

Carrier move creates Mideast, Europe void

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump's decision to shift an aircraft carrier to South America in his campaign against drug cartels is pulling the ship out of the Mediterranean Sea at a time when a tenuous ceasefire between Israel and Hamas has been threatened by new strikes in Gaza.

The U.S. is set to be in the fairly unusual position of having only a single aircraft carrier deployed and none in the waters off both Europe and the Middle East. The change is especially stark after the U.S. joined Israeli strikes on Iran in June and has engaged in some of the most intense combat operations since World War II against Yemen's Houthi rebels in the Red Sea.

Aircraft carriers, with their thousands of sailors and dozens of warplanes, have long been recognized as one of the ultimate signifiers of U.S. military might and

the nation's foreign policy priorities. There have been five carrier deployments to the Middle East since the Hamas-led attack on Israel on Oct. 7, 2023, including two carriers in the region at multiple points this year and last.

The new orders for the USS Gerald R. Ford illustrate the Trump administration's increasing focus on the Western Hemisphere and mark a major escalation of firepower as the U.S. military ramps up fatal strikes on alleged drug boats. With a buildup of warships, aircraft and troops already in the region, Trump himself has signaled what could be next.

Speaking from another aircraft carrier, the USS George Washington, in its home port of Japan, Trump noted the U.S. attacks at sea and reiterated that "now we'll stop the drugs coming in by land."

Mark Cancian, a senior adviser with the Center for Strategic

and International Studies and a retired Marine colonel, questioned how long the Ford would be able to remain in South America, when only three of the 11 U.S. aircraft carriers are typically out to sea.

"It's such a powerful and scarce resource, there will be a lot of pressure to do something or send it elsewhere," Cancian said. "You can imagine the peace negotiations breaking down in the Eastern Mediterranean or something happening with Iran."

The USS Nimitz is also deployed but is heading home from the South China Sea to the West Coast before being decommissioned. It recently lost two aircraft—a fighter jet and a helicopter—in separate crashes that are under investigation. A third carrier, the USS Theodore Roosevelt, is not deployed but is conducting exercises off the coast of San Diego.

The shift is happening just as

violence has flared up again in Gaza despite a ceasefire that Trump helped broker after two years of war.

The Israeli army launched a barrage of attacks Tuesday as tensions with Hamas grew two weeks into the fragile ceasefire.

Meanwhile, the U.S. military's growing presence near Venezuela and its 13 fatal strikes on alleged drug boats have stoked fears that Trump could try to topple authoritarian President Nicolás Maduro, who faces charges of narcoterrorism in the U.S.

In response to questions about the speculation, Secretary of State Marco Rubio insisted Saturday that the U.S. is taking part in a counterdrug operation. And he again accused Maduro's government of participating in the shipment of narcotics.

"This is a very serious problem for the hemisphere, and a very destabilizing one," Rubio said. "And that has to be addressed."

Vance says he believes US troops will be paid this week

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Vice President JD Vance said Tuesday he believes U.S. military members will be paid at the end of the week, though he did not specify how the Trump administration will reconfigure funding as pain from the second-longest government shutdown spreads nationwide.

The funding fight in Washington gained new urgency this week as millions of Americans face the prospect of losing food assistance, more federal workers miss their first full paycheck and recurring delays at airports snarl travel plans.

"We do think that we can continue paying the troops, at least for now," Vance told reporters af-

ter lunch with Senate Republicans at the Capitol. "We've got food stamp benefits that are set to run out in a week. We're trying to keep as much open as possible. We just need the Democrats to actually help us out."

The vice president reaffirmed Republicans' strategy of trying to pick off a handful of Senate Democrats to vote for stopgap funding to reopen the government. But nearly a month into the shutdown, it hasn't worked. Just before Vance's visit, a Senate vote on legislation to reopen the government failed for the 13th time.

The strain is building on Democratic lawmakers to end the impasse.

That was magnified by the na-

tion's largest federal employee union, which on Monday called on Congress to immediately pass a funding bill and ensure workers receive full pay.

Everett Kelley, president of the American Federation of Government Employees, said the two political parties have made their point.

