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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

stripes.com

Pence says Turkey agrees to cease-fire

Associated Press

ANKARA, Turkey — Vice President Mike Pence announced Thursday that the U.S. and Turkey had agreed to a five-day cease-fire in northern Syria.

The cease-fire would allow for a Kurdish withdrawal from a security zone roughly 20 miles south of the Turkish border in what appeared to be a significant embrace of Turkey's position in the week-long conflict.

After more than four hours of negotiations with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, Pence said the purpose of his high-level mission was to end the bloodshed caused by Turkey's invasion of Syria, and remained silent on whether the agreement amounted to another abandonment of the U.S.' former Kurdish allies in the fight against Islamic State.

Turkish troops and Syrian fighters backed by Turkey launched their offensive against Kurdish forces in northern Syria a week ago, two days after President Donald Trump announced he was withdrawing the U.S. from the area.

Pence and Secretary of State Mike Pompeo lauded the deal as a significant achievement, and Trump tweeted that it was "a great day for civilization." But the agreement essentially gives the Turks what they had sought to achieve with their military operation in the first place. After the Kurdish forces are cleared from the safe zone, Turkey has committed to a permanent cease-fire but is under no obligation to withdraw its troops.

In addition, the deal gives Turkey relief from sanctions the administration had imposed and threatened to impose since the invasion began, meaning

there will be no penalty for the operation.

Kurdish forces were not party to the agreement, and it was not immediately clear whether they would comply.

Before the talks, the Kurds indicated they would object to any agreement along the lines of what was announced by Pence. But Pence maintained that the U.S. had obtained "repeated assurances from them that they'll be moving out."

Ankara has long argued the Kurdish fighters are nothing more than an extension of the Kurdistan Workers Party, or PKK, which has waged a guerrilla campaign inside Turkey since the 1980s and which Turkey, as well as the U.S. and European Union, designate as a terrorist organization.

Severe condemnation of Trump's failure to deter Erdogan's assault on the Kurds, and his subsequent embrace

of Turkish talking points about the former U.S. allies, sparked bipartisan outrage in the U.S. and calls for swift punishment for the NATO ally.

Republicans and Democrats in the House, bitterly divided over the Trump impeachment inquiry, banded together Wednesday for an overwhelming 354-60 denunciation of the U.S. troop withdrawal. Many lawmakers expressed worry that the withdrawal may lead to revival of ISIS as well as Russian presence and influence in the area, besides the slaughter of many Kurds.

Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., publicly broke with Trump to call the U.S. relationship with the Kurds "a great alliance."

"I'm sorry that we are where we are. I hope the vice president and the secretary of state can somehow repair the damage," McConnell said Wednesday.

UN: Afghan war casualties at highest level in decade

BY PHILLIP WALTER WELLMAN

Stars and Stripes

KABUL, Afghanistan — More Afghans were killed or injured in the past three months than in any comparable period in the past decade, the United Nations said in a report released Thursday, blaming the Taliban for most of the deaths.

The deaths and injuries in Afghanistan came during accelerated U.S.-Taliban peace talks, which collapsed in September after the Taliban claimed an attack that killed a U.S. soldier.

From July to September, 1,174 civilians were killed and more than 3,100 were injured, the report said. The tally for the quarter was the highest since the U.N. began tracking civilian deaths in Afghanistan 10 years ago. Over 40% of this year's civilian casualties were women and children, the report said.

"The impact of Afghanistan's conflict

on civilians is appalling; every verified number is a person, someone's relative — mother, father, daughter, son," said Fiona Frazer, UNAMA's human rights chief.

This quarter's rise in civilian casualties was blamed mainly on bomb attacks carried out by the Taliban, followed by ground engagements and aerial attacks, the report said.

During the first nine months of 2019, the Taliban and Islamic State were responsible for more than 60% of civilian deaths and injuries, while pro-government forces were blamed for just over a quarter of the casualties, the report said. Some casualties were not attributed to either side.

Attacks by extremist groups also caused more civilian deaths in the third quarter than operations by pro-government forces, the report said.

Airstrikes, mostly conducted by American forces, still caused nearly a quarter of all civilian deaths in Afghanistan in 2019,

the report said.

The latest civilian casualty figures were released just days after the 18th anniversary of the war.

In another report released last week, the U.N. said American airstrikes targeting drug production facilities in western Afghanistan in May left nearly 40 civilians dead or injured. The U.N. said the airstrikes were unlawful because the facilities that were hit were civilian targets under international law.

United States Forces-Afghanistan denied the claims of illegality and that the strikes caused casualties.

"USFOR-A is deeply concerned by UNAMA's methods and findings," command spokesman Col. Sonny Leggett said on Twitter shortly after the report was released, using an acronym for the U.N.'s mission in Afghanistan. "Sources with limited information, conflicted motives and violent agendas are not credible."

Syria pullback sends message to rest of world

The Washington Post

BEIRUT — The blow to America's standing in the Middle East was sudden and unexpectedly swift. Within the space of a few hours, advances by Turkish troops in Syria this week had compelled the U.S. military's Syrian Kurdish allies to switch sides, unraveled years of U.S. Syria policy and recalibrated the balance of power in the Middle East.

As Russian and Syrian troops roll into vacated towns and U.S. bases, the winners are counting the spoils.

The withdrawal delivered a huge victory to Syrian President Bashar Assad, who won back control of an area roughly amounting to a third of the country almost overnight. It affirmed Moscow as the arbiter of Syria's fate and the rising power in the Middle East. It sent another signal to Iran that Washington has no appetite for the kind of confrontation that its rhetoric suggests and that Iran's expanded influence in Syria is now likely to go unchallenged.

