

Experts debate response to Chinese drills

By **SETH ROBSON**
Stars and Stripes

A trio of military affairs analysts disagree on the best U.S. response to a recent Chinese military exercise that appeared to be a dress rehearsal for an invasion of Taiwan.

One said the United States should demonstrate how it would respond to a Chinese move against Taiwan, while another said a defensive exercise is more appropriate. The third suggested countering China's moves that way would show weakness.

David Johnson, a former Army officer now with the Center for Advanced Defense Studies in Washington, D.C., said U.S. forces should conduct "counter-exercises" that simulate reinforcing Taiwan in the face of Chinese aggression.

"The most effective deterrent would be counter-exercises," he said Wednesday in an email to Stars and Stripes.

Johnson's suggestion came the same day that China's Taiwan Affairs Office said recent beach-storming drills by Chinese troops were "absolutely just actions."

Speaking at a regular news briefing in Beijing, Ma Xiaoguang, spokesman for the office, said the exercises were aimed at interference by external forces colluding with Taiwan's ruling Democratic Progressive Party, Reuters news agency reported.

In a separate demonstration, nearly 150

Chinese warplanes flew into Taiwan's air defense identification zone over a four-day period beginning Oct. 1.

China is testing the resolve of regional powers to resist reunification of the island, Johnson, a retired lieutenant colonel, wrote in his email.

"The Chinese regularly conduct exercises for geo-political signaling," he said, adding that an amphibious assault is an extremely complex and expensive operation.

Even if completely choreographed and without resistance, a well-executed exercise is a major indicator of intent and capability, Johnson said.

"This exercise likely signals the intention to ensure that Taiwan does not seek independence," he said.

A counter-exercise by the U.S. military should simulate the repositioning of forces and logistics that would reinforce any target of regional aggression, Johnson said.

New Zealand-based security expert Paul Buchanan agreed, up to a point.

U.S. officials should weigh the risk of provocation against the benefits of showing China the negative consequences of an attack on Taiwan, he said in a phone interview Thursday.

An exercise that involves potentially offensive weapons or includes allies such as Japan could be perceived as a threat to the main-

land, Buchanan said.

"A defensive demonstration of capability and resolve is probably the best way to go should the option be exercised," he said.

That might involve mine-laying drills in international waters leading to Chinese ports.

"Showing a blue water interdiction and disruption capability sends a serious message," Buchanan said.

Any exercise should convey the potential economic and political downside as well as the military costs of an invasion, he added.

However, Jeff Kingston, director of Asian Studies at Temple University Japan, in an email Thursday said a counter-drill would be counterproductive.

"There has been a lot of posturing on all sides that has recently escalated tensions and it would be a good time to not ratchet that up further," he said.

Polling conducted by think tank Intelligentsia Taipei last month showed six in 10 Taiwanese don't think there will be a war with China in the next decade, with only 18% of those polled expecting one, the South China Morning Post reported Oct. 1.

"Instead of defense of Taiwan exercises, it might be better to go low key and dial down the rhetoric and saber-rattling," Kingston said. "By overreacting, the risk is dancing to [Chinese President Xi Jinping's] tune, a sign of weakness rather than strength."

Quad nations begin phase 2 of exercises off India coast

By **WYATT OLSON**
Stars and Stripes

Naval forces from the United States, India, Australia and Japan kicked off the second phase of Exercise Malabar in the Bay of Bengal this week with an armada led by the aircraft carrier USS Carl Vinson.

The annual exercise is a chance for the countries to share tactics and procedures to better prepare for operating together under any contingency.

The first portion of the exercise took place in the Philippine Sea in late August. The second began on Monday.

The four nations have increased their cooperation through participation in the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, or Quad. Its

stated purpose is to promote "a free-and-open Indo-Pacific," but it is essentially a means of countering China's growing economic, political and military influence in the region.

President Joe Biden hosted the first Quad Leaders Summit at the White House in September. Adm. Mike Gilday, chief of naval operations, is meeting with senior naval leaders in India this week.

During an online news conference with Indian media Tuesday, Gilday said the Malabar exercise could expand to include, for example, Great Britain.

"In the future, that exercise may expand," he said. "I think it's up to our partners in the Quad to discuss it. Remember that like-

minded allies and partners are working together."

In late September, Australia, the United Kingdom and United States announced a newly formed security partnership, dubbed AUKUS, which would deliver a fleet of nuclear-propelled submarines to Australia as a first step.

The Royal Navy carrier HMS Queen Elizabeth and its strike group deployed to the Pacific late this summer and has been operating on and off with U.S. and Japanese vessels.

The second phase of Malabar includes anti-submarine warfare training target exercise, cross-deck helicopter operations, a surface gunnery drill and replenishments-at-sea.

Deal improves troops' access to bases in Greece

By JOHN VANDIVER
Stars and Stripes

The United States will gain greater access to Greek military bases under an updated defense cooperation deal between the countries, Secretary of State Antony Blinken said Thursday as he called Greece “a pillar of stability in the region.”

The Pentagon has stepped up military activities in Greece over the past several years, seeking a stronger position in an area where Russia has expanded naval operations and maintains a base of operations in nearby Syria.