"It's time to pass a clean continuing resolution and end this shutdown today. No half measures, and no gamesmanship," said Kelley, whose union carries considerable political weight with Democratic lawmakers.

Still, Democratic senators, including those representing states with many federal workers, did not appear ready to back down.

Virginia Sen. Tim Kaine said he was insisting on commitments from the White House to prevent the administration from mass firing more workers. Democrats also want Congress to extend subsidies for health plans under the Affordable Care Act.

"We've got to get a deal with Donald Trump," Kaine said.

The nation's 1.3 million active-duty service members were at risk of missing a paycheck on Friday. Earlier this month, the Trump administration ensured they were paid by shifting \$8 billion from military research and development funds to make payroll. Vance did not say Tuesday how the Department of Defense will cover troop pay this time.

White House urged live bombs on Trump visit

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The White House pressed U.S. Navy officials to launch 2,000-pound live bombs instead of dummy explosives during an elaborate military demonstration for the service's 250th anniversary celebration that President Donald Trump attended, two people familiar with planning for the event said.

One person familiar with the planning said White House officials insisted to Navy planners that Trump "needed to see explosions" instead of just a "big splash" during the Oct. 5 demonstration.

Original planning for what the Navy dubbed the Titans of the Sea Presidential Review called for military personnel to use dummies and not live bombs, a third person familiar with the Navy's planning said.

That person, who like the others was not authorized to speak publicly on the matter and spoke on the condition of anonymity, would not comment on why the Navy decided to switch

to live bombs.

The White House said no switch was made. Deputy press secretary Anna Kelly in a statement said: "Organizers always planned to use live munitions, as is typical in training exercises."

The episode is the latest example of the Trump administration turning the military toward the president's wishes in ways large and small — from summoning generals from around the world to Washington for a day of speeches to his lethal strikes on alleged drug boats in the Caribbean.

The Navy and other military branches typically use dummy, or inert, bombs for training and demonstrations. Dummies are cheaper than live bombs because they do not contain expensive explosives, fuses and other components. They're also safer.

However, military officials often argue that the use of live ammunition for events like the 250th birthday celebration also fulfills a training purpose and

that the ordnance would have been expended anyway at a later date. The Navy declined to comment.

The switch required Navy officials to change up detailed plans for the Norfolk military demonstration to ensure safety protocols were met, according to the three people familiar with the planning.

The White House pushed forward with the event despite a U.S. government shutdown, which has led nonessential federal workers to be sent home without pay and reduced operation of many non-critical government services.

At the Navy celebration this month in Norfolk, the president and first lady Melania Trump watched the military demonstration from the deck of an aircraft carrier before Trump delivered a speech in which he criticized his political opponents and attacked Democratic lawmakers.

At sea, the Navy had seven Arleigh Burke-class guided missile destroyers fire a variety

of their guns, including a large 5-inch gun.

Four destroyers also launched the Navy's Standard Missile 2. Each missile costs approximately \$2 million.

Meanwhile, aircraft from USS Truman's air wing fired missiles and general-purpose bombs and performed a strafing run with their Gatling guns. The Navy's MH-60S Seahawk helicopters also fired hydra rockets and guns.

Trump then spoke on a pier between two towering Navy vessels, an aircraft carrier and an amphibious assault ship.

The carrier displayed a Navy fighter jet that had the words "President Donald J. Trump '45-47'" printed on the fuselage, right under the cockpit window.

In addition to the live bomb demonstration, Navy destroyers launched missiles and fired shells into the Atlantic Ocean, and Navy SEALs descended from helicopters and fighter jets catapulted off vessels.

Pacific Fleet head seeks tech industry's savvy to employ AI

By Wyatt Olson

Stars and Stripes

HAWAII CONVENTION CENTER, Honolulu — U.S. Pacific Fleet's commander on Tuesday challenged the high-tech industry to boost the Navy's ongoing effort to empower sailors with artificial intelligence.

"We are using AI on nearly every network to develop familiarity with our team and improve decision making throughout our commanders," Adm. Stephen Koehler said during the opening keynote address for the three-day TechNet Indo-Pacific conference in Honolulu.

"We're embracing a hybrid government-commercial ap-

proach that partners with private sector leaders to accelerate innovation on AI, and we are working with partners in industry and government to integrate it into our day-to-day functions and operations," he said.

