

US reviewing Saudi ties after oil production cut

By J.P. LAWRENCE
Stars and Stripes

A decision by Saudi Arabia that will indirectly help Russia fund its war in Ukraine has the United States weighing whether to scale back ties with a Middle East ally that houses thousands of U.S. troops and buys more American arms than any other nation.

The Saudi-backed move by the OPEC+ cartel to slash oil production has led President Joe Biden to review U.S.-Saudi ties amid calls by lawmakers to withdraw troops and missile defense batteries deployed there.

Biden is analyzing whether the relationship with Saudi Arabia still serves U.S. interests, National Security Council spokesman John Kirby told reporters Tuesday in a conference call.

U.S. officials asked their Saudi counterparts to delay a decision on oil production for a

month, The Wall Street Journal reported Tuesday. Saudi officials dismissed the request, saying their decision was purely economic and had no political dimensions, the report said.

But Russia, a member of OPEC+, stands to take in greater oil revenues if a more limited supply results in higher prices, as expected.

“We thought it was a short-sighted decision and that it benefited Russia,” said Kirby, who declined to give further details on the review.

Any change in the relationship will have to balance the desire to send a message to Riyadh with the value the Saudis provide in advancing U.S. security goals.

The country offers stable staging points for a range of different operations, including protecting “interests in the region against hostile action by Iran and Iran-backed groups,” a White House statement in

June said.

The roughly 3,000 U.S. service members there maintain aircraft and provide air and missile defense with the Saudi government.

Other U.S. troops and contractors work on defense and security cooperation programs. Riyadh is Washington’s largest foreign military sales customer, with more than \$100 billion in contracts supporting the country’s security ministries, according to a State Department fact sheet.

But Biden’s remarks that U.S.-Saudi ties need to be reconsidered are a “strong signal that the relationship is in trouble,” said Jeff Colgan, a political science professor at Brown University.

The president told CNN’s Jake Tapper that Saudi Arabia should expect “some consequences for what they’ve done with Russia,” but he declined to give specifics.

“Oil has always glued the two countries together,” Colgan said. “Lately, however, the relationship seems to be under as much strain as ever.”

A bill introduced by three congressional Democrats last week would withdraw troops as well as Patriot and Terminal High Altitude Area Defense anti-missile interceptors from Saudi Arabia.

The legislation seeks to give Biden tools “to recalibrate these relationships so they’re more in our interest,” one of the lawmakers, Rep. Tom Malinowski, D-N.J., said on CNN last week.

While most modern presidents have claimed broad powers to wage war, some legal scholars think Congress is constitutionally authorized to regulate military activity, such as by setting funding constraints and time limits on the deployment of troops, a Lawfare Institute blog post said in 2019.

US security strategy makes Mideast lower priority

By J.P. LAWRENCE
Stars and Stripes

The United States’ newly released national security strategy calls for restrained use of the American military in the Middle East.

Instead, it prioritizes “out-competing China and constraining Russia” while criticizing the expanded missions of U.S. wars in recent decades.

“We will not use our military to change regimes or remake societies,” the document says. “We have too often defaulted to military-centric policies underpinned by an unrealistic faith in force and regime change to deliver sustainable outcomes.”

The strategy includes plans to continue partnerships with Middle Eastern countries and to help protect their security, pa-

trol waterways, integrate defense networks and support human rights.

Much of the document concerns competition with Russia and China. Russia is mentioned 71 times in the document, and China is mentioned 55 times. The Middle East is written only 11 times, Afghanistan is said four times, and Iraq and Saudi Arabia go unmentioned.

Devoting fewer resources to the Middle East would allow the Pentagon to concentrate on deterring China from attacking Taiwan or other territories in Asia and to keep focusing on Russia, which is waging an unprovoked war in Ukraine.

Security analysts have said President Joe Biden’s strategy continues efforts by the Obama and Trump administrations to redirect focus to China and Russia.

“I see more continuity than change,” said Michael Eisenstadt, a fellow at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy. “They’re further providing affirmation of a policy we’ve been attempting for a decade.”

Biden’s national security strategy will prioritize defensive alliances and says the U.S. will deepen Israel’s growing ties to its neighbors and other Arab states.

Israel was absorbed into U.S. Central Command’s area of responsibility last year. The realignment came after Israel signed the Trump administration-backed Abraham Accords with leaders of Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates on Sept. 15, 2020.

“Our hope is the Abraham Accords create a way to advance our interests without having as big of a presence in the past,” Eisenstadt said.

Marines pair HIMARS, stealth jets in drills

By SETH ROBSON
Stars and Stripes

The Marine Corps is pairing long-range rocket systems that have proved their worth in Ukraine with stealth fighters for training in Japan and the Philippines, a tactic that experts claim may help deter Chinese aggression.

F-35B Lightning IIs and High Mobility Artillery Rocket Systems, or HIMARS, are in drills with 3,000 Marines on Japan's northern island of Hokkaido and on the Philippines' main island of Luzon. The two exercises — Kamandag in the Philippines and Resolute Dragon in Japan — began early this month and conclude Friday.