Blinken and Greek Foreign Minister Nikos Dendias signed off on the plan after talks in Washington, where the two diplomats touted increasingly close ties between the NATO allies.

“This update will allow the agreement to remain in force indefinitely and enables U.S. forces in Greece to train and operate from additional locations,” Blinken said. “We are strengthening our defense cooperation today.”

Blinken didn't detail which additional bases American forces would operate from Greece. However, the Greek newspaper Kathimerini reported that the deal would allow for expansions at military sites in Alexandroupoli, Larissa, Stefanovikio and Souda Bay, where the U.S. Navy has long maintained a presence. And Greek news agency Proto Thema reported that U.S. troops will have access to a firing range at Litochoro.

Greek officials had been pressing to include Skyros, a strategic Aegean Sea island in the vicinity of Turkey and the Black Sea, in the deal.

It was unclear Thursday whether the U.S. also will have access to military locations on Skyros. However, such a move could be viewed negatively by fellow NATO member Turkey.

The update to the bilateral agreement comes as both the U.S. and Greece deal with worsening relations with Turkey.

Athens and Ankara have been locked in a territorial dispute in the Aegean and also are at odds over energy rights in the eastern Mediterranean.

Senator uses foreign ship photo for Navy's birthday

By WYATT OLSON
Stars and Stripes

A U.S. senator's birthday greeting Wednesday to the U.S. Navy on Twitter turned out to be anything but happy after commenters noticed the photo of a ship accompanying the tweet was not one of the Navy's.

“For 246 years, the @USNavy has answered the call to defend America from threats abroad so we can remain safe at home,” Sen. James Risch, an Idaho Republican, wrote. “Today, we celebrate them.”

Below the message was the U.S. Navy logo over a somewhat shaded photo of a large, gray vessel.

“Not a U.S. ship,” Dave Brown, defense editor at Politico, tweeted back. “Appears to be a Pattani-class offshore patrol vessel belonging to the Royal Thai Navy, which means in it was built by China.”

Risch sits on the Select Committee on Intelligence and is the ranking member of the Committee on Foreign Relations.

“Purely a staff level oversight when creating a graphic, which was pulled down when

the error came to our attention,” said Marty Cozza, a spokesman for the senator, in an email to Stars and Stripes.

The photo and Risch's message were removed later in the day but not before taking some heat from the twitterverse.

“Is it really that hard for Congressional staff or consultants to Google photos of US ships?” a commenter by the handle of ham-mach asked. “This seems to be a frequent occurrence.”

Well, perhaps not frequent but certainly not rare.

In October 2019, Rep. Brian Mast, a Florida Republican, posted a similar birthday greeting to the U.S. Navy that was accompanied by a photo of the Russian battlecruiser Pyotr Velikiy.

On Wednesday, Brown apparently continued to scour Twitter for errant Navy birthday greetings. He later retweeted a message and photo that had been posted by the Naval Criminal Investigative Service.

“That's a Kirov-class Russian battlecruiser,” Brown wrote.

South Korea launches effort with US to formally end Korean War

By DAVID CHOI
Stars and Stripes

South Korean government officials confirmed they were holding discussions with the United States about formally ending the Korean War, just a few months before a new administration will preside over the country.

South Korean Ambassador to the U.S. Lee Soo Hyuck brought up the subject Wednesday while briefing Korean lawmakers at the embassy in Washington, D.C., telling them that senior U.S. officials were “approaching the issue seriously and understands its rational purposefulness.”

The U.S. and South Korea technically remain at war with North Korea after the signing of an armistice agreement following the 1950-53 Korean War.

National Security Office director Suh

Hoon also traveled to Washington this week for high-level talks with U.S. officials. South Korea's top national security official told reporters he planned to broach the topic of ending the war with Jake Sullivan, President Joe Biden's national security adviser.

“We think it is time for consultations ... and to check inter-Korean relations or North Korea-U.S. relations at least once,” Suh told reporters at the airport Monday.

Kim Yo Jong, North Korean leader Kim Jong Un's sister and a high-ranking official within the ruling party, described the idea as “interesting” and “good.”

“We have discussed the end of war declaration ... which can be the beginning of the establishment of a system to ensure peace on the Korean Peninsula,” she said in a statement issued last month by the state-run Korean Central News Agency.

Afghans keep bags packed, hope for escape

Associated Press

KABUL, Afghanistan — As their flight to Islamabad was finally about to take off, Somaya took her husband Ali's hand, lay her head back and closed her eyes. Tension had been building in her for weeks. Now it was happening: They were leaving Afghanistan, their homeland.

The couple had been trying to go ever since the Taliban took over in mid-August, for multiple reasons. Ali is a journalist and Somaya a civil engineer who has worked on United Nations development programs. They worry how the Taliban will treat anyone with those jobs. Both are members of the mainly Shiite Hazara minority, which fears the Sunni militants.

Most important of all: Somaya is five months pregnant with their daughter, whom they've already named Negar.