It sent a message to the wider world that the U.S. is in the process of a disengagement that could resonate beyond the Middle East, said Hussein Ibish of the Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington.

"There's a sense that the long goodbye has begun and that the long goodbye from the Middle East could become a long goodbye from Asia and everywhere else," he said.

Images shared on social media underscored the indignity of the retreat. Departing U.S. troops in sophisticated armored vehicles passed Syrian army soldiers riding in open-top trucks on a desert highway. An embedded Russian journalist took selfies on the abandoned U.S. base in Manbij, where U.S. forces had fought alongside their Kurdish allies to drive out Islamic State in 2015.

"Only yesterday they were here, and now we are here," said the journalist, panning the camera around the intact infrastructure, including a radio tower and a button-powered traffic-control gate that he showed was still functioning.

"Let's see how they lived and what they ate," he said, before ducking into one of the tents and filming the soldiers' discarded snacks.

On Arab news channels, coverage switched from footage of jubilant Syrian troops to scenes of Russian President Vladimir Putin's lavish receptions from the monarchs of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, Washington's most vital Arab allies in the Persian Gulf. The visits had been long planned, but the timing gave them the feel of a victory lap.

"This has left a bad taste for all of Amer-

ica's friends and allies in the region, not only among the Kurds," said a former regional minister who spoke on the condition of anonymity in order to not embarrass his government, an American ally. "Many will now be looking for new friends. The Russians don't abandon their allies. They fight for them. And so do the Iranians."

It was the manner of the withdrawal, hastily called amid chaos on the battlefield as Turkish forces pushed deep into Syria, that gave the event such impact in the region, analysts said. Few had anticipated that the most advanced military in the world would make such a scrambled and hasty departure, even after President Donald Trump signaled that he would not endorse a war on behalf of the Kurds against a U.S. NATO ally.

Less than 48 hours before the withdrawal announcement, the top U.S. military commander, Joint Chiefs Chairman Gen. Mark Milley, had given assurances that the troops would remain indefinitely, standing by their Kurdish partners to continue to hunt down ISIS.

But the Turks' capture Sunday of a key highway that served as the U.S. troops' main supply line revealed the fragility of a mission that had narrowly focused on the ISIS fight while neglecting regional dynamics, including the depth of Turkish animosity to the Kurdish militia with which the U.S. had teamed.

For many in the region, Trump's abandonment of Syria caps a long erosion of trust that began under the administration of President Barack Obama. His decision not to stand by Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, who was toppled during the Arab Spring uprisings in 2011, is frequently contrasted with Russia's unwavering support for Assad after he faced popular unrest just a few weeks later, Arab officials say.

Obama's retreat from his "red line" ultimatum on the use of chemical weapons by the Syrian government, after hundreds died in an attack outside Damascus in 2013, further called into question Washington's credibility, they say. His nuclear deal with Iran, which eased economic sanctions in return for restrictions on its nuclear activities, was seen by some as a capitulation to Iran and a betrayal of U.S. allies in the Middle East who were not consulted and were more concerned about Iran's pursuit of ballistic missiles and regional expansionism.

Trump's election to the presidency was welcomed by the United States' closest allies as a chance to reset the clock, but he, too, has disappointed, with his unpredictability and seemingly erratic decision-making. His decision not to confront Iran

after it shot down an American drone in June jolted Gulf Arab leaders, who began to wonder whether decades of U.S. security guarantees could be counted on in the event of a real crisis with Iran.

Americans cannot complain about any loss of influence in the region as a result of their actions, said Mohammed al-Sulami, writing in the Saudi Arabian Arab News outlet on Wednesday.

"Washington actively opted for this policy, having chosen a strategy of withdrawal and retrenchment," he wrote. "The U.S. has no right to condemn the region's countries if they choose to forge relations with other powers to protect their interests."

The abrupt departure from northeastern Syria, Ibish said, has further shredded any U.S. credibility that had survived the disengagement of the Obama era and the capriciousness of the Trump one. The U.S. remains overwhelmingly the dominant military power in the Middle East, with about 50,000 troops deployed in the region and a level of technological superiority that will ensure that allies covet American weapons and support for years.

But friends and enemies alike are starting to suspect that Trump's unpredictability is less a cause than a consequence of a broader American reluctance to engage with the world, Ibish said. He dates that to the trauma of the bloody, costly and ultimately unsatisfying wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

"People are asking: Could the United States not only be an unreliable power, but could it actually be a weak power as well?" he said. "Not because it lacks the capability but because it lacks the will."

There was therefore a sense of inevitability to the sudden American departure from Syria, analysts said. Washington appears to have underestimated Turkey's determination to prevent the emergence of a Kurdish statelet on its border and overestimated the limited leverage offered by the presence of 1,000 U.S. troops.

The small U.S. presence in Syria had big intentions but limited means. The goal, as articulated by State Department officials, was for the troops to remain there to stamp out the remnants of ISIS and to provide leverage in seeking a Syrian peace settlement that would impose restraints on Assad's power, safeguard Kurdish interests and limit Iran's influence.

The Kurds also had overestimated their clout with an American president who frequently asserts his determination to disentangle the United States from Middle East wars, said Hilal Khashan, professor of political science at the American University of Beirut.

Marines correct another Iwo Jima ID

The Washington Post

At first, the men hoisting one of the first American flags on Japanese soil were anonymous symbols of the war effort — backs turned, faces obscured in the Associated Press photograph that would win a Pulitzer, signal triumph amid massive casualties and help finance World War II.