Marine Corps Commandant Gen. David

Berger touted the exercises in a series of tweets Friday and Saturday that noted the allies involved, which include South Korea, and the “impressive weapon systems” deployed in a “geographically distributed environment.”

The stealth jets in the Philippines, from Marine Fighter Attack Squadron 121 of Marine Corps Air Station Iwakuni, Japan, will support ground troops during live-fire training Thursday, said 3rd Marine Division operations officer Col. Darryl Ayers.

“For the Marines on the ground, all they know is that they’re getting support from an aircraft,” he told Stars and Stripes by phone Tuesday from Fort Bonifacio in Manila. “The F-35 is a highly capable aircraft but,

on the ground, as long as they’re getting the support that they requested, they don’t really care what’s up there.”

The Marines’ variant of the joint strike fighter can take off from short runways and hover to land vertically. The jet’s stealth capabilities make it hard for the enemy to detect, and its computers can share targeting data with other aircraft and weapons.

The truck-mounted HIMARS can strike targets 50 miles away and rapidly move around the battlefield making it tough for the enemy to pinpoint. The Defense Department, which has sent 20 HIMARS launchers to Ukraine to help battle Russian invaders, announced the shipment of four more of the weapons Oct. 4.

Tricare to reduce number of pharmacies in network

By JONATHAN SNYDER
Stars and Stripes

A new contract from prescription-drug benefit manager Express Scripts will force nearly 15,000 pharmacies out of the Tricare network by the end of this month, according to a spokeswoman for a small pharmacies’ association.

The new contract will remove 14,963 pharmacies from the network by Oct. 24, leaving approximately 41,000 pharmacies.

A proposed contract Express Scripts sent to participating pharmacies in August lowered their reimbursement rates below even their own costs, Anne Cassity, vice president of federal and state government affairs at the National Community Pharmacists Association, told Stars and Stripes by phone Sept. 22. She

said association members had never before seen anything like it.

“We saw a massive reduction in reimbursements to the tune of far below even acquisition price for our pharmacies,” Cassity said. “So they would be underwater on every prescription that they dispense for a Tricare beneficiary.”

Many small, local pharmacies had to refuse the new contract, she said.

“This is going to have a huge effect, especially in rural areas where it’s generally independent pharmacies,” Cassity said.

Express Scripts, a pharmacy benefit management company based in St. Louis, handles annual pharmacy contract negotiations on behalf of Tricare. It also provides a mail order prescription service for Tricare beneficiaries.

In August 2021, the Department of Defense awarded a \$4.3 billion contract to Express Scripts that incentivized the company to reduce the size of the Tricare retail pharmacy network, according to email and phone conversations with NCPA spokeswoman Andie Pivarunas.

Tricare denies its new contract will have a huge, negative impact on beneficiaries living in rural areas.

“The Tricare retail network will continue to meet or exceed Tricare’s standard for pharmacy access,” Tricare spokesman Peter Graves said. “[Defense Health Agency] expects nearly 95% of beneficiaries will maintain access to at least two network pharmacies within 15 minutes from their home, and over 99% will have access within 30 minutes.”

3 Navy officers reprimanded in death of SEAL trainee

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Navy’s Special Warfare Command has reprimanded three officers in connection with the February death of a SEAL candidate who collapsed and died of acute pneumonia just hours after completing the grueling Hell Week test, according to Navy officials and a new report.

Commanders did not directly blame the officers for the death of SEAL candidate Kyle Mullen, and no one has been fired. But a Navy investigation into his death has trig-

gered a number of changes in how sailors are monitored during the physically and mentally exhausting test, and has prompted the command to seek and conduct expanded testing for performance-enhancing drugs.

A new report released by the command concluded that Mullen, 24, from Manalapan, N.J., died “in the line of duty, not due to his own misconduct.” It said he had an enlarged heart that also contributed to his death, which came soon after he successfully finished Hell Week, the five-and-a-half-day test that comes during the first phase of

assessment for SEAL candidates striving to get into the Basic Underwater Demolition/SEAL, or BUD/S, class. The training was at the Naval Special Warfare Training Center in Coronado, Calif.

According to officials, administrative “non-punitive” letters were given to Navy Capt. Brian Drechsler, who is commodore of the Naval Special Warfare Center; Capt. Brad Geary, commanding officer of Naval Special Warfare’s Basic Training Command; and an unnamed senior medical officer.

Voting access on ballot in some key states

Associated Press

All but lost in the shadow of major contests for U.S. Senate and governor, voters in some battleground states will be deciding ballot proposals this November that could reshape the way they vote in the next presidential election.

In Arizona, scene of the closest presidential contest in 2020, the question is whether to require more identification to vote in the future. In Michigan, another swing state, voters will consider whether to make it easier to cast early ballots.

Voting-related proposals will be on the ballot in several other states, including a measure to adopt ranked-choice voting in Nevada that — if approved this year — would need a second vote in 2024 to take effect. Most of the measures are garnering little attention but could have profound effects on voting in some of the

most politically competitive states for years to come. They mark an escalation of what voting expert Jon Sherman describes as “the voting wars” — battles between Democrats, Republicans and activist groups over laws specifying how people register, obtain mail-in ballots, prove their identity and cast ballots.