"I will not allow my daughter to step in Afghanistan if the Taliban are in charge," Somaya told The Associated Press on the flight with them. Like others

leaving or trying to leave, the couple asked that their full names not be used for their protection. They don't know if they'll ever return.

Ask almost anyone in the Afghan capital what they want now that the Taliban are in power, and the answer is the same: They want to leave. It's the same at every level of society, in the local market, in a barbershop, at Kabul University, at a camp of displaced people. At a restaurant once popular with businessmen and upper-class teens, the waiter lists the countries to which he has applied for visas.

Some say their lives are in danger because of links with the ousted government or with Western organizations. Others say their way of life cannot endure under the hard-line Taliban, notorious for their restrictions on women, on civil liberties and their harsh interpretation of Islamic law. Some are not as concerned with the Taliban themselves but fear that under them, an already collapsing

economy will utterly crash.

Tens of thousands of people were evacuated by the United States and its allies in the frantic days between the Aug. 15 Taliban takeover and the official end of the evacuation on Aug. 30.

The exodus is emptying Afghanistan of many of its young people who had hoped to help build their homeland.

"I was raised with one dream, that I study hard and be someone, and I'd come back to this country and help," said Popal, a 27-year-old engineer.

"With this sudden collapse, every dream is shattered. ... We lose everything living here."

When Popal was 5 years old, his father sent him to Britain with relatives to get an education. Growing up, Popal worked low-skill jobs, sending money back to his family, while studying engineering. He eventually gained British citizenship and worked in the nuclear sector.

A few weeks before the Taliban takeover, Popal returned to

Afghanistan in hopes of getting his family out.

Popal has been in contact for weeks with British officials trying to arrange evacuations. But he said they told him he could not bring his parents and siblings. In early October, Popal managed to get out to Iran. Complaining that he's had no help from the British Foreign Office, he is making his way back to Britain, where he will try to find a way to bring out his family.

A former adviser to a senior Cabinet minister in Afghanistan's ousted government said he was searching for a way out. The decision came after years of sticking it out through mounting violence.

In the past, he had opportunities and offers to go to the United States or Europe. "I didn't take them because I wanted to stay and I wanted to work and I wanted to make a difference," he said, speaking on condition he not be named for his protection.

Now he is in hiding, waiting for his opportunity to escape.

Experts: Vets targeted more for extremist recruiting

By COREY DICKSTEIN
Stars and Stripes

U.S. military veterans need tools to help them identify and resist increased recruiting efforts by violent extremist groups, expert witnesses told the House Veterans Affairs Committee on Wednesday.

Violent extremist groups target military veterans because they value their training in small unit tactics, communications and weapons skills, said Seth Jones, who directs the Transnational Threats Project at Washington think tank Center for Strategic and International Studies. Extremists often target veterans online and prey on those "struggling to adapt" to civilian life and those facing economic or emotional hardships, added Joe Plenzler, a retired Marine lieutenant colonel.

"They provide them with a tribe, a simplistic view of the world and its problems, actionable solutions and a sense of purpose," said Plenzler, a former infantry and public affairs officer who retired in 2015.

"Then they feed these vulnerable individuals a concoction of lies and an unrelenting narrative of political and social grievance, and they've been successful."

But the U.S. government and researchers also need more data and analysis to fully understand what drives some of those who served their country into groups that use violence against Americans, the experts said.

Republican House members, meanwhile, said they worried the committee's public examination of the issue was a political ploy by Democrats that threatens veterans' freedom of speech.

The hearing Wednesday comes in the months after the Jan. 6 attack on the U.S. Capitol by some of former President Donald Trump's backers, who sought to prevent Congress from certifying President Joe Biden's November election victory. The mob included members of several right-wing and anti-government groups, including the Proud Boys, the Oath Keepers and the Three Percenters, the Justice Department

said.

Among the more than 620 individuals who have been arrested and charged with crimes related to the Jan. 6 attack, at least 66 were military-affiliated — veterans, active-duty service members or current reservists, lawmakers said Wednesday. Plenzler called it "shocking" that veterans, who make up about 6% of the U.S. population, comprised at least 10% of those charged in the assault.

House Veterans Affairs Committee Chairman Rep. Mark Takano, D-Calif., said the hearing was necessary to examine the issues that have drawn veterans into domestic violent extremist groups. Takano noted that FBI Director Christopher Wray has identified domestic extremism as the greatest threat to U.S. national security in the homeland.

Takano said he hoped the two-panel hearing would help the committee support veterans who may be targeted by violent groups.

US official: Lack of outreach hurt vaccinations

By CAITLIN DOORNBOS
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Leaders of the federal effort to speed coronavirus vaccine development should have developed better communication strategies to convince more Americans to receive the shots, a key figure in the operation said Wednesday.

Retired Army Lt. Gen. Paul Ostrowski, director of supply, production and distribution for Operation Warp Speed, said that while the program successfully helped bring about the first coronavirus vaccines less than a year after the pandemic began, leaders “blew it” when it came to messaging.

“The biggest lesson learned is the value of strategic communications, and we’re fighting that today,” Ostrowski said at the convention of the Association of the United

States Army.