“Our country needed a pick-me-up,” said Dustin Spence, a Sacramento, Calif., filmmaker and historian who has studied the photo for years. “This flag-raising picture did that.”

Then President Franklin D. Roosevelt said he wanted to bring the six Marines pictured to Washington.

“That’s when we kind of opened up this Pandora’s box,” Spence, 35, told *The Washington Post*.

It would take nearly 75 years to get the names right.

This month, the Marine Corps confirmed that it has long misidentified one of the men in Joe Rosenthal’s iconic picture from the island of Iwo Jima, after Spence and others submitted a PowerPoint of evidence. It wasn’t the first error. Three years ago, the Marines acknowledged another mistake, and false IDs have plagued a second image from the Feb. 23, 1945, flag-raising on Japan’s Mount Suribachi too.

Both the Marines and the FBI’s Digital Evidence Laboratory worked to confirm the latest “opportunity to expand on the historical record,” the Marine Corps told NBC News in a

statement — the revelation that Cpl. Harold “Pie” Keller rather than Pfc. Rene Gagnon is pictured in Rosenthal’s shot.

“Regardless of who was in the photograph, each and every Marine who set foot on Iwo Jima, or supported the effort from the sea and air around the island is, and always will be, a part of our Corps’ cherished history,” the Marines said. “In the words of General David H. Berger, Commandant of the Marine Corps, ‘they are all heroes.’”

For Spence, the Marines’ admission capped a personal project that’s spanned half his life. Fascinated by World War II after growing up on his grandfather’s stories of piloting in the Pacific, Spence spent his college years interviewing veterans. One of those veterans told him a story about a flag-raising picture from Iwo Jima that all the books got wrong.

Two flag-raising were memorialized on Iwo Jima on Feb. 23; U.S. forces swapped in a bigger flag before Rosenthal’s shot.

Spence started scouting out misconceptions about the first, lesser-known photo before moving on to the Rosenthal image that plastered newspapers in 1945. He teamed up with two other historians who had been scrutinizing the pictures, Stephen Foley and Brent Westemeyer.

In 2016, the Marine Corps announced it was revisiting the lore around the famous AP photo, thanks to Spence

and others’ digging. Within a month, a panel headed by a retired general had put its weight behind the historians’ findings.

Navy Petty Officer 2nd Class John Bradley was, in fact, Marine Pvt. Harold Schultz. Bradley was actually part of the first, smaller flag-raising, the panel affirmed.

Westemeyer had a “hunch” that one man was still wrongly identified, Spence recalled. But they needed proof.

Those lingering questions sent Spence to Army archives in Carlisle, Pa., where he sifted through other, little-known pictures from that day on Iwo Jima. He would match a snippet of camouflage helmet from Rosenthal’s image to a different picture, then trace another detail to yet another picture, until he found a clearly visible face.

The face he landed on seemed to belong to Harold Keller. Looking for more confirmation, Spence said, he tracked down Keller’s daughter, Kay Maurer. Maurer showed him a trunk of keepsakes her parents saved, full of news clippings about the brutal war being waged in the Pacific, Spence said. Among the papers were articles about the flag-raising.

Spence has spoken with many veterans over the years, he said, but Keller stood out. A Purple Heart recipient and Marine Raider, Keller was what Spence calls “the Navy SEAL of World War II,” a man highly trained and prepared to survive behind enemy lines. Spence found out that he’d fought in

major clashes like the Battle of Midway and lived through a bullet in the neck. The only one of the six Marines in Rosenthal’s photo to have children, Keller would name his son after a friend mortally wounded at the bottom of Mount Suribachi, Spence said.

News that Keller was pictured in the famous photo has reportedly caught Keller’s family off guard.

“He never spoke about any of this when we were growing up,” Maurer, 70, told NBC News. “We knew he fought in the war, we knew he was wounded in the shoulder at one point. ... But he didn’t tell us he helped raise the flag on Mount Suribachi.”

Hanging on the living room wall, though, was another Rosenthal picture, Maurer told the news station. It showed Marines in front of a flag.

An obituary indicates that Keller died in 1979.

Sometimes, Spence said, he’s asked why it matters who’s in Rosenthal’s image. After all, the second flag-raising shot seems composed to discourage identification.

“It’s not supposed to be named individuals,” Spence speculated. “You’re supposed to see Marines, or any type of person, coming together to raise something, raise a flag that symbolizes unity.”

Despite the Rosenthal photo’s track record, Spence believes the Marines finally have the right names.

“I feel the journey is over,” he said.

Coast Guard cutter joins exercise near Spratly Islands

BY CAITLIN DOORNBOS
Stars and Stripes

YOKOSUKA NAVAL BASE, Japan — The Coast Guard is taking part in annual training near contentious South China Sea islands involving the U.S. and Philippine navies and the Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force.

The exercise — Maritime Training Activity Sama Sama — is underway this week on and

around Palawan, the Philippine island closest to the Spratly Islands, southwest of Manila, a Navy statement said.

China, Taiwan, Vietnam, the Philippines and Malaysia dispute the ownership of the approximately 100 islands and reefs in the Spratly chain. Military forces from those countries occupy about 45 of the islands, according to the CIA World Factbook.

China has built up and mili-

tarized seven of the Spratlys, according to the Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative. The region is rich in fishing grounds and untapped oil and gas deposits, the CIA factbook says.