“The parties and their allies are fighting over every last voting rule and trying to make predictions about how they think it will help or hurt their chances of winning, particularly in closely competitive states,” said Sherman, litigation director and senior counsel at the Fair Elections Center, a nonprofit that advocates for voting access.

Efforts to change voting laws ramped up after the 2000 presidential election, when a U.S. Supreme Court decision in Florida’s exceptionally close race gave Republican George W. Bush the vic-

tory over Democrat Al Gore. It intensified after the 2020 election, as Republican President Donald Trump refused to acknowledge his loss to Democrat Joe Biden while pressing false claims of widespread fraud, and some Republican-led states responded by passing restrictive voting laws.

Arizona, which Biden won by about 10,500 votes, was one center of controversy. After a six-month review focused on Arizona’s largest county, a Trump-friendly firm hired by Republican state lawmakers ended up with vote results confirming Biden’s victory. Republicans who control the Legislature subsequently placed a proposed constitutional amendment on the November ballot that would strengthen voter identification laws. It would require people voting in person to show a photo ID, and eliminate a current alternative of providing two documents bearing a person’s name

and address, such as a recent utility bill and a bank statement.

People voting with mailed ballots — the vast majority in Arizona — would have to list their date of birth and either their driver’s license number, a state identification number or the last four digits of their Social Security number.

Republican state Sen. J.D. Mesnard, who sponsored the measure, said the intent is to “make the election as secure as possible” while addressing “a growing crisis in confidence” that could discourage some people from voting.

But rather than reassuring voters, tougher ID requirements could dissuade some from voting at all and actually lead to fraud by exposing personal information, said Darrell Hill, policy director of the American Civil Liberties Union of Arizona, which opposes the measure.

Attorneys argue over school shooter’s fate: death or prison

Associated Press

FORT LAUDERDALE, Fla. — The prosecutor and defense attorney for Florida school shooter Nikolas Cruz agreed Tuesday that his 2018 attack that killed 17 people was horrible, but disagreed in their closing arguments on whether it was an act of evil worthy of execution or one of a broken person who should be imprisoned for life.

Lead prosecutor Mike Satz and his defense counterpart, Melisa McNeill, painted for the 12 jurors competing pictures of what drove Cruz’s attack at Parkland’s Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School on Valentine’s Day.

For Satz, Cruz was driven by antisocial personality disorder — in lay terms, he’s a sociopath. He deserves a death sentence because he “was hunting his victims” as he stalked a three-story classroom building for seven minutes. He fired his AR-15-style

semiautomatic rifle into some victims at close range and returned to wounded victims as they lay helpless “to finish them off.”

McNeill said neither Cruz nor herself has ever denied what he did and that “he knew right from wrong and he chose wrong.” But she said the former Stoneman Douglas student is “a broken, brain-damaged, mentally ill young man,” doomed from conception by the heavy drinking and drug use of his birth mother during pregnancy. She argued for a sentence of life without parole.

“It’s the right thing to do. Mercy is what makes us civilized. Giving mercy to Nikolas will say more about who you are than it will ever say about him,” McNeill told the jury.

Cruz, 24, pleaded guilty a year ago to murdering 14 students and three staff members and wounding 17 others.

NASA reports its asteroid strike resulted in big nudge

Associated Press

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. — A spacecraft that plowed into a small, harmless asteroid millions of miles away succeeded in shifting its orbit, NASA said Tuesday in announcing the results of its save-the-world test.

The space agency attempted the test two weeks ago to see if in the future a killer rock could be nudged out of Earth’s way.

“This mission shows that NASA is trying to be ready for whatever the universe throws at us,” NASA Administrator Bill Nelson said during a briefing in Washington.

The Dart spacecraft carved a crater into the asteroid Dimorphos on Sept. 26, hurling debris into space and creating a comet-like trail of dust and rubble stretching several thousand miles. It took consecutive nights of telescope observations from

Chile and South Africa to determine how much the impact altered the path of the asteroid around its bigger companion.

Before the impact, the moonlet took 11 hours and 55 minutes to circle its parent asteroid. Scientists had anticipated shaving off 10 minutes, but Nelson said the impact shortened the asteroid’s orbit by 32 minutes.

“Let’s all just kind of take a moment to soak this in ... for the first time ever, humanity has changed the orbit” of a celestial body, noted Lori Glaze, NASA’s director of planetary science.

The team’s scientists said the amount of debris apparently played a role in the outcome. The impact may also have left Dimorphos wobbling a bit, said NASA program scientist Tom Statler. That may affect the orbit, but it will never go back to its original location, he noted.

Official: NATO countries looking to help Ukraine with air defense

By JOHN VANDIVER
Stars and Stripes

The United States and its allies are aiming to provide Ukraine with an integrated air defense system that will give enhanced protection to high-priority parts of the country, the top American military officer said Wednesday.

The system, to be built from a range of assets from multiple countries, will involve everything from short-range, low altitude systems to medium, long and high-altitude systems, Joint Chiefs Chairman Gen. Mark Milley told reporters.