"Those include command and control, cyber, logistics, [intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance], target analysis and more."

Koehler told the audience, filled with representatives in the fields of communications, IT and intelligence, that Pacific Fleet needs their help in speeding such innovation.

"We know our industry partners are key to all of these critical efforts, and it's not just AI,"

he said. "As we move forward together, we should combine our unique strengths. We should blend the best of both of our worlds to see and then achieve the art of the possible."

Pacific Fleet's area of responsibility covers nearly half the globe. Its fleet includes roughly 200 ships, 160,000 personnel and 1,500 aircraft.

Koehler said the fleet is already integrating and pairing all its data with AI to dominate adversaries from "seabed to space" and across the continuum of competition to conflict.

"Going forward, I envision a future where the Pacific Fleet is empowered by artificial intelligence, where sailors and com-

manders at every level balance the art and science of warfare to make more effective decisions with superior outcomes faster than the adversary, a future where AI further accelerates the cycle of action between maneuver and fires for decisive combat advantage," he said.

In the coming months, Pacific Fleet will step up the "drumbeat of experimentation and innovation," Koehler said.

"I consider it experimentation combined with rehearsal," he said. "Our common practice here is to pair them with exercises, to work in parallel specifically to develop new capabilities and build new concepts of operation."

US to cut troop numbers in Romania

By JOHN VANDIVER
Stars and Stripes

U.S. troop deployments to Romania are being scaled back as part of a Pentagon plan to reduce force levels in Europe, the Romanian defense ministry said Wednesday.

The plan calls for ending the rotation of a U.S. Army brigade to Romania that also had elements dispersed across several other countries in the Black Sea region, the ministry said in a statement.

"The resizing of U.S. forces is an effect of the new priorities of the presidential administration, announced as early as February," according to the statement, which added that the decision had been expected.

The U.S. began rotating a brigade to Romania in the aftermath of Russia's 2022 full-scale invasion of Ukraine. The increased troop presence in Ro-

mania and other parts of the eastern flank was intended to reassure allies unsettled by Russian aggression in Europe and deter Moscow from potentially making a move on NATO territory.

The decision means the 101st Airborne Division's 2nd Brigade, which is close to wrapping up a nine-month deployment in Romania, won't be backfilled.

U.S. Army Europe and Africa said in a statement Wednesday that the Pentagon decision was aimed at balancing the U.S. military's force posture in Europe.

"This is not an American withdrawal from Europe or a signal of lessened commitment to NATO and Article 5," USAREUR-AF said in a statement, referring to NATO's collective defense policy that an attack on one member is an attack on all. "Rather this is a positive sign of increased European capability

and responsibility."

The Army said NATO allies, who have pledged to increase defense spending, are meeting President Donald Trump's call to "take primary responsibility for the conventional defense of Europe."

"The U.S. maintains a robust presence throughout the European Theater, and maintains the ability to array forces and capabilities to meet objectives in the Theater and support U.S. priorities, including President Trump's commitment to defend NATO allies," the USAREUR-AF statement said.

Pentagon leaders have debated whether to curtail troop rotations in Romania. In 2023, the Defense Department considered the idea but opted to continue sending rotational brigades.

Romanian officials said the Pentagon's plan now calls for

about 1,000 U.S. troops to be positioned in the country, down from several thousand.

The decision took into account the fact that NATO has strengthened its presence on the alliance's eastern flank, and that allows the United States to adjust its military posture in the region, the Romanian statement said.

It wasn't immediately clear what other countries could be affected by the Pentagon's plans to reduce forces in Europe. However, many allies have been anticipating potentially significant cuts.

In July, Estonian Defense Minister Hanno Pevkur said there was "an understanding and assumption that the U.S. military posture across Europe will change." He added, in an interview with Estonian media at the time, that details were expected around October.

Hegseth says US Forces Japan ready for new phase

By SETH ROBSON
Stars and Stripes

CAMP ICHIGAYA, Tokyo — U.S. Forces Japan has all the personnel it needs to become a joint force headquarters and is ready for the next phase of its reorganization, Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth said after meeting his Japanese counterpart here Wednesday.