During the exercise, the nations will practice shore and sea capabilities, including force protection, explosive ordnance disposal and anti-air, surface warfare and vessel-of-interest tracking.

The Navy did not say when the drills would end. The service by policy does not discuss future ship movements.

The inclusion of the cutter Stratton continues the Coast Guard’s presence in the western Pacific this year. The Stratton in June relieved the cutter Bertholf, which made history this past spring when it became the first U.S. cutter to sail through the Taiwan Strait.

Trump, Pelosi have it out again

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — He said she's a "third-grade" politician. She said he's having a meltdown.

And with that President Donald Trump and House Speaker Nancy Pelosi chalked up the latest explosive meeting that ended abruptly with a walkout at the White House.

It's a familiar ritual, with Trump and congressional leaders meeting on official business, only to see the session devolve into colorful, name-calling commentary that's a new kind of addition to the history books. But this time, against the backdrop of the fast-moving impeachment inquiry, Pelosi arrived not just as the leader of the opposing party but as the speaker who could determine Trump's political future.

The administration called in congressional leadership to discuss the situation in Syria. The House had just voted, 354-60, to overwhelmingly oppose the president's announced U.S. troop withdrawal, a rare bipartisan rebuke. Trump's action has opened the door for a Turkish military attack on Syrian Kurds who have been aligned with the U.S. in fighting the country's long-running war.

Trump kicked off the meeting bragging about his "nasty" letter to Turkish President Recep Erdogan, according to a Democrat familiar with the meeting who was granted anonymity to discuss it. In the letter, Trump warned the Turkish leader, with exclamation points, not to engage in "slaughtering" the Kurds. The person called Trump's opening a lengthy, bombastic monologue.

Pelosi mentioned the House vote and Sen. Chuck Schumer, the Democratic leader, started to read the president a quote from former Defense Secretary Jim Mattis on the need to keep U.S. troops in Syria to prevent a resurgent of Islamic State fighters.

But Trump cut Schumer off, complaining that Mattis was "the world's most overrated general. You know why? He wasn't tough enough." Trump went on, "I captured ISIS."

Pelosi explained to Trump that Russia has always wanted a "foothold in the Middle East," and now it has one with the U.S. withdrawal, according to a senior Democratic aide who was also granted anonymity.

"All roads with you lead to Putin," the speaker said.

Then it began.

Trump said to Pelosi, "I hate

ISIS more than you do."

Pelosi responded, "You don't know that."

Schumer intervened at one point and said, "Is your plan to rely on the Syrians and the Turks?"

Trump replied, "Our plan is to keep the American people safe."

Pelosi said: "That's not a plan. That's a goal."

Trump turned to Pelosi and complained about former President Barack Obama's "red line" over Syria. According to Schumer, he then called her "a third-rate politician."

At that point, the genteel Rep. Steny Hoyer, of Maryland, the House Majority Leader, interjected, "This is not useful."

Pelosi and Hoyer stood and left the meeting. As they did, Trump said, "Goodbye, we'll see you at the polls."

From the White House driveway, Pelosi told reporters Trump was having some kind of "meltdown" inside. She said they had to leave because Trump was unable to grasp the reality of the situation.

Later, she would insist he even botched the insult, calling her "third-grade" rather than "third-rate."

The impeachment inquiry never came up, she said.

Tentative Brexit deal struck; votes uncertain

Associated Press

BRUSSELS — Britain and the European Union said Thursday that they have struck an outline Brexit deal after days of intense see-saw negotiations — though it must still be formally approved by the bloc and ratified by the European and U.K. Parliaments.

Hours before a summit of all 28 EU national leaders, European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker tweeted: "We have one! It's a fair and balanced agreement for the EU and the UK and it is testament to our commitment to find solutions."

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson tweeted that the two sides had struck a "great new deal" and urged U.K. lawmakers to ratify it in a special session on Saturday.

Immediately complicating matters was Johnson's Northern Irish government allies, who didn't waste a minute to say they could not back the outline deal because of provisions for the Irish border.

Johnson needs all the support he can get to push any deal past a deeply divided Parliament and will surely temper jubilation at the EU summit. The UK parliament already rejected a previous deal three times.

Technical negotiators struggled longest to fine-tune customs and sales tax regulations that will have to manage trade in goods between the Northern Ireland and Ireland — where the U.K. and the EU share their only land border.

After months of gloom over the stalled Brexit process, European leaders have sounded upbeat this week.

French President Emmanuel Macron said Wednesday that "I want to believe that a deal is being finalized," while German Chancellor Angela Merkel said negotiations were "in the final stretch."

They were proven right on Thursday.

Ex-US diplomat testifies he was disturbed by Trump's politicization of foreign policy

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — A former top State Department aide testified in the impeachment inquiry that the Trump administration's politicization of foreign policy contributed to his resignation, while the Senate GOP leader briefed colleagues on a possible Christmas impeachment trial.

The day's events, interrupted by an explosive meeting at the White House, churned as longtime State Department officials continued speaking out under subpoena — some revealing striking new details — about the actions President

Donald Trump and his personal lawyer, Rudy Giuliani, took toward Ukraine that sparked the House investigation.

On Wednesday, Michael McKinley, a career foreign service officer and Secretary of State Mike Pompeo's de facto chief of staff, told investigators behind closed doors that he could no longer look the other way amid the Trump administration's dealings with Ukraine, which were among the reasons he ended his 37-year career last week, according to multiple people familiar with the testimony, who, like others who spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity, were

not authorized to discuss it.

"I was disturbed by the implication that foreign governments were being approached to procure negative information on political opponents," McKinley testified, according to a former colleague familiar with his remarks.