“So it’s quite complicated from a technical standpoint,” said Milley, who did not detail the timeline for putting such a system into action. “(But) it is achievable, and that’s what we’re aiming at.”

Milley and Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin led a meeting in Brussels of the Ukraine Defense Contact Group, a collection of some 50 allies and partner states involved in the effort to get more weapons into Ukraine.

Allied defense ministers are gathered this week at NATO headquarters for two days of talks, which began Wednesday.

The main focus was how to get more air defense weapons into Ukraine, which in recent days has been hit with a Russian missile barrage in numer-

ous cities.

The salvos are seen as President Vladimir Putin’s retaliation for an explosion that severely damaged a bridge the Kremlin built over the Kerch Strait after it illegally annexed Crimea in 2014.

Those attacks are hitting targets with no discernible military value, killing civilians and destroying nonmilitary infrastructure, Austin said.

“The malice and cruelty of Putin’s war of choice rooted in aggression and waged with deep contempt for the rules of war,” Austin said.

Russia’s missile attacks appear to have added urgency to the arming effort. On Wednesday, Germany confirmed that the first of four state-of-the-art air defense systems it pledged had arrived in Ukraine. Artillery, infantry fighting vehicles and armored personnel carriers were other needs brought up by Ukraine during the meeting in Brussels. Despite the Russian missile attacks, Ukrainian forces have changed the dynamics of the war, Austin said.

“They’ve liberated hundreds of towns from Russian occupation. And they’ve retaken thousands of square kilometers of their land,” Austin said.

Austin said the U.S. is committed to providing Ukraine with military support over the long term.

Ukraine plant loses power; 8 arrested for bridge blast

Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine — Russian missile attacks caused a crippled nuclear plant in Ukraine to lose all external power for the second time in five days, increasing the risk of a radiation disaster because critical safety systems need electricity to operate, Ukraine’s state nuclear operator said Wednesday.

On-site monitors from the U.N.’s atomic energy watchdog reported the last remaining outside line to the Russian-occupied Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant was restored about eight hours later. The war-related interruption nonetheless highlighted “how precarious the situation is” at Europe’s largest nuclear plant, International Atomic Energy Agency Director Rafael Grossi said.

The nuclear scare came amid a flurry of developments in Russia’s 7½-month invasion of Ukraine.

Meanwhile, Russia’s main domestic security agency said eight people were arrested over an explosion on a bridge that links Russia to the Crimean Peninsula.

The Ukrainian president’s office said strikes Moscow ordered in retaliation for the bridge attack killed at least 14 people and wounded 34 in the last day.

Ukrainian nuclear power operator Energoatom said the Zaporizhzhia plant suffered a “blackout” Wednesday morning when a missile damaged an electrical substation, leading to the emergency shutdown of the plant’s last external power source. All six of the reactors were stopped earlier due to the war. But they still require electricity to prevent them from overheating to the point of a meltdown that could cause radiation to pour from Europe’s largest nuclear plant.

UK spy chief: Russian military ‘exhausted’

The Washington Post

LONDON — The United Kingdom’s top spy chief warned in a rare public speech Tuesday that Russian forces in Ukraine are overstretched and “exhausted” — and that President Vladimir Putin is committing “strategic errors in judgment.”

The assessment from Jeremy Fleming, head of the secretive GCHQ, Britain’s intelligence, cyber and security agency, comes after Putin drafted reservists to bolster his war effort and claimed a “massive strike” across Ukraine this week.

The missile attacks hit energy facilities and civilian infrastructure across the country, including in the heart of Kyiv, in retaliation for a weekend explosion on Russia’s strategic Crimean Bridge.

“Russia’s forces are exhausted. The use of prisoners to reinforce, and now the mobilization of tens of thousands of inexperienced conscripts, speaks of a desperate situation,” Fleming said in an address to the Royal United Services Institute

think tank in London.

“Far from the inevitable Russian military victory that their propaganda machine spouted, it’s clear that Ukraine’s courageous action on the battlefield and in cyberspace is turning the tide,” Fleming added.

Ukraine’s military has launched successful counteroffensives with the help of Western weapons, recapturing swaths of land previously held by Russian forces.

Putin’s “decision-making has proved flawed,” Fleming said, and he has “little effective internal challenge” from Russia’s military and political elite.

“We know — and Russian commanders on the ground know — that their supplies and munitions are running out,” he said.

Britain’s Defense Ministry has become a daily source of information since Russia invaded its neighbor in February, churning out frequent bite-sized updates on social media analyzing Moscow’s military strategy and war effort.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

2 from sunken boat fend off sharks during rescue

LA NEW ORLEANS — Two people from a sunken fishing boat were fending off sharks in the Gulf of Mexico when a crew rescued them and one other person from waters off the Louisiana coastline, the U.S. Coast Guard said.

The Coast Guard launched a search after a relative reported the three people failed to return from a fishing trip.

The three were wearing life-jackets and one was showing signs of hypothermia when they were rescued. They had been in the water more than 24 hours.

The news release said a Coast Guard boat crew saw two of the people fending off sharks, and both of them had injured hands. The crew pulled them from the water, and the helicopter crew lifted the third boater from the water.