"This important change will improve our warfighting capabilities, our lethality and our readiness," Hegseth told reporters at the headquarters of Japan's Ministry of Defense.

"All phase one personnel are in place, and we are ready to begin phase two shortly," he said after meeting new Japanese Defense Minister Shinjiro Koizumi.

USFJ's upgrade is part of the allies' response to a growing Chinese military. Beijing has built the world's largest navy and routinely transits the waters around

Japan, sometimes alongside Russian naval vessels.

Along with increasing the size of its defense budget, Japan has positioned missiles on its southwest islands, which are at risk of attack in any attempt by China to reclaim nearby Taiwan.

"China's unprecedented military buildup and its aggressive military actions speak for themselves," Hegseth said alongside Koizumi at Ichigaya.

The first steps to restructure the command from a liaison organization to one integrated for operations with its Japanese counterparts were announced by Hegseth during his first visit to Tokyo as defense secretary in March. His predecessor, Lloyd Austin, announced USFJ's restructuring in July 2024.

"Moving from a headquarters primarily charged with an alliance management mission to one that, in time, will integrate

and synchronize operations that span the spectrum of operations from humanitarian assistance, disaster relief and armed conflict is a monumental task," USFJ commander Air Force Lt. Gen. Stephen Jost wrote in an editorial for the Asahi newspaper in June.

To strengthen their alliance, the United States and Japan must continue building strong, lethal, combat-credible forces, Hegseth said.

"There's no way to replace hard power," he said.

Japan's commitment to spend more money on defense is an important step, Hegseth said.

The former Fox News host spoke to around 6,000 troops aboard the USS George Washington aircraft carrier Tuesday at Yokosuka Naval Base, homeport of the U.S. 7th Fleet in nearby Kanagawa prefecture, ahead of President Donald Trump and

Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi.

American and Japanese troops standing shoulder to shoulder at Yokosuka were a reminder of the strength and depth of the alliance, Hegseth said at Ichigaya.

The 55,000 U.S. troops in Japan alongside Japanese self-defense forces stand ready to defend both nations, he said.

The defense ministers will take steps to ensure U.S. and Japanese troops have what they need to train, fight and win, Hegseth added.

Koizumi noted Takaichi's remarks a day earlier — that the U.S.-Japan partnership is the world's greatest alliance and that she would work to strengthen both countries.

During an hourlong meeting, the pair discussed the blueprint for the future of the alliance, Koizumi said.

Storm leaves destruction, death across Caribbean

Associated Press

SANTIAGO DE CUBA, Cuba — Hurricane Melissa left dozens dead and widespread destruction across Cuba, Haiti and Jamaica, where roofless homes, toppled utility poles and waterlogged furniture dominated the landscape Wednesday.

A landslide blocked the main roads of Santa Cruz in Jamaica's St. Elizabeth parish, where the streets were reduced to mud pits. Residents swept water from homes as they tried to salvage belongings. Winds ripped off part of the roof at a high school, a designated public shelter.

"I never see anything like this before in all my years living here," resident Jennifer Small

said.

Melissa made landfall Tuesday in Jamaica as a catastrophic Category 5 storm with top winds of 185 mph, one of the strongest Atlantic hurricanes on record, before weakening and moving on to Cuba.

But even countries outside the direct path of the massive storm felt its devastating effects.

In Haiti, flooding from Melissa killed at least 25 people in the southern coastal town of Petit-Goave, its mayor told The Associated Press.

Mayor Jean Bertrand Sarrès said dozens of homes collapsed when La Digue river burst its banks and people were still trapped under rubble

Wednesday morning. Only one official from Haiti's Civil Protection Agency was in the area as residents struggled to evacuate amid heavy floodwaters.

Officials reported collapsed houses, blocked mountain roads and roofs blown off in Cuba on Wednesday, with the heaviest destruction concentrated in the southwest and northwest. Authorities said about 735,000 people remained in shelters.

"That was hell. All night long, it was terrible," said Reinaldo Charon in Santiago de Cuba. The 52-year-old was one of the few people venturing out Wednesday, covered by a plastic sheet in the intermittent rain.