The impeachment inquiry revolves around a whistleblower's complaint that Trump was pushing Ukraine's leader into opening an investigation of a company connected to the son of Trump's potential 2020 Democratic rival Joe Biden. It is illegal to solicit or receive foreign help in a U.S. election.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

St. Louis might have to repay trolley money

MO ST. LOUIS — If a St. Louis-area streetcar line ceases operation, the federal government may want back some of the millions of dollars it spent on the project.

That's the assessment of James Wild, of the East-West Gateway Council of Governments, which coordinates the region's federal transportation funding.

The St. Louis Post-Dispatch reported that the U.S. government paid for about two-thirds of the \$51.5 million Loop Trolley, a 2.2-mile system running from University City's Delmar Loop to the Missouri History Museum in St. Louis. It opened in November after years of delays. Ridership has been low.

The trolley board is seeking city and county funding, saying the trolley needs \$200,000 by November to keep operating and another \$500,000 for 2020.

Transgender rest room policy reversed

GA JASPER — A Georgia school district said it won't let transgender students use bathrooms aligning with their gender identity, reversing a previous decision.

The Pickens County school district announced the decision Wednesday following a heated public meeting Monday night.

The district said it wants to consult with police and others about how to guarantee safety, citing death threats, student harassment and vandalism.

Superintendent Carlton Wilson had earlier said students could use bathrooms that correspond to their gender identities. But Wilson said he received death threats after the announcement and put the

policy change on hold until he could talk to the five-member school board.

Wilson has said transgender students can use gender-neutral bathrooms. A number of federal courts have ruled students should be able to use bathrooms consistent with their gender identities.

Rural city getting its first grocery store

UT SANTAQUIN — A rural Utah city is opening its first grocery store.

The Daily Herald reported construction began Monday on the first grocery store in Santaquin, a city of about 14,000 residents in northern Utah.

The Santaquin Market is the first step in the city's plan to build a commercial district. Officials expect the store to add more than 100 jobs and increase Santaquin's tax revenue.

Santaquin city manager Ben Reeves said Santaquin has prioritized development in recent years, adding a traffic signal downtown and expanding Main Street.

Police: Naked man found after vandalism

FL CAPE CORAL — A Florida man who was found nude by deputies is facing charges after being accused of using a forklift and a hammer to wreak havoc before taking a shower at a plumbing business.

The News-Press reported Joseph Michael Bieniek, 24, was confronted by an employee at United Plumbing on Friday.

The employee told Lee County deputies he was working late in the warehouse and went to investigate a noise when he found Bieniek standing naked and clutching a hammer. The employee said Bieniek didn't

threaten him.

Bieniek was released Sunday on \$26,500 bond and faces two charges of burglary and charges of resisting arrest, larceny and criminal mischief.

Charges dropped against bus driver

CT VERNON — The lawyer for a bus driver who had been charged with locking a passenger in the vehicle's luggage compartment said the criminal case has been dropped.

Attorney Nate Baber told The Boston Globe that Wendy Alberty is no longer facing reckless endangerment, unlawful restraint, and breach of peace charges.

The 49-year-old New Jersey woman was charged after Connecticut State Police received a 911 call Aug. 4 from a New York woman who said she was locked inside the compartment of the Peter Pan bus while retrieving items from her bag.

Police found the woman when they pulled the bus over in Union, Conn.

Baber said his client's actions were unintentional.

Man keeps calling 911 to report roommate

FL DADE CITY — A Florida man repeatedly called 911 to report that his roommate had stolen his marijuana.

A deputy for the Pasco County Sheriff's Office posted a Twitter response to the man's calls Saturday night: Stop calling.

Deputy Neal Zalva said in the Twitter video that he called the man back to tell him to quit contacting the sheriff's office about his stolen marijuana.

Zalva recorded the video as part of the agency's #Tweet-

Along program, which allows viewers to get a behind-the-scenes look at the police work by the deputies.

Recreational marijuana use remains illegal in Florida. A sheriff's office spokesman said the caller wasn't charged.

Man charged in attack with bowling ball

IL CICERO — A man has been charged in connection with a bowling ball attack that left the victim in a coma.

Cicero town spokesman Ray Hanania said Demetrius Easton, 30, faces a charge of attempted first-degree murder in the Sept. 5 attack at Town Hall Bowl in the Chicago suburb. He was arrested Sunday.

Diamante Williams was struck in the head with a 14-pound bowling ball. He suffered a skull fracture and was placed in a medically induced coma to aid his recovery. Police said he remains hospitalized in serious condition.

Town decides to keep Halloween on Oct. 31

MA WORCESTER — The second-largest city in Massachusetts is sticking with the Oct. 31 date for Halloween celebrations this year.

The Worcester City Council made the decision Tuesday.

Councilor Matthew Walley was originally pushing to permanently change the holiday's date to the last Saturday of October to avoid problems with midweek trick-or-treating.

The Telegram & Gazette reported many city councilors have no interest in changing the date, including Councilor-at-Large Konstantina Lukes, who said "let's not rewrite history now."

From wire reports

Your objective source for military news
updated 24/7 from bases
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STARS AND STRIPES®

Dynamic duos all the rage around NBA

Associated Press

In today's high-stakes NBA, a powerful pair beats three of a kind.

Teams who longed to build a Big Three are now striving for a dynamic duo, hoping two premier players are good enough to win a championship when the belief used to be that it required a trio.

And with some of the combinations assembled this summer, it sure seems less is more.