Mayor helps family escape before train hits vehicle

GA VIENNA — A Georgia mayor helped a mother and three children escape from a sport utility vehicle that was stalled on railroad tracks with a train fast approaching.

Vienna Mayor Eddie Daniels was on his way to work when he saw the SUV in the dangerous position.

He said he helped the mom out first, then saw three children in the back seat — a 6-year-old, a 3-year-old and a 1-year-old. He said he got the two younger children out and was helping the 6-year-old when the train hit the vehicle.

Daniels said he remembers being caught between the train

and the SUV but still managed to get the last child out.

Daniels has a broken ankle and eight stitches on his head.

Riders endure 19-hour trip after train loses power

MI PONTIAC — What was supposed to be a 5½-hour rail trip from Detroit to Chicago turned into a 19-hour ordeal for passengers on an Amtrak train that lost power, leaving them without light, heat or running toilets.

Wolverine Train 351 left Pontiac about 6 a.m. EDT Friday. Some passengers were so frustrated that they got off the train well before it finally reached Chicago on Saturday, just after midnight CDT, MLive.com reported.

Amtrak has apologized to passengers and offered transportation vouchers, MLive.com reported.

The train stopped west of Ann Arbor due to the power problem, Amtrak spokesman Jason Abrams said. A brake issue caused another stoppage, this time in northwestern Indiana. Then there was another delay due to battery problems, Abrams added.

State pays \$2.75M to woman in highway crash

WA MALTBY — Washington state agreed to pay \$2.75 million to a woman who was seriously hurt in a rollover crash involving a state Department of Transportation vehicle on Highway 522.

On March 5, 2018, Kara Janneh, of Monroe, was driving her Jeep Cherokee east on the highway near Maltby with her toddler son in the back. Her lawsuit

said she didn't have time to stop when a Washington State Department of Transportation truck made an illegal U-turn.

Her son escaped serious injury but the lawsuit said Janneh suffered serious harm including a traumatic brain injury.

In 2019, she sued the state Department of Transportation. In September, the state conceded the crash was its fault in court filings. Shortly after, the lawsuit was settled for \$2.75 million, The Daily Herald reported.

Mayor pleads guilty to drunken-driving offense

IN FORT WAYNE — The mayor of Indiana's second-largest city pleaded guilty to a drunken-driving charge after a weekend crash that followed too much wine at a event.

Fort Wayne Mayor Tom Henry's blood-alcohol level was 0.152 after he was arrested, according to records. Indiana's legal limit to drive is 0.08.

Police said Henry was driving and his wife and mother-in-law were passengers when his vehicle moved left of the center line and struck another car. The other driver was not injured.

The 70-year-old Democrat pleaded guilty to operating a vehicle while intoxicated endangering a person. He will return to court Nov. 7.

Doctor admits illegally prescribing 120K pills

CA SANTA ANA — A Southern California doctor pleaded guilty to writing prescriptions for more than 120,000 opioid pills over a six-year span, including to an impaired driver who struck and

killed a bicyclist, federal prosecutors said.

In his plea agreement, Dr. Dzung Ahn Pham, of Tustin, admitted distributing the pills without a legitimate medical purpose in exchange for cash and insurance payments. He pleaded guilty to conspiracy to distribute controlled substances, the Orange County Register reported.

Pham faces up to 20 years in federal prison when he is sentenced on Jan. 6, 2023, the newspaper said.

From Jan. 1, 2013 and Dec. 17, 2018, Pham wrote prescriptions for around 53,000 Oxycodone pills, 68,000 hydrocodone pills and 29,000 pills of amphetamine salts using 18 different patient names, according to his plea agreement.

2,560-pound pumpkin wins contest, sets record

CA HALF MOON BAY — A horticulture teacher from Minnesota set a new U.S. record for the heaviest pumpkin after raising a giant gourd weighing 2,560 pounds.

Travis Gienger, of Anoka, Minn., set the new record and won an annual pumpkin-weighing contest in Northern California. He drove the gargantuan gourd for 35 hours to the 49th World Championship Pumpkin Weigh-Off in Half Moon Bay.

Gienger broke a record set last week in New York where a grower raised a massive pumpkin weighing 2,554 pounds.

A grower in Italy holds the world record for the heaviest pumpkin. He grew a 2,702-pound squash in 2021, according to Guinness World Records.

— From wire reports

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Alvarez homer in ninth lifts Astros

Associated Press

HOUSTON — Yordan Alvarez wrecked all of Seattle's carefully crafted strategy with one colossal swing.

The Mariners came to the postseason with a plan. Down to their last out, the October-tested Houston Astros weren't so easily outmatched.

Alvarez smashed a game-ending, three-run homer with two outs in the ninth inning off Robbie Ray, foiling the Mariners' move to use a Cy Young Award winner in a rare relief role and vaulting the Astros to an 8-7 win Tuesday in their playoff opener.

"It was something going into the series where we were at, looking at our rotation, where we were going to head, and talking with Robbie about using him out of the bullpen as a bullet, so to speak, for that type of scenario," Mariners manager Scott Servais said. "You know, bringing in a lefty against Alvarez, although Alvarez is one of the better hitters in the league."

