.

He carried eight times for 44 yards, most of that coming in the first half.

"I guess I've become a sell-out, haven't I? I might be the biggest offender," said Bieniemy, who played running back in college and the NFL. "Yeah, we need to run the ball, but we

have our RPOs and we give our quarterback the opportunity to make the best read for us. You don't want to second-guess what he's doing. But at the end of the day, when we're calling runs we have to make sure we're executing."

It does raise the question, though: Are the Chiefs still confident in Mahomes making the best read?

"Oh yeah, very confident. We put all our faith in Pat," Bieniemy said.

After every game, the Chiefs break down the film and see whether Mahomes made the right decision to run or pass. And the quarterback said Monday that with few exceptions, he made the right reads against Houston.

"You have to trust in what we're doing," Mahomes said. "I feel like there's plays here and there every single game that changed the outcome. That's how hard it is in the NFL. Any team can win any week, so it's the little plays that make a difference."

Or the little decisions, such as choosing whether to run or pass.

Rams trade 3 picks to Jags to land Ramsey

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — The Los Angeles Rams acquired Jalen Ramsey from the Jaguars on Tuesday night, ending the star cornerback's tumultuous tenure in Jacksonville with a trade to the defending NFC champions.

Jacksonville got first-round picks from the Rams in 2020 and 2021, along with a fourth-round pick in 2021.

Ramsey is one of the NFL's elite defensive backs, earning two Pro Bowl selections and one first-team All-Pro nod in three seasons with Jaguars. The fifth overall pick in the 2016 draft has nine career interceptions along with innumerable conflicts with his coaches, the front office and the Jags' opponents.

One month after he requested a trade, Ramsey is off to the West Coast to join Aaron Donald on the Rams' defense.

Ramsey has missed the Jaguars' last three games with an apparent back injury, but he returned to practice last week. He

will probably need to play immediately with the Rams (3-3), who are without both of their usual starting cornerbacks as they head to Atlanta this weekend.

The defending NFC champions traded cornerback Marcus Peters to Baltimore earlier in the day, getting depth linebacker Kenny Young for a two-time Pro Bowl selection who will be a free agent next year. Los Angeles also put cornerback Aqib Talib on injured reserve Monday after he missed last weekend's loss to San Francisco with a rib injury.

Ramsey had never missed a start in his professional career before his current injury, but that was about the only certainty around the Tennessee native who once committed to USC, only to end up at Florida State.

Ramsey's relationship with the Jaguars frayed in recent months. He had a public spat on the sideline with coach Doug Marrone in Week 2 at Houston, and he clashed with personnel chief Tom Coughlin after

the game.

The Jags made their move five days after owner Shad Khan said he had a "heart-to-heart" with Ramsey and expected him to play against New Orleans last weekend. Ramsey didn't, prompting Khan's decision to move on from the disgruntled defender.

Ramsey is under contract through the 2020 season after the Jaguars exercised his fifth-year, \$13.7 million option in April — at the same time Ramsey apparently was upsetting Coughlin by skipping the Jags' voluntary offseason workouts.

Coach Sean McVay's Rams have had few problems molding together plenty of strong personalities in recent years.

Ramsey will join two prominent ex-Jaguars in Los Angeles, all three of whom were top-5 draft picks by Jacksonville.

Pass rusher Dante Fowler re-signed with the Rams after he was traded from Jacksonville at last season's deadline, while quarterback Blake Bortles is Jared Goff's backup after five years with the Jags.

NHL roundup

Vasilevskiy's stops lift Lightning past Habs

Associated Press

MONTREAL — Andrei Vasilevskiy made 33 saves to help the Tampa Bay Lightning beat the Montreal Canadiens 3-1 on Tuesday night in the fifth game of a six-game road trip.

Braydon Coburn, Steven Stamkos and Tyler Johnson scored for the Lightning (3-2-1), who were coming off a 4-2 loss to the Ottawa Senators. Nikita Kucherov added two assists.

Vasilevskiy improved to 8-1-2 in his career against Montreal.

"He made some great saves," said defenceman Victor Hedman of the 25-year-old Vasilevskiy. "His reaction time, he's so quick in the net. Vasi is the best goalie in the world and he proved that again today."

Jeff Petry scored the lone goal for the Canadiens (2-2-2) while Carey Price stopped 19 of 22 shots in defeat.

Montreal came into the matchup with the league's fourth-best offense, scoring four goals per game, but could only get one past Vasilevskiy.

Maple Leafs 4, Wild 2: Mitch Marner had a goal and two assists and host Toronto overcame a slow start and beat Minnesota.