Ostrowski said the military was the “bandwidth” behind Operation Warp Speed’s mission to “develop, clinically test, manufacture and then deliver 300 million vaccines to the American people by January of 2021.”

Though that mission was completed, the work to get shots in arms continues since the issue became politicized, Ostrowski said.

“We always knew based on the politics [and] based on surveys ... about 50% of Americans said they were going to get it,” Ostrowski said. “We had another 20% who were anti-vaxxers and they were never going to get it. And then we had this 30% called the ‘movable middle.’”

“Where we failed was the movable middle, and we’re paying that price today,” he added.

As of Wednesday, more than 400 million vaccines have been administered in the U.S., Ostrowski said. Still, just 56.5% of the U.S. population has been fully vaccinated nearly a year after the first vaccine was made available to people aged 16 years and over, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

“That is our biggest failure, the fact that we did not follow through with an effective strategic campaign to move the movable middle from the left side — i.e., not getting the vaccine — to the correct side [of] getting the vaccine,” Ostrowski said.

Within the military, the Pentagon relied heavily on strategic communication campaigns to convince service members to take the vaccine before making it mandatory in August.

US jobless claims hit lowest level since pandemic start

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The number of Americans applying for unemployment benefits fell to its lowest level since the pandemic began, a sign the job market is still improving even as hiring has slowed in the past two months.

Unemployment claims dropped 36,000 to 293,000 last week, the second straight drop, the Labor Department said Thursday. That’s the smallest number of people to apply for benefits since the week of March 14, 2020, when the pandemic intensified, and the first time claims have dipped below 300,000. Applications for jobless aid, which generally track the pace of layoffs, have fallen steadily since last spring as many busi-

nesses, struggling to fill jobs, have held onto their workers.

The decline in layoffs comes amid an otherwise unusual job market. Hiring has slowed in the past two months, even as companies and other employers have posted a near-record number of open jobs.

Businesses are struggling to find workers as about 3 million people who lost jobs and stopped looking for work since the pandemic have yet to resume their job searches. Economists hoped more people would find work in September as schools reopened, easing child care constraints, and enhanced unemployment aid ended nationwide.

But the pickup didn’t happen, with employers adding just 194,000 jobs last month.

In a bright spot, the unemployment rate fell to 4.8% from 5.2%, though some of that decline occurred because many of those out of work stopped searching for jobs, and were no longer counted as unemployed. The proportion of women working or looking for work fell in September, likely because of difficulties finding child care or because of schools disrupted by COVID-19 outbreaks.

At the same time, Americans are quitting their jobs in record numbers, with about 3% of workers doing so in August. Workers have been particularly likely to leave their jobs at restaurants, bars and hotels, possibly spurred by fear of the delta variant of COVID-19, which was still spreading rapidly in August.

Borrowers denied student loan relief will get 2nd look

Associated Press

Thousands of public servants who were rejected from a student loan forgiveness program will get their cases reviewed by the Education Department as part of a settlement in a lawsuit brought by one of the nation’s largest teachers unions.

The settlement announced Wednesday aims to resolve a 2019 suit accusing the department of mismanaging its Public Service Loan Forgiveness program — a troubled initiative that the agency is separately working to fix through an overhaul announced last week.

The suit was brought by the American Federation of Teachers on behalf of eight members who said they were wrongly denied debt cancellation through the program.

Created in 2007, the program promises that college graduates who take jobs in public service can have their federal student debt forgiven after making 10 years of monthly payments. But the vast majority of applicants have been rejected, often for failing to meet complicated eligibility rules.

According to the lawsuit, the Education Department routinely made errors while

processing applications yet offered no appeals process. It argued that borrowers were illegally being denied their right to due process. The suit targeted the department and former Education Secretary Betsy DeVos.

As part of the settlement, the department said it will automatically review applications for all borrowers who were rejected prior to Nov. 1, 2020, as long as they had made 10 years of payments. If the department finds that a rejection was justified, it will email borrowers to explain the decision and how they can become eligible.

Ex-DOJ lawyer subpoenaed by Jan. 6 panel

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The House committee investigating the Jan. 6 riot at the U.S. Capitol has issued a subpoena to a former Justice Department lawyer who positioned himself as an ally of Donald Trump and aided the Republican president's efforts to challenge the results of the 2020 election.

The subpoena to Jeffrey Clark, revealed Wednesday, came amid signs of an escalating congressional inquiry. At least three of the people involved in organizing and running the rally that preceded

the violent riot are handing over documents in response to subpoenas from the committee.

The demands for documents and testimony from Clark reflect the committee's efforts to probe not only the deadly insurrection but also the tumult that roiled the Justice Department in the weeks leading up to it as Trump and his allies leaned on government lawyers to advance his baseless claims that the election results were fraudulent. Trump loyalists who wrongly believed the election had been stolen stormed the Capitol in an effort to disrupt the

congressional certification of Democrat Joe Biden's victory.

Clark, an assistant attorney general in the Trump administration, has emerged as a pivotal character in that saga. A Senate committee report issued last week shows how he championed Trump's efforts to undo the election results and clashed as a result with Justice Department superiors who resisted the pressure, culminating in a dramatic White House meeting at which Trump ruminated about elevating Clark to attorney general.