"But we talked about it com-

ing into the series. We talked about it pregame today. I looked at it in the seventh inning and said, hey, this could happen. So that was the plan going in," he said.

Houston skipper Dusty Baker, who managed Servais while with the Giants, refused to second-guess his former player.

"If he gets him out, then it looks great ... next time Robbie Ray could win, but today we won," Baker said.

Trailing all game after a poor start by Justin Verlander, the AL West champion Astros overtook rookie star Julio Rodríguez and the wild-card Mariners at the end to begin their best-of-five Division Series.

The Astros had been 0-48 in their postseason history when trailing by more than a run after eight innings until Alvarez homered deep into the seats to overcome a 7-5 deficit.

With his Cuban parents in the stands, too.

"I think it's one of the most special moments that I've had in my career, having them there, and even for just the city

of Houston," Alvarez said through a translator. "They know that we're a team that never gives up."

The no-doubt drive was the first walk-off homer in postseason history with a team trailing by multiple runs. And it was just the second walk-off homer with a team down to its final out — the other was Kirk Gibson's startling shot that lifted the Dodgers over the A's in the 1988 World Series opener.

A stoic Ray said he was "just frustrated" after giving up the mammoth home run.

Houston rookie pinch-hitter David Hensley reached with one out in the ninth as Seattle closer Paul Sewald grazed his jersey with a pitch. Sewald struck out Jose Altuve before Jeremy Peña laced a single to center field to chase Sewald.

Servais then made the bold move to bring in Ray, who started Saturday at Toronto in the AL wild-card series, for a lefty vs. lefty matchup with Alvarez. Ray won the Cy Young last year with Toronto, had made only six relief appear-

ances in his career and had never earned a pro save.

A percentage move — or was it?

Alvarez had a .998 OPS against left-handed pitchers this season, by far the highest among qualified left-handed hitters, and 10 home runs. And his batting average against lefties was .321, compared to .299 vs righties.

Alvarez, who hit 37 homers in the regular season, turned around Servais' move by launching Ray's second pitch into the seats in right field to set off a wild celebration with his mom and dad in the seats.

It was the first time they got to see him play in the postseason after arriving from the island in August to watch him play professionally for the first time.

The Mariners, back in the playoffs this year for the first time since 2001, were on the wrong end of a big comeback this time after rallying from a seven-run deficit in Game 2 to sweep their wild-card series with Toronto.

Cole cruises as Yankees down Guardians in Game 1

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Gerrit Cole dreamed of this moment growing up in California, winning a postseason game in pinstripes at Yankee Stadium.

Harrison Bader had a similar fantasy while sitting in the first-base seats as a 15-year-old and watching New York's last championship team.

They combined to make each other's wishes come true.

Cole cruised for most of the night, Bader and Anthony Rizzo homered and the Yankees beat the Cleveland Guardians 4-1 on Tuesday in their AL Division Series opener.

Bader hit his first home run since the Yankees made the sur-

prising deal to acquire him from St. Louis at the trade deadline, tying the score with a third-inning drive to left-center on a Cal Quantrill sinker after Steven Kwan had homered in the top half.

A graduate of Horace Mann School, 5 miles from Yankee Stadium, Bader was in a walking boot with a foot injury at the time of the trade and didn't make his Yankees debut until Sept. 20.

"I want to validate myself," Bader said. "I want to play hard and I want to show my teammates and I want to show — my parents are in the stands — I want to show them all why I earned that uniform."

Not even another Josh Do-

naldson baserunning blunder could slow the Yankees, who have won six straight postseason games against Cleveland dating to a comeback from a 2-0 deficit in the 2017 Division Series. The crowd of 47,807 roared from the first pitch.

"It was just a really awesome experience," Cole said. "Sometimes when you feel the crowd or the energy, it sometimes can become a little easier just to quiet things down because it's so loud. I don't know if that makes sense, but it does to me."

After Kwan's homer, Cole hit Amed Rosario with a pitch and José Ramírez lined a gapper to left-center. Bader, a Gold Glove center fielder, saved a run by

cutting off the ball and holding the runners at second and third. Cole escaped a bases-loaded jam by striking out Andrés Giménez with his 60th pitch.

"That may be the at-bat of the game right there," Yankees manager Aaron Boone said.

Cole needed just eight pitches in the fourth and allowed just two more runners, on a single and his only walk. He left after giving up one run and four hits in 6 1/3 innings with eight strikeouts.

"We did a really good job early of driving his pitch count up," Cleveland manager Terry Francona said. "And then he had a real quick fourth inning, that kind of got him back into the game."

Castellanos leads Phillies past Braves

Associated Press

ATLANTA — Nick Castellanos had already carried quite a load with his bat.

When the Philadelphia Phillies needed his glove in the ninth inning, he didn't let them down.

Castellanos drove in three runs and made a potentially game-saving catch, lifting the Philadelphia Phillies over the reigning World Series champion Atlanta Braves 7-6 in the opener of their NL Division Series on Tuesday.

The Phillies have won three straight games to begin these playoffs, hardly looking like a team making its first postseason appearance since 2011. They followed up their wild-card sweep of the St. Louis Cardinals with a victory over the team that finished 14 games ahead of them in the NL East.