That's certainly the thinking in Los Angeles, where LeBron James and Anthony Davis will try to power the Lakers back to the playoffs, and Kawhi Leonard and Paul George attempt to carry the Clippers further than they've ever gone before.

Houston is putting James Harden and Russell Westbrook together in a backcourt of recent MVPs, and Kyrie Irving and Kevin Durant made the Nets the talk of not only New York but also the entire NBA on the opening day of free agency when they decided to partner up in Brooklyn.

"Everybody was looking for a Big Three," George said. "It didn't work for a lot of teams, so now this is a new dynamic for the new generation of this league."

One that could make the NBA more balanced and exciting this season. If one team hoards too many good players, as Golden State did while reaching the last five NBA Finals, it leaves a lengthy list of clubs who have no realistic hope of contending for a

title.

But if it only takes a pair of All-Star players, that opens the door for teams who already have two, or have one and the assets to get another.

The Big Three model kept some of those teams from going all in, but that era appears over.

"I think that's the way the league just went," Davis said. "I'm not sure if it was done purposefully, but I think this is maybe the most exciting the league ever has been in a while. It's going to be fun."

James won rings with two versions of a Big Three, teaming with Dwyane Wade and Chris Bosh for back-to-back titles in Miami, and then rallying Cleveland to the 2016 championship along with Irving and Kevin Love. Now he'll try to do it with one fewer, which might be enough if the Lakers put the right pieces around him and Davis, who are two of the top players in the league.

So are Leonard and George. Doc Rivers coached a Big Three to the 2008 title in Boston with Kevin Garnett, Paul Pierce and Ray Allen, and the Celtics might've won another if not for the Heat building a younger one two years later.

Now he'll try to win with two, with a Clippers team that George thinks looks like many other teams in today's NBA.

"I think what Boston did was special. I think what Miami did was special," he said. "But I think it goes back to you have two

guys that are the guys and then you have a group around them that supports them to the highest level, and that foundation is around a lot of guys in this league."

Trying to afford three top players and keep them for long became even more challenging only a year after James and Bosh went to Miami, with the 2011 Collective Bargaining Agreement implementing severe penalties for teams who exceed the luxury tax. Short of players sacrificing salary, as Tim Duncan repeatedly did in San Antonio when the Spurs kept him, Tony Parker and Manu Ginobili together long enough to win four titles, it's almost impossible to get three stars and a competent cast around them.

Even if the salaries work, the personalities might not. It's hard to keep three alpha dogs happy, as Irving showed by asking out of Cleveland, especially because one of them usually has to give up so much of his game so three isn't a crowd.

"You have a guy that's used to being a focal point of the offense — take Bron's teams in Miami," Lakers coach Frank Vogel said. "There's more sacrifice I think probably to be had if it's a Big Three versus a Big Two, but that would be my two cents on it."

And his two cents on the two-man trend?

"I think we've got the best of them, of all the duos," he said.

Referees to crack down on traveling this season

Associated Press

NEW YORK — James Harden slides sideways or steps backward, and the screaming starts.

Whether seated on the opposing bench or on a stool in a sports bar, somebody is insisting that Harden must have traveled between the time he finished dribbling and launched his shot from a different spot. Traveling will be an emphasis this season for officials, who are determined not to allow offensive players to gain an extra edge by taking an extra step.

Scoring stars like Harden already got an advantage once hand-checking on the perimeter was no longer legal, so they can't be given another one.

"If we can't allow people

to hand check, we can't allow them to travel because then they're almost unguardable," vice president of referee operations Mark Wunderlich said.

That said, most times when Harden does his signature step-back, he doesn't travel.

"It is legal, except for the fact that he gets a third step in every now and then when his rhythm is just off, which shows you the highlight of how difficult it is," said Monty McCutchen, the NBA's head of referee development and training.

That's why referees are working harder to get it right.

Critics of the NBA — and even some fans — have long sneered that the league doesn't call traveling. McCutchen said data showed officials were

missing about two per game, but the way the game is played today can make those misses more punitive for the defense.

Players are bigger, faster and more skilled, and even big men who would have been centers in a previous generation are now do-everything forwards like 6-foot-11 MVP Giannis Antetokounmpo. He already gets far enough with the two steps that are legal, forget when allowed a third.

So officials are altering the way they were taught to officiate when McCutchen and Wunderlich were on the floor. Before, referees were trained to look first at the defensive player. Now they have reversed their sequencing, looking first at the offensive player's feet to

make certain a legal pivot foot has been established and not changed.

And the league added new language in the rule book to define the "gather," to clarify how many steps a player can take after receiving the ball or completing his dribble.

Houston coach Mike D'Antoni said the league stressed that Harden's step-back jumper is legal.

"They made a point, which is great, to tell every head coach that is not traveling. It's not traveling," D'Antoni said. "So hopefully coaches will quit complaining and hopefully you guys in the news will understand that that's not traveling."

49ers stay grounded amid unbeaten start

Associated Press

SANTA CLARA, Calif. — For a franchise that has had little success the past few seasons, the San Francisco 49ers are sure taking their fast start this season in stride.

The Niners have won their first five games for the first time in 29 years and are one of two remaining undefeated teams in the NFL along with the defending Super Bowl champion New England Patriots.

“It’s cool to be 5-0. But I know it’s nothing,” safety Jimmie Ward said Wednesday. “I’ve been through seasons, I’ve been through injuries, so I know 5-0 is not where I want to be at. It’s cool. It’s impressive I guess for the people outside in the world. Inside this locker room, it’s nothing; 5-0 doesn’t get you anything, 5-0 doesn’t get you a ring.”