"The Select Committee's in-

vestigation has revealed credible evidence that you attempted to involve the Department of Justice in efforts to interrupt the peaceful transfer of power," the chairman of the committee, Democratic Rep. Bennie Thompson, of Mississippi, wrote in a letter to Clark announcing the subpoena.

While Trump ultimately did not appoint Clark acting attorney general, Clark's "efforts risked involving the Department of Justice in actions that lacked evidentiary foundation and threatened to subvert the rule of law," Thompson added.

Judge dismisses 9 voters' election fraud case in Ga.

Associated Press

ATLANTA — A judge on Wednesday dismissed a lawsuit alleging fraud in Georgia's most populous county during the 2020 election. The suit sought a review of some 147,000 absentee ballots to see if any were illegitimate.

The lawsuit was filed in December and alleged evidence of fraudulent ballots and improper ballot counting in Fulton County. It was filed by nine Georgia voters and spearheaded by Garland Favorito, a longtime critic of Georgia's election systems.

Henry County Superior Court Chief Judge Brian Amero's order dismissing the case says the voters who brought the lawsuit "failed to allege a particularized injury" and therefore lacked the standing to claim that their state constitutional rights had been violated. Amero also noted that Georgia's secretary of state's office on Tuesday provided a "substantive and detailed response" to his

request for an update on any investigations into allegations of fraudulent or counterfeit ballots in Fulton County.

Favorito expressed frustration after the ruling, saying his team had "prepared diligently to show the evidence of our allegations" at a hearing the judge had previously scheduled for Nov. 15. He said an appeal is planned.

"All citizens of Georgia have a right to know whether or not counterfeit ballots were injected into the Fulton Co. election results, how many were injected, where they came from and how we can prevent it from happening again in future elections," Favorito wrote in an email. "It is not adequate for any organizations to secretly tell us there are no counterfeit ballots and refuse to let the public inspect them."

"Today was a win for democracy," Fulton County Board of Commissioners Chairman Robb Pitts said in an emailed statement.

Facebook harassment policy now protects public figures

Associated Press

Facebook will expand its policies on harassment to remove more harmful content, the company said Wednesday in its latest change following congressional testimony from a whistleblower who faulted the social media giant for not doing enough to stop harmful content.

Under the new, more detailed harassment policy, Facebook will bar content that degrades or sexualizes public figures, including celebrities, elected officials and others in the public eye. Existing policies already prohibit similar content about private individuals.

Another change will add more protections from harassment to government dissidents, journalists and human rights activists around the world.

Lastly, the company based in Menlo Park, Calif., announced it will ban all coordinated harassment, in which a group of indi-

viduals work together to bully another user. That change will apply to all users.

The changes come amid mounting criticism of the company's handling of hate speech, misinformation and negative content. Concerns about harassment range from teenagers bullying each other on Instagram to the coordinated abuse of journalists and dissidents by groups linked to authoritarian governments.

Last week, former Facebook data scientist Frances Haugen told Congress that the company has done too little to address its responsibility for spreading harmful content, and too often chooses profit over its users' best interests.

Days later, the company announced that it would introduce new features designed to protect kids, including one encouraging them to take a break from the platform.

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Red Sox ride laundry cart to ALCS

Associated Press

It was the middle of the pandemic, the Boston Red Sox stunk, and with major league ballparks empty in 2020, they couldn't even count on the crowd to get them going. During one especially humdrum road game at the Rays' Tropicana Field, coach Jason Varitek suggested they needed to put some fun back into the game.

The words had barely left his lips when Christian Vázquez hit a homer. So backup catcher Kevin Plawecki grabbed a nearby laundry cart, waited for Vázquez to return to the dugout, and told him, "Hey, hop in."

"We hadn't talked about it — nothing," Plawecki said on Wednesday. "He sat right in, and I pushed him. And ever since it's been our thing, I guess."

The 2004 Red Sox were "The Idiots." In '13 they grew bushy beards. And if the 2021 team performs like its predecessors and wins the World Series, the lingering image could be "Tun-

nel Time" — the home run laundry cart drive through the dugout.

Started on a lark in a last-place season, the Red Sox have continued the celebration this year and ridden it all the way to a spot in the AL Championship Series, which begins Friday night in Houston.

"It looked great in a difficult season for them to be able to find something that's fun, and be able to celebrate something in the game," manager Alex Cora said. "It means a lot for them. For them to have fun with that, that's great."

Sports teams have long found unique ways to celebrate their wins and other milestones, from the now routine post-victory Gatorade bath to jackets or jewelry awarded for big plays.

Even in baseball, where traditionalists sneer at anything that might seem disrespectful or undignified, teams haven't been afraid to show some personality.

The Phillies have a straw Home Run Hat, the Rockies have "homer shades," and the

Blue Jays have a blue blazer for members of their "HR Club." The New York Mets ride a stuffed pony through the dugout to celebrate homers; the San Diego Padres pass around a seven-pound bejeweled necklace dubbed the "Swagg Chain."