It wasn't easy. Matt Olson hit a three-run homer in the ninth off Zach Eflin to bring the Braves within a run.

But Castellanos, capping off a brilliant all-around day, made a sliding catch in right field for the second out to help snuff out the comeback — a clutch play from a player frequently maligned for his defense.

"Do anything I could to not let it hit the ground," Castellanos said of his mindset.

He sprawled out on the grass — arms raised above his head, the ball securely in

his glove — before rolling over and flipping it back to the infield.

Castellanos appears to be finding his groove after missing most of September with an oblique injury.

"I hope that's the start of something, because he's been out for a long time," manager Rob Thomson said. "Maybe he's really getting his timing back now."

Alec Bohm added two RBIs for the Phillies, who built a 7-1 lead by the top of the fifth and made it stand up against a Braves lineup that squandered numerous chances to get back in the game earlier.

Travis d'Arnaud homered and drove in the other three Atlanta runs, but the team that won 101 games during the regular season and edged the New York Mets in a thrilling NL East race suddenly finds itself behind in a best-of-five predicament.

Castellanos had a run-scoring single in the first — the Phillies jumping ahead 2-0 before many fans had settled in their seats for the lunchtime start — and added a two-run single in the fourth.

Castellanos came in hitting .148 (4-for-27) in seven postseason games. He had nearly as many hits in this one, going 3-for-5.

And that catch on William Contreras' opposite-field liner truly made it a day to remember.

"Baseball is really, really fun right now," Castellanos said.

Max Fried, whose last postseason start was a World Series-clinching victory over the Astros, failed to get through the fourth against the Phillies.

The Braves ace was roughed up for eight hits and six runs — two of them unearned, but that was because of his own throwing error.

The Phillies, on the other hand, have been playing like playoff-hardened veterans even though their 11-year postseason drought was the National League's longest.

They started the season dismally, which led to the firing of manager Joe Girardi in early June.

Thomson guided a remarkable turnaround as interim manager, with the Phillies bouncing back to claim the NL's final wild card.

Thomson had the interim removed from his title on Monday, agreeing to a two-year deal to remain at the helm through 2024. The Phillies gave him quite a thank-you in his first game as plain ol' manager.

D'Arnaud led off the second with a homer deep into the left-field seats off Ranger Suárez to make it 2-1, but the 22-year-old left-hander was not flustered.

Suárez went just 3⅓ innings but made some big pitches to keep the Braves down.

Turner, Dodgers start fast, hold off Padres in Game 1

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — The well-rested Los Angeles Dodgers raced out to a big lead early and hung on against the upstart San Diego Padres.

Trea Turner homered and doubled as the Dodgers won 5-3 on Tuesday night in the NL Division Series opener.

Behind 17-game winner Julio Urías, the Dodgers led 5-0 after three innings and appeared to be on their way to another blowout of the Padres.

Los Angeles dominated in the regular season, owning a 14-5 advantage and outscoring San Diego 109-47.

"We've seen a lot of them lately, especially in the last month or so," Turner said. "Kind of knew what to expect. Still have to execute and still have to get the results, but I think we just were ourselves and didn't give anything away."

With Sandy Koufax watching from the

owners' box, Urías retired the first eight batters he faced until Austin Nola doubled with two outs in the third.

"We have to give a lot of credit to our offense," Urías said through a translator. "They did a good job battling, getting those runs early and putting us in a good spot to win."

Chris Martin, who had two saves this season, gave up a single in the ninth, when the Padres had the potential tying run at the plate. Struggling closer Craig Kimbrel was left off the Dodgers' roster for this series.

"No moral victories, but the latter part of the game was better than the first part for us," Padres manager Bob Melvin said.

"We felt like we had a chance in the latter innings to win this game," he said. "I think everybody is pretty eager to get back out here again."

The Padres were coming off a win in the decisive Game 3 of the wild-card series

Sunday night over the Mets in New York.

"We need to put this one behind us and keep competing like we've been doing all year," said Manny Machado, who was 1-for-4 with a strikeout.

The Dodgers, who had five days off after drawing a bye, showed no signs of rust.

In the first, Turner hit a 419-foot shot into the left-field pavilion for his second career postseason homer and first as a Dodger. Two batters later, Will Smith doubled and scored on Max Muncy's two-out single for a 2-0 lead.

The Dodgers batted around in the third, tacking on three more runs.

Turner doubled leading off and after Freddie Freeman flied out, Smith stepped in and doubled to deep left-center, nearly the same spot where Turner's ball landed. Gavin Lux doubled to the right-field corner with two outs, driving in Smith and chasing Mike Clevinger.

Zibanejad, Rangers knock off Lightning

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Mika Zibanejad helped the New York Rangers get the new season off to a winning start.

Zibanejad scored twice, including a tie-breaking power-play goal in the third period, and the Rangers beat the Tampa Bay Lightning 3-1 Tuesday night.

Barclay Goodrow also scored and reigning Vezina Trophy winner Igor Shesterkin stopped 26 shots to help the Rangers start the season with a win against the Lightning team that eliminated them from the Eastern Conference finals in June.