The United States is sending rescue and response teams to

assist in recovery efforts in the Caribbean, Secretary of State Marco Rubio said on X. He said officials were coordinating with leadership in Jamaica, Haiti, the Dominican Republic and the Bahamas.

People in the eastern Cuban province of Santiago de Cuba began clearing debris around the collapsed walls of their homes on Wednesday after Hurricane Melissa made landfall in the region hours earlier.

In Cuba, parts of Granma province, especially the municipal capital, Jiguaní, were underwater, said Gov. Yanetsy Terry Gutiérrez. More than 15 inches of rain was reported in Jiguaní's settlement of Charco Redondo.

Trump scores golden gifts as US, Seoul advance trade talks

Associated Press

GYEONGJU, South Korea — The United States and South Korea advanced trade talks on Wednesday, addressing details of \$350 billion that would be invested in the American economy, after negotiations and ceremonies that included the presentation of a gold medal and crown to President Donald Trump.

Both were gifts from the country's president, Lee Jae Myung, who dialed up the flattery while Washington and Se-

oul worked to nail down financial promises during the last stop of Trump's Asia trip.

Although both sides said progress has been made — Trump said things were "pretty much finalized" — no agreement has been signed yet. The framework includes gradual investments, cooperation on shipbuilding and the lowering of Trump's tariffs on South Korea's automobile exports, according to Kim Yong-beom, Lee's chief of staff for policy. The White House did not immediately re-

spond to a request for comment.

The announcement came after a day of adulation for the visiting American president from his hosts. There was a special lunch menu featuring U.S.-raised beef and a gold-adorned brownie. A band played Trump's campaign anthem of "Y.M.C.A." when he stepped off Air Force One. Lee told him that "you are indeed making America great again."

Trump can be mercurial and demanding, but he has a soft spot for pomp and circum-

stance. He was particularly impressed by a choreographed display of colorful flags as he walked along the red carpet.

"That was some spectacle and some beautiful scene," Trump told Lee during their meeting. "It was so perfect, so flawlessly done."

Earlier in the day, Trump even softened his rhetoric on international trade, which he normally describes in predatory terms where someone is always trying to rip off the United States.

Putin says new nuclear-armed sea drone test successful

Associated Press

MOSCOW — Russia has conducted a successful test of a new atomic-powered and nuclear-capable underwater drone, President Vladimir Putin said Wednesday, declaring that the weapon can't be intercepted.

Putin's statement, which comes three days after he praised a successful test of a new nuclear-powered cruise

missile, appears to be another message to President Donald Trump that Russia is standing firm in its maximalist demands on Ukraine.

Speaking at a meeting with soldiers wounded in Ukraine, Putin said the Poseidon drone was tested while running on nuclear power for the first time Tuesday, describing it as a "huge success."

He said the nuclear reactor that powers Poseidon is "100 times smaller" than those on submarines, and the power of its warhead is "significantly higher than that of our prospective Sarmat intercontinental ballistic missile."

Putin first mentioned the underwater nuclear-powered drone in his 2018 state-of-the-nation address along with other

prospective weapons.

Russian media reported that Poseidon was designed to explode near coastlines and unleash a powerful radioactive tsunami.

Putin said that during Tuesday's test, Poseidon traveled on nuclear power for the first time. He didn't say where the trials were conducted or give any other details.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Man killed after attack on firefighter with machete

GA WRIGHTSVILLE — A police officer who was talking to a firefighter outside a Georgia convenience store shot and killed a man who drove up to the store and began attacking the firefighter with a machete, authorities said Monday.

After arriving at the store around midnight, the man walked over to where the police officer and firefighter were talking and suddenly began swinging the weapon, authorities said.

"Fearing for the life of the firefighter and in defense of himself and the firefighter, the officer was left with no other option than to use deadly force to stop the threat," Wrightsville police said in a statement.

The firefighter sustained severe injuries to his arms, but is expected to survive, Wrightsville police said. The 32-year-old man shot by the Wrightsville police officer was taken to a hospital, where he died. The officer was not injured, police said.

Storm dumps as much rain as a hurricane

FL ORLANDO — Intense rains that stalled over Central Florida unleashed nearly 20 inches of rain in 24 hours, triggering dangerous flash floods that stranded cars and inundated roadways, leaving some closed to traffic into Monday.