During their 2019 World Series run, Washington Nationals car buffs Adam Eaton and Howie Kendrick celebrated by pretending to drive in the dugout — stepping on an imaginary clutch, shifting fake gears and making loud revving engine noises with their mouths.

"Everybody's got their own way of having fun. That's what it's all about," Plawecki said in an on-field interview during batting practice at Fenway Park. "It's not an 'In your face' to anybody. It's just a way for us to have fun, keep it light."

Boston's cart is now a new, customized model that may never have been touched by actual laundry; it even had its own bobble head day (though the Red Sox will tell you that the giveaway honored J.D.

Martinez, who was riding in it).

During the playoffs, infielder José Iglesias has taken responsibility for the "carrito," and declared himself the official chauffeur. Acquired too late in the season to be eligible for the playoff roster, Iglesias said he was happy to contribute in the dugout, since he can't on the field.

"It's a good way for him to stay involved with the guys," Plawecki said. "I know it kills him to not actually be out there with us. He's such a help for all of us."

Plawecki said he had no regrets about giving up his cart-driving duties. After all, the way the Red Sox are going, he needs to save his energy: Boston hit two homers in an AL wild-card victory over the rival Yankees and nine more in the four-game Division Series win over Tampa Bay — a franchise postseason record five of them in Game 2 alone.

"They kept me very, very busy," Iglesias said. "And I hope I get busier over the course of the playoffs."

Weah, Dest spark US to qualifier win over Costa Rica

Associated Press

COLUMBUS, Ohio — Sixty seconds in, Costa Rica was celebrating and the U.S. World Cup campaign was spinning out of control.

Sergio Dest and Tim Weah, two young Americans unscarred by the failure of four years ago, got them back on track.

Shoelaces untied, Dest curled an 18-yard, left-footed shot past Keylor Navas in the 25th minute. Weah's shot for the go-ahead goal deflected off the near post and then off backup goalkeeper Leonel Moreira in the 66th, and the U.S. exhaled with a 2-1 victory Wednesday night that eased pressure as

qualifying neared the halfway point.

"We can't lose again," the 20-year-old Dest said. "We needed it really bad."

Goalkeeper Zack Steffen, one of nine new starters inserted following Sunday's dismal 1-0 loss at Panama, made a costly headed clearance that led to Keysher Fuller's goal 60 seconds in, the fastest goal conceded by the U.S. in 23 years.

Dest ended a streak of eight straight first halves without an American goal following a pass from Yunus Musah on the right flank after Weah had switched the ball from the opposite side. Dest cut toward the center and curled the ball just beyond Na-

vas' outstretched right hand into the upper corner.

Navas left at halftime because of a strained adductor muscle.

Weah, a 21-year-old son of Liberia President and former FIFA Player of the Year George Weah, joined the lineup about five minutes before kickoff after Paul Arriola injured his right groin during warmups.

"Everything was kind of a rush. I had to warm up, get ready quick," Weah said.

With Matthew Hoppe on the touchline about to replace Weah, Weston McKennie passed to Dest, who dished to Weah. His 10-yard shot from an angle hit the post and ricocheted off a diving Moreira and in.

"It just so happened that the ball came out wide to Serge, and I saw the run," Weah said. "I just hit it one time, and it happened to go in."

Weah originally was credited with a goal, but it was changed to an own goal by Moreira.

"We'll talk to FIFA about that," U.S. coach Gregg Berhalter said.

Mexico leads with 14 points after a 2-0 win at El Salvador, and the U.S. has 11 after six of 14 matches going into its Nov. 12 meeting with El Tri in Cincinnati.

Canada has 10 after a 4-1 win over Panama, which has eight. The top three teams qualify for the World Cup.

Jackson has rearmed Ravens' offense

Associated Press

OWINGS MILLS, Md. — Colts owner Jim Irsay was so impressed with Lamar Jackson that he took to Twitter the next day — and said the Baltimore quarterback's performance against Indianapolis might have been the best in NFL history.

And Irsay, as he explained in his tweet, was at Wrigley Field the day Gale Sayers scored six touchdowns.

The superlatives keep rolling in for Jackson, who threw for 442 yards and four touchdowns in a 31-25 overtime win over Indianapolis on Monday night.

It wasn't quite a perfect night for Jackson, who fumbled near the goal line, but after that the Ravens scored touchdowns on their final four possessions.

The quarterback who has faced questions about his passing ability finished 37-for-43 in that department, leading Baltimore to a victory.

"Man, it's special. He's just scratching the surface on how good he can be," Baltimore defensive lineman Calais Campbell said. "I think he's still 24 years old. I mean, this is crazy — what he's capable of doing. I know he's notorious for what he can do with his legs, and I feel like he got a lot of disrespect on his arm talent, and I think a lot of people are eating their words right now."

Jackson won MVP honors two seasons ago, and it's been clear for a while that his blend of passing and running can be really difficult to defend.

In truth, he's been pretty efficient throwing the ball throughout his career, completing 64.5% of his passes with 76 touchdowns and 21 interceptions.

Still, it was fair to point out that Jackson hasn't attempted more than 401 passes in a season — in a league where top quarterbacks routinely surpass 500. If you added Jackson's passing and rushing yardage, he accounted for 4,333 yards in his MVP season but just 3,762 last season.