“The way we played tonight is a lot how we want to play — to trust ourselves and trust the system,” Zibanejad said. “We did a good job tonight and we have to keep doing that.”

Zibanejad, who scored a short-handed goal early in the second period, gave New York a 2-1 lead at 5:11 of the third with a slap shot from the left circle off a pass from Artemi Panarin, who got his 250th point with the Rangers.

“Obviously, it’s nice to see the puck go in, not just to get the win but the way we won,” Zibanejad said.

Goodrow made it 3-1 as he deflected

Ryan Lindren’s long shot from the left point past Vasilevskiy with 9 minutes remaining.

Steven Stamkos had a power-play goal for the Lightning and Andrei Vasilevskiy had 36 saves.

“We competed, we just didn’t execute at all, and when you’re not going to do that it doesn’t matter how hard you try,” Lightning coach Jon Cooper said. “We looked frustrated in the third. ... We’re a better team than we showed tonight.”

The Rangers outshot the Lightning 14-8 in a scoreless first period, and 18-8 in the second.

“Right from the get-go, I thought we were engaged, we were on it, we were competing,” Goodrow said. “I thought everyone did a good job. From the drop of the puck we were playing well. It was a full team effort tonight. It was a great first game.”

The Lightning, tops in the NHL with 291 power-play goals over the last five seasons, got their first man advantage of the game early in the second period. However, seconds after Vasilevskiy stopped two short-handed slap shots by Chris Kreider, Zibanejad skated in from the right side,

got around the goalie’s poke check and lifted a backhand into the top left corner at 3:25 to put the Rangers up 1-0.

Golden Knights 4, Kings 3: Mark Stone scored the tiebreaking goal with 24.9 seconds to play, and visiting Vegas punctuated coach Bruce Cassidy’s debut with a victory over Los Angeles.

After Arthur Kaliyev tied it for the Kings with 7:02 left, Chandler Stephenson controlled a loose puck at mid-ice and carried it in for a pass to Stone, who whipped a shot past Jonathan Quick to cap Vegas’ three-goal third period.

William Karlsson had a goal and an assist as the Golden Knights put a whopping 51 shots on Quick, including 20 in the final period. Jonathan Marchessault and Jack Eichel also scored, while Alex Pietrangolo had assists on both of Vegas’ last two goals.

Logan Thompson made 27 saves in his first game since becoming Vegas’ first-choice goalie.

Quick made 47 saves while starting on opening night for the 14th time in the Kings’ last 15 seasons. Gabe Vilardi and Adrian Kempe also scored for Los Angeles.

Spain hands US women’s soccer team 2nd straight loss

Associated Press

PAMPLONA, Spain — Laia Codina and Esther González both scored for Spain in a 2-0 victory Tuesday over the U.S. women’s national team, which lost a second straight game for the first time in more than five years.

Codina scored in the 39th minute. It was the first goal off a set piece that the United States had conceded since last summer’s Tokyo Olympics. Gonzalez added a goal in the 72nd.

The United States hadn’t lost two straight since the March 2017 SheBelieves Cup, when the team lost consecutive games to England and France.

“It’s really disappointing, there’s no question about it,” U.S. coach Vlatko Andonovski said. “We have a winning mentality and when we don’t win, it hurts. It hurt all off us. It is a tough moment for us as a team.”

Both teams are preparing for next summer’s World Cup, co-hosted by Australia and New Zealand. The United States, the world’s top-ranked team, has won the last two World Cups.

Both teams also have been rocked by scandals, with Spain missing some of its best players because of it.

The U.S. players are reeling following the release last week of a report on misconduct in the National Women’s Soccer League. A year-long investigation led by former acting U.S. Attorney General Sally Q. Yates found “systemic” abuse and misconduct in women’s soccer.

U.S. captain Becky Sauerbrunn said players were “horrified” by the revelations. Five of 10 coaches in the NWSL last season were either fired or stepped down amid allegations of inappropriate behavior. Yates also offered recommendations for change going forward.

Meanwhile, a group of Spanish national team players recently called on the federation to professionalize the women’s team. But the federation responded by saying the players asked for coach Jorge Vilda to be fired, which the players denied.

The federation made matters worse by asking the players to apologize and ask for forgiveness. In announcing his team for a

pair of friendlies this month, including Tuesday’s game, Vilda excluded the players who called for change, among them Barcelona’s Patricia Guijarro and goalkeeper Sandra Panos, and Manchester United’s Lucia Garcia. Jenni Hermoso and Alexia Putellas were not included because of injury.

The United States was coming off a 2-1 loss to England on Friday in front of a sold-out crowd at Wembley Stadium. The Americans have conceded goals in their past three matches, after allowing just two total goals in their previous 19 games.

The United States was also missing key players because of injuries, among them Alex Morgan, Sam Mewis and Catarina Macario. Mallory Pugh was not with the team because of a family commitment.

“We knew that these were going to be two tough games,” Andonovski said. “That’s why we came here, to learn more about us before the World Cup, and get prepared better before the World Cup.”

Spain was coming off a 1-1 draw with Sweden in Cordoba.