Forecasters said the colossal amount of rain dropped on parts of Florida east and north of Orlando was comparable to what the region saw from a hurricane in 2022, underscoring the state's

vulnerability to extreme weather far beyond the tropical storms that brew offshore.

"This is very significant rainfall. I mean, this is the type of numbers that we haven't really seen since Hurricane Ian," said Zach Law, a meteorologist in the National Weather Service's office in Melbourne, Fla.

Parts of Eustis in Lake County were inundated with 19.7 inches of rain, while Port Saint John, west of the Kennedy Space Center in Brevard County, saw 15.57 inches, according to a 24-hour rainfall analysis by the NWS.

Dems set 2028 primary deadline for states

SC COLUMBIA — Not even a year out from the last presidential election, the Democratic National Committee has begun setting up a framework for the party's next round of presidential primary elections, which could upend the early-voting calendar yet again.

The Rules and Bylaws Committee of the Democratic National Committee on Monday approved a plan giving states until Jan. 16 to submit applications to hold voting contests in the early window ahead of Super Tuesday, when a massive haul of delegates will be awarded.

Four or five states will get an early slot, and all four regions — East, Midwest, South and West — must be represented, according to the framework.

No huge tranche of delegates is necessarily at stake in the early-voting contests, but their heft has traditionally played a pivotal role for candidates seek-

ing to lead their parties, with heavy travel rotations meaning high visibility for the states involved.

Norway spruce selected for Rockefeller Center

NY NEW YORK — A majestic Norway spruce now growing in upstate New York has been chosen to be this year's Rockefeller Center Christmas Tree, officials announced Monday.

The 75-foot tree is to be cut down Nov. 6 in East Greenbush, outside the state capital of Albany, and arrive by truck two days later in New York City, about 150 miles to the south.

After being wrapped from trunk to top in more than 50,000 multi-colored LED lights and crowned with a 900-pound Swarovski star, it will be illuminated Dec. 3 during a live "Christmas in Rockefeller Center" broadcast, Rockefeller Center said.

The tree is being donated by the owners of the property, where it has grown for an estimated 75 years.

Like those before it, this year's Rockefeller Center Christmas Tree will shine as one of New York City's most popular holiday attractions throughout the season, until being taken down and milled into lumber for Habitat for Humanity.

Candidate backs redistricting push

VA BLACKSBURG — Abigail Spanberger, the Democratic candidate for Virginia governor, said Monday that she would not oppose a push by the state's Democratic-controlled legislature to redraw

congressional districts ahead of next year's midterm elections.

Virginia Democrats earlier in the day began taking steps to change the state's constitution to allow for a new congressional map, a change that must ultimately be approved by voters before it becomes law. The change is designed to counter President Donald Trump's push to create more partisan districts in several Republican-run states.

In an interview on her campaign bus just eight days before Election Day, Spanberger told The Associated Press that she would not stand in the way of the Democratic leaders in the state General Assembly, although it's unclear whether congressional districts could be changed in time for the 2026 midterm elections.

Her position marks a shift of sorts from this summer when she said she had "no plans to redistrict Virginia."

Virginia Republicans, including Spanberger's Republican opponent, Lt. Gov. Winsome Earle-Sears, blasted the move in a news conference outside the statehouse.

Republican lawmakers in Texas, Missouri and North Carolina have already approved new congressional maps aimed at winning more GOP seats. The Republican governor of Indiana also said Monday he's scheduling a special session to redraw congressional boundaries.

In Virginia on Monday, the House amended its agenda to allow a redistricting constitutional amendment to be put forward, with details to come later. The state senate is expected to follow suit this week.

— From wire reports

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Guerrero HR off Ohtani helps even series

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — Dodger Stadium was still shaking with joy when Monday turned to Tuesday as the Toronto Blue Jays trudged into their clubhouse. Their 18-inning loss in Game 3 felt like a monumental setback that might have already decided the World Series.

That's when Vladimir Guerrero Jr. stepped up and told his team exactly what it needed to hear.

For all its drama, Game 3 was no more important than Game 4.