The Ravens finished first in the NFL in rushing and last in passing in 2020 — and that added up to a No. 19 ranking in total offense.

This season Baltimore is No. 1 in total offense. Jackson's passing and rushing adds up to 1,860 yards — also the best mark in the league. That should make any remaining critics of Jackson's passing ability a little quieter.

"I don't know if they're going to stop talking about it. I don't really know," Jackson said. "All I know is my focus is on winning."

Whether by design or necessity — the Ravens' top two running backs went down with season-ending injuries — Jackson is

throwing more, and he's handling it impressively. He's averaging 33 pass attempts per game, up from 25 last season.

"Look at the last couple of games, he's just calm, composed, and he's a leader, man," tight end Mark Andrews said. "That's what we all look to. There were mistakes. There were a couple mistakes that were made, but he just keeps on coming."

Jackson is also doing this without all the targets he was expecting to play with. Rookie receiver Rashod Bateman hasn't played yet because of groin problems, and newcomer Sammy Watkins left Monday's game with a hamstring injury.

Jackson's big game came on a night when the Ravens had their streak of 43 consecutive 100-yard rushing games snapped. After sputtering through the first half, Baltimore unleashed Jackson in the second. He threw for 335 yards after halftime.

This coming week, Jackson faces Justin Herbert and the Los Angeles Chargers in a matchup of division leaders. It's now clear that the Chargers — and the rest of the Ravens' opponents — need to respect Baltimore's previously maligned passing game.

"I've been believing in myself. The Ravens' organization has been believing in me," Jackson said. "I really haven't seen my peak yet. It's still early in the season."

Jaguars try to end skid 4,000 miles from home

Associated Press

JACKSONVILLE, Fla. — Urban Meyer is undefeated overseas.

Meyer was Notre Dame's receivers coach in 1996 when the Fighting Irish played Navy in Dublin, Ireland. Notre Dame won 54-27. Twenty-five years later, Meyer will try to get to 2-0 when his winless Jacksonville Jaguars (0-5) play a "home game" against cross-state foe Miami (1-4) at Tottenham Hotspur Stadium in London on Sunday.

"It's just kind of ironic we're going all the way to London to play a team from Miami," rookie quarterback Trevor Lawrence said Wednesday.

The Jaguars have lost 20 consecutive games, six shy of the NFL record set by Tampa Bay in 1977. They actually have a better winning percentage in London (.429) than in Jacksonville (.333) since they started playing annually across the pond in 2013.

London is supposed to be Jacksonville's second home. The 8,500-mile round trip is significant for the small-market franchise's financial stability. The Jaguars credit about

11% of their local revenue to playing annually abroad.

Jacksonville's ticket, television, sponsorship and stadium revenue streams are smaller than NFL teams in larger markets. Earning money in London helps offset some of the disparity, and the game remains a critical part of the team's long-term plan.

The Jags played a "home game" at iconic Wembley Stadium every year between 2013 and 2019 and would have played there again last year had COVID-19 not shuttered international travel. The team signed a long-term deal with the NFL that granted it extended territorial rights — essentially allowing sponsorship deals — in the United Kingdom and landed it ticket revenue from Wembley, an 86,000-seat venue.

Jacksonville owner Shad Khan, who also owns Fulham Football Club, is ready to sign another contract to remain "London's team" and play one home game annually at Wembley. Khan tried to strengthen the Jaguars' foothold in London by bidding to buy Wembley in 2018. He withdrew his offer for

the English Football Association's main asset after recognizing the extent of opposition to the sale.

Khan surely still would be interested in purchasing Wembley and would prefer playing there Sunday. A confluence of factors related to scheduling issues caused by COVID-19 forced Jacksonville to settle for playing one of three NFL games at Tottenham Hotspur Stadium.

And the Jags ended up facing the Dolphins in a matchup of Florida teams that are a five-hour drive apart.

Jacksonville has 26 players on its 53-man roster who have played at least one game in London. It was a higher percentage a few years ago, but a roster overhaul and missing last year's trip caused that number to dip.

Meyer and several assistants also will be making the trip for the first time. Meyer is relying on a group of staffers who have been over there enough times to have it down to a science to make it smooth for everyone — and give the team its best chance of ending an embarrassing skid.

Like a paisley tie, Big 12 defenses are trendy again

Associated Press

Gary Patterson compares efforts by defenses to keep pace with changing offenses to the on-and-off fashion cycle of the paisley tie.

In the nearly four decades that Patterson has been in college football, including two decades as TCU's head coach, he's seen great defenses come and go, especially in a score-happy league like the Big 12.

Over the past 18 months as the coronavirus pandemic forced college teams to change their routines, meet less often in person and more by way of technology, Patterson said he believes Big 12 defenses adapted.

And improved.

"You just look at the numbers and the way people, at least in our league, are playing defense," Patterson said.

Kansas State, No. 4 Oklahoma, Iowa State and No. 12 Oklahoma State rank in the top 12 nationally in rushing defense.