But 5-0 is a dramatic turnaround from where this franchise has been. Since making three straight NFC championship games and one Super Bowl from 2011 to 2013 under coach Jim Harbaugh, San Francisco hasn’t had a winning record.

The 49ers went 8-8 in Harbaugh’s final season in 2014 and have fallen even further since he was forced out after that season. The team won five games in Jim Tomsula’s only season as coach in 2015, went 2-14 the following year under Chip Kelly and then posted a combined 10-22 record in the first two seasons under Kyle Shanahan.

Now with a vastly improved defense fortified by edge rushers Nick Bosa and Dee Ford and an offense that features a dynamic running game to go along with a healthy Jimmy Garoppolo at quarterback, the Niners once again look like contenders in the NFC.

The defense is the tops in the league against the pass and second overall in terms of scoring and total defense. The running game is the second-most productive and San Francisco is outscoring opponents by 16.6

points per game, second best in the league.

“Things are trending in the right direction,” Garoppolo said. “I think as an offense you try to assess yourself week to week after the game, what you did good, what you did bad and try to improve those things going forward and not really have any weaknesses. So, that’s what we’re trying to do.”

San Francisco is coming off perhaps its most impressive seven-day stretch in years, having beaten Cleveland 31-3 at home on “Monday Night Football” on Oct. 7 and then following it up six days later with a 20-7 win in Los Angeles against the defending NFC champion Rams. San Francisco allowed only 157 yards against LA.

Despite that recent success, Shanahan spent part of the film session before practice Wednesday showing some of the bad plays against the Rams in an effort to keep his players grounded.

“I did it today because I showed a lot of good things Monday,” he said. “We enjoyed the win and there were a lot of good things. But you can watch that in a different light and find a lot of bad things, too. It’s nice when people tell you how good you are and stuff. It makes people, all human beings, feel better. Those are also the same people who will tell you how bad you are if the ball bounces the wrong way. You can watch that game in a different light and see it’s three plays away from getting out of hand going the other way. So you always want to put that perspective back in the players’ minds so you never relax. If you relax in this league, you’ll be humbled.”

Notes: TE George Kittle (groin), DT DJ Jones (hamstring), WR Deebo Samuel (groin), DL DeForest Buckner (rest) and RB Raheem Mostert (knee) didn’t practice. ... Tackles Joe Staley (leg) and Mike McGlinchey (knee) worked out on a side field rehabbing their injuries.

Goodell: Pass interference reviews working as expected

Associated Press

FORT LAUDERDALE, Fla. — NFL commissioner Roger Goodell says the new video review rule for pass interference is working as expected, with only obvious mistakes by officials being corrected.

Through Week 6, the league has had 44 reviews related to pass interference, and the on-field ruling was reversed seven times.

“I think coaches understood replay was not going to correct every pass interference close call,” Goodell said Wednesday at the close of the two-day owners’ meetings. “It’s not possible to make it perfect, and we’re not reofficiating these plays. The thought process was to correct the obvious and clear error. I think it’s settling out where we expected.”

The new rule approved as a one-year experiment allows pass interference calls or non-calls to be challenged by coaches and reviewed via replay. But complaints by coaches, players and fans about pass interference persist, with some arguing more calls should be reversed.

When the rule was adopted last spring, Goodell said, coaches understood that close calls wouldn’t be changed. The reversal rate so far is 16 percent.

“Whenever there’s a rule change, there’s a period of adapting, and coaches are testing to see what types of changes are going to be made,” Goodell said.

Rich McKay, Atlanta Falcons president and a member of the NFL competition committee, said it’s too early to judge whether interference reviews are being handled properly. But he agreed with Goodell that the goal was to reverse only egregious mistakes.

“It’s got to be an obvious error,” McKay said. “It’s a brand-new rule, one our coaches, players, fans and officials are getting accustomed to.”

Officiating has been a hot topic this season, with controversy about pass interference, the rate of holding penalties and, most recently, a critical call in Monday’s Lions-Packers

game that the league admitted was wrong.

The erroneous hands-to-the-face flag tainted Green Bay’s 23-22 win. But Goodell said such controversy is part of any sport.

“You never want to see a game where people are talking about officials afterward,” Goodell said. “It was a great game played by two great teams surprising people about the way they’re playing. And it’s tough. We have to continue to do everything to improve.”

On other topics, the commissioner said:

■ Labor discussions on a new collective bargaining agreement have touched on the possible expansion to a 17-game season. The Super Bowl would be one week later, with the season still starting the week after Labor Day. Larger rosters might accompany a longer season.

Goodell said the CBA talks have been productive, but he declined to predict when a deal might be reached.

■ Despite the Miami Dolphins’ historically bad start during a rebuilding effort, Goodell said he’s not concerned about teams sacrificing a season for a high draft pick and diminishing the NFL’s competitiveness.

“The good news for us is we don’t see that,” he said. “I don’t think the league has ever been more competitive. You can see that in teams going from last to first in dramatic fashion.”

Goodell said he doesn’t believe competitiveness would be improved by a lottery for draft picks, and such a change hasn’t been proposed by owners.

■ The league will examine possible reasons for a 44% increase in concussions in exhibition games from 2018 to this year. Concussions in preseason practices fell by 33%.

“We can look at the video, we can look at the medical information and try to understand the exact circumstances and see if there’s a trend or something we need further changes on — whether it’s preseason policies or techniques we want to remove from the game,” Goodell said.