Andreas Johnsson had a goal and an assist, and Auston Matthews and John Tavares also scored for the Maple Leafs. Frederik Andersen made 27 saves.

Toronto defenseman Morgan Rielly added four assists in the second period, tying a franchise record for assists in a period of a regular-season game set by Rick Vaive on March 12, 1984.

Luke Kunin and Gerald Mayhew scored for the Wild. Devan Dubnyk stopped 30 shots for Minnesota.

Coyotes 4, Jets 2: Christian Dvorak scored a pair of goals and Arizona won at Winnipeg.

The Coyotes had lost 10 straight games in Winnipeg, since the Jets franchise moved from Atlanta in 2011.

Nick Schmaltz had a goal and two assists for Arizona and Conor Garland also scored. Oliver Ekman-Larsson finished with two assists. Darcy Kuemper made 38 saves for the Coyotes.

Mark Scheifele had a goal and an assist and extended his point streak to five games with his team-leading fourth goal of the season for Winnipeg.

Flames 3, Flyers 1: Michael Frolik scored in his 800th NHL game and host Calgary beat Philadelphia.

Frolik scored the 154th goal of his 13-season career, fifth as a member of the Flames.

Andrew Mangiapane also scored, and Elias Lindholm added an empty-net goal for Calgary, which snapped a two-game losing skid.

David Rittich made 21 saves and improved to 3-2 on the season.

Defenseman Matt Niskanen scored for the Flyers. Brian Elliott made 35 saves in his first start of the season.

Predators 5, Golden Knights 2: Pekka Rinne made 33 saves to remain unbeaten as Nashville won at Las Vegas.

Rinne is 4-0-0 this season and has been splendid in the net, stifling one of the NHL's

most potent offenses.

Kyle Turris, Colton Sissons, Calle Jarnkrok, Filip Forsberg and Nick Bonino scored for the Predators, who had nine players get points in the win. Seventeen of Nashville's 20 skaters to appear in a game registered a point.

Canucks 5, Red Wings 1: J.T. Miller had a pair of goals and Elias Pettersson and Alex Edler each had a goal and a two assists as host Vancouver used a potent power play to beat Detroit.

Troy Stecher also had a goal and Brock Boeser finished with three assists for the Canucks.

The Red Wings' lone goal came from Dylan Larkin. Jonathan Bernier stopped 27 of 32 shots for Detroit.

Thatcher Demko had 26 saves and picked up his first win of the season in his first start for Vancouver.

The Canucks have won three games in a row, matching last year's best win streak.

Hurricanes 2, Kings 0: Petr Mrazek made 31 saves in his 19th career shutout, and Carolina extended its torrid start to the season with a win at Los Angeles.

Martin Necas scored in the second period and Sebastian Aho tipped in an empty-net goal as the Canes rebounded from their first defeat and extended the best start to a season in franchise history, improving to 6-1-0 in the opener of a four-game road trip.

Jack Campbell stopped 21 shots for the Kings, who were shut out after averaging four goals per game in their first five games this season.

Canada beats US for first time in 34 years

Associated Press

TORONTO — The U.S. keeps coming up with underwhelming performances in its first year under Gregg Berhalter, whose tenure as American coach is starting to draw criticism.

Canada beat the United States for the first time in 34 years, getting second-half goals from Alphonso Davies and Lucas Cavallini in a 2-0 victory on Tuesday night in the CONCACAF Nations League.

A little over two years after the Americans failed to qualify for the 2018 World Cup by losing

at Trinidad and Tobago, they saw their 17-match unbeaten streak against their northern neighbor come to an end. They had not even allowed a goal to the Canadians in four previous matches dating to 2007.

"The first thing that stands out to me is desire, the desire of Canada," Berhalter said. "Give them credit, but having said that, the minimum we expect is to match that. We need to compete on every single play in games like that, and that's important. I don't think it was lack of effort, I don't think it was purposeful, but I wasn't

happy with the desire that we displayed."

The U.S. already had lost to Mexico in the CONCACAF Gold Cup final in July, the first competitive tournament after Berhalter was hired last December.

Canada went ahead in the 63rd minute after Scott Arfield dispossessed Michael Bradley on the edge of the center circle. After several passes, U.S. captain Tim Ream made a poor clearance. The ball was played back toward the American goal, and Arfield's low cross went across the goalmouth. Davies

got behind DeAndre Yedlin and Aaron Long, redirecting the ball in.

"What stands out to me is just the sloppiness with the ball," Berhalter said. "Too many mis-controlled touches, too many missed passes, too many easy things that we normally make that we weren't making tonight."

Jonathan Osorio lifted the ball behind the American defense in the first minute of stoppage time and Cavallini beat Zack Steffen to the near post.