The Cyclones are third nationally in total defense and lead the conference in many other categories. Oklahoma State is first in the league in third-down conversion defense and the fewest touchdown passes allowed, while Baylor is tops in interceptions and has returned two turnovers for touchdowns.

Kansas State, Oklahoma State and Oklahoma average at least three sacks per game.

Beyond the numbers, some teams have evolved. Patterson points to Kansas State, which is giving opponents a new 3-3-5 defensive look this season similar to those used with success in the NFL and at other colleges.

The pandemic "gave people an opportunity to do some extra things and do some stuff to try to catch up," Patterson said. "I'm not sure we had any more challenges during that time. If anything, I think it gave us a little bit more time to kind of look at things."

Patterson said the pattern of standout Big 12 defenses "goes through ebbs and flows" similar to NFL teams trying to keep up with changes made by other offenses.

That brings up the reference to the paisley tie, which "goes out of fashion," Patterson said. "I think in my 61 years, it's come back three or four times where it's now a favorite of people. And so I think offense and defense kind of go that way. I think there for a couple of years, offense really had the advantage. I think defense has caught up a little bit with some things."

Nylander, Campbell lead Leafs past Canadiens

Associated Press

TORONTO — William Nylander broke a tie at 1:06 of the third period and the Toronto Maple Leafs beat the Montreal Canadiens 2-1 in the opener for both teams.

Nylander took a pass from Morgan Rielly off the rush before faking a slap shot and shooting high to goalie Jake Allen's short side.

In a rematch of Montreal's seven-game victory in the first round of the playoffs last season, Toronto won in front of 18,493 masked and fully vaccinated fans in Scotiabank Arena's first regular-season crowd since March 10, 2020.

Jack Campbell made 31 saves for the Maple Leafs, allowing only Jonathan Drouin's first-period goal. Pierre Engvall tied it on a power play midway through the second.

Toronto star Auston Matthews, the NHL leader with 41 goals in 52 games last season, sat out because of a wrist injury that hasn't fully healed from surgery.

Ducks 4, Jets 1: Mason McTavish became the youngest player in franchise history to score, leading host Anaheim to a season-opening win over Winnipeg.

The 18-year-old McTavish — the third overall pick in this year's NHL Draft — put in a loose puck 13:20 into the first period to give Anaheim a 2-0 lead.

At 18 years, 256 days old, McTavish surpassed the previous franchise mark set by Oleg Tverdovsky (18 years, 259 days) on Feb. 1, 1995, at Dallas.

McTavish also had an assist on Adam Henrique's power-play goal. Kevin Shattenkirk and Rickard Rakell also scored for Anaheim. John Gibson made 33 saves.

Kyle Connor scored the Jets' goal in the second period. Connor Hellebuyck stopped 18 shots.

Avalanche 4, Blackhawks 2: Bowen Byram scored his first NHL goal and added an assist as short-handed Colorado beat visiting Chicago in the opener for both teams.

Nazem Kadri and Gabriel Landeskog each had a goal and an assist for the Avalanche, who played without star center Nathan MacKinnon and head coach Jared Bednar. Both are in the COVID-19 protocol and away from the team. Assistant coaches Ray Bennett and Nolan Pratt led the team against Chicago.

Darcy Kuemper stopped 32 shots in his

Colorado debut, and Jack Johnson added a goal.

Dominik Kubalik and Connor Murphy scored for the Blackhawks. Marc-Andre Fleury made 32 saves in his debut with Chicago.

Oilers 3, Canucks 2: Kyle Turris scored the shootout winner and host Edmonton beat Vancouver in the season opener for both teams.

Jesse Puljujarvi and Zach Hyman scored in regulation for the Oilers, who squandered a late lead. Edmonton also got a pair of assists from Connor McDavid. Mike Smith finished with 36 saves.

Oliver Ekman-Larsson and Quinn Hughes scored for the Canucks. Thatcher Demko made 32 saves.

Capitals 5, Rangers 1: While the fistcuffs never materialized, host Washington earned a season-opening against division-rival New York memorable for Alex Ovechkin's 731st and 732nd goals and Hendrix Lapierre's first.

Ovechkin scored twice to pass Marcel Dionne for sole possession of fifth place on the NHL goals list, putting him a couple of steps closer to Wayne Gretzky's record that had long seemed unbreakable. And Gretzky was even part of Lapierre's goal, talking about his relationship with Ovechkin on national television while the 19-year-old put the puck into the net and went sliding into the boards.

Lapierre was all smiles after his parents, grandparents, brother, sister and girlfriend witnessed his NHL debut as part of a sellout crowd and will always have the "Great One" on the highlight reel of his first goal. Ovechkin, one game into a new five-year contract to chase the mark, needs 163 goals to pass Gretzky.

The hype going in was more about the aftermath of incidents between these teams last season and the changes the Rangers made over the summer to get bigger and tougher. They debuted a new-look lineup featuring gritty forwards Barclay Goodrow and Sammy Blais, enforcer Ryan Reaves and big defensemen Patrik Nemeth and Jarred Tinordi, but the closest thing to a fight was a pair of roughing penalties in the first period.

Washington goals filled the void.