NHL roundup

Tanev's OT goal for Pens hands Avs 1st loss

Associated Press

PITTSBURGH—Pittsburgh coach Mike Sullivan believes his undermanned Penguins can beat any team right now, despite missing five of their top nine forwards.

The Penguins proved it on Wednesday night by knocking off the Colorado Avalanche, the league's last unbeaten team.

Brandon Tanev scored a short-handed goal in overtime and the Penguins beat Colorado 3-2.

"When you have the number of injuries that we have, I think it creates a level of urgency among our group, and these guys have responded," Sullivan said. "They never look for excuses. There's an expectation that we can win games regardless of who's in our lineup and that's how we approach it."

Tanev, Pittsburgh's biggest free-agent pickup in the offseason, spent the first four seasons of his career with Winnipeg, earning a reputation as a quality penalty killer and a hard-working, two-way player who can chip in at both ends of the ice.

Tanev, who set career highs in goals and points last year, scored his first goal with the Penguins at 3:57 of overtime and joined Hall of Famer Mario Lemieux as the only players in franchise history to score an overtime goal while short-handed.

Tanev swooped into the zone and threw a shot on goal that went between Philipp Grubauer's pads. Colorado forward Ga-

briel Landeskog knocked the puck into the net, giving Pittsburgh its fourth straight win for the first time since an eight-game winning streak last season.

"I saw some open ice and just wanted to get one to the net," Tanev said. "I was fortunate enough to get a generous bounce."

Pittsburgh's Sidney Crosby continued a season-long, seven-game point streak, scoring his fourth goal of the season. Jake Guentzel added to his six-game point streak with his fifth goal in four games. Matt Murray made 26 saves.

The Avalanche looked to start the season with six straight wins for the first time since 2013-14.

Oilers 6, Flyers 3: Connor McDavid had a goal and four assists and Leon Draisaitl added two goals and one assist for host Edmonton in a win over Philadelphia.

It was McDavid's third career five-point game. Mikko Koskinen made 49 saves for the Oilers (6-1-0) in his third win of the season.

Jakub Voracek scored twice for Philadelphia (2-2-1) and assisted on Oskar Lindblom's goal.

Sharks 5, Hurricanes 2: Evander Kane became the first San Jose player to score three goals in the opening period of a game, and the host Sharks earned their third straight victory.

Kane opened the scoring at even strength and added two power-play goals in the first for his second career hat trick. San Jose is

hitting its stride after beginning the season with four straight losses.

Ducks 5, Sabres 2: Adam Henrique scored twice and Jakob Silfverberg had a goal and two assists, leading host Anaheim to the victory.

Victor Olofsson scored his team-leading sixth power-play goal for Buffalo, which absorbed its first regulation loss after a 5-0-1 start. Jack Eichel also scored for the Sabres.

Capitals 4, Maple Leafs 3: John Carlson had a goal and two assists, giving the defenseman 14 points, and Washington earned its first home win of the season.

Nicklas Backstrom added a goal and an assist, and Jakub Vrana and Evgeny Kuznetsov also scored for the Capitals, who lost their first three home games for the first time since October 1983.

Rookie goaltender Ilya Samsonov made 29 saves in his first home start to earn his third career win.

Blue Jackets 3, Stars 2: Sonny Milano scored a flashy goal in the third period to help host Columbus get the win.

Alexander Wennberg and Zach Werenski also scored for the Blue Jackets. Joonas Korpisalo stopped 30 shots.

Columbus (3-3-0) won back-to-back games and pulled to .500 with its eighth consecutive victory over the Stars (1-6-1).

Ben Bishop made 32 saves for Dallas, which dropped its fourth straight game.

Homebody heroes: SMU led by in-state transfers

Associated Press

DALLAS — Shane Buechele is having the kind of season so many envisioned after the quarterback started all 12 games as a true freshman in the Big 12 Conference three years ago.

While still in Texas, Buechele is closer to home with undefeated No. 19 SMU, where he is among 15 players who were once at other Power Five schools. The quarterback is one of 10 of those transfers from the Dallas-Fort Worth area.

"It was a big part of why I came, is just to be close to home and be around a bunch of guys that are from this area," Buechele said. "It's been awesome to

be around a bunch of guys that I have heard of or known."

There are 23 players overall on SMU's roster who were previously at other Division I schools. At least four of the seven grad transfers are eligible to play this year and next, including Buechele and Brandon Stephens, a running back at UCLA and now a starting junior cornerback playing near his hometown of Plano.

"This is a great fit for me to come back and play corner and be back home," Stephens said. "The first day I even stepped on campus, I just saw something. These guys were hungry to just be great. ... It was eye-

opening and inspiring to keep working and bring SMU back on the map."

SMU is 6-0 for the first time since 1982, the Pony Express days with Eric Dickerson and Craig James when the Mustangs went on to an 11-0-1 season. They had last been in the AP poll in October 1986, just before the NCAA death penalty punishments and not fielding a team in 1987 and 1988.

The players aren't the only ones feeling like they came home. Second-year coach Sonny Dykes is in a similar situation.

Dykes, the Texas-born son of the late Spike Dykes, was out

of the Lone Star State for a decade before a short stint as an offensive analyst at TCU. He became SMU's coach in December 2017 after Chad Morris left for Arkansas, and his Mustangs debut came in a bowl game.

"Having a chance to come back, I think, really has been special for a lot of these guys, and I think they appreciate it. Because they went off and went someplace else, and they appreciate knowing people and having people that are looking out for their best interest, and having family and being able to see them more," said Dykes.