"I was the last one to go in," Guerrero said.

"I saw everybody with his head down. I said, 'Come on, bro. Head up. It's not over yet. It's not over yet. They gotta win four. Four games. You have to win four games to win the World Series. It's not over.'"

The Jays' leader then backed up his message by crushing another timely homer Tuesday night, this one off Shohei Ohtani.

And after nine superb innings played in less than three tidy hours, these profoundly resilient Blue Jays have evened the World Series again.

Guerrero hit a two-run homer off Ohtani in the third inning, Shane Bieber pitched four-hit ball into the sixth, and Toronto got back on track with a 6-2 victory over the Los Angeles Dodgers.

Addison Barger had two hits and an RBI for the AL champion Blue Jays, who coolly rebounded from their heart-breaking, late-night defeat with stellar work at the plate and on the mound.

"Coming off what could be a back-breaking loss last night, it was an absolute pleasure to show up today and see nobody changes," Bieber said.

"Nobody ever wavers. Nobody ever hesitates. It's the same group of guys each and every day."

"A sweeper is a pitch designed to generate popups, and the swing that Vlad put on it was elite."

John Schneider
Toronto manager

By sending the defending champion Dodgers to just their third loss in 14 games this postseason, the Blue Jays reclaimed homefield advantage and guaranteed the World Series trophy will be won at Rogers Centre.

"I believe in this team, man," said Guerrero, who spurred the Jays with his seventh homer of the postseason. "This team is something special."

Game 5 is Wednesday at Dodger Stadium, with Game 6 in Toronto on Friday.

Ohtani redefined the concept of short rest by taking the World Series mound just over 17 hours after he reached base nine times and smashed four extra-base hits in the Dodgers' stirring victory.

He yielded four runs on six hits while pitching six-plus innings with six strikeouts in Game 4. And after Guerrero hit his majestic homer, the Blue Jays tagged Ohtani for two more while chasing him during their four-run seventh.

Ohtani couldn't make up for it at the plate, going 0-for-3 with a walk and two strikeouts. He was on deck when the game ended.

He didn't have the only poor performance at bat for the powerhouse Dodgers, who mustered just six hits — only one for extra bases.

"We're facing quality arms at this time of year against really good teams," Ohtani said through his interpreter.

"We're facing the best of the

best, so I think it's not that easy. At the same time, we could do at least the bare minimum and put up some runs."

The Dodgers' two-way superstar was outpitched by Bieber, the Blue Jays newcomer who returned from Tommy John surgery in late August. The 2020 AL Cy Young Award winner gave up just one run over 5½ innings in a resilient World Series debut.

An Orange County native with friends and family roaring for him from the loge level at Dodger Stadium, Bieber issued three walks, but repeatedly got out of trouble.

He stranded four runners before Mason Fluharty relieved him in the sixth and stranded two more — and the Blue Jays took control moments later with their seventh-inning rally.

"I think that we knew it was going to be a great series," Dodgers manager Dave Roberts said.

"This team is talented, they're resilient — talking about the Blue Jays — and they came back fighting. Bieber does what he does ... and we really didn't get a whole lot of good swings. Conversely, you see those guys grinding and using the whole field and putting some hits together. We just didn't have an answer."

Ohtani took the mound again 11 days after he hit three homers and struck out 10 Milwaukee Brewers in arguably the greatest single-game performance in baseball playoff history to clinch the NL pennant.

Although his fastball velocity was down to 97.6 mph from his season average of 98.5, Ohtani largely stayed out of trouble with effective breaking stuff.

He also drew a six-pitch lead-off walk to reach base for the 11th straight time, extending his World Series record — but he didn't get on base again.

The Dodgers scored first for the fourth consecutive game when Kiké Hernández's sacri-

fice fly brought home Max Muncy in the second.

But the Blue Jays finally got to Ohtani in the third, ending their 13-inning scoring drought with a big swing from their star slugger.

Nathan Lukes hit a one-out single before Guerrero hammered a misplaced breaking ball from Ohtani over the left-center wall.

Guerrero has set Toronto postseason records with seven homers and 14 RBIs this month.

"A sweeper is a pitch designed to generate popups, and the swing that Vlad put on it was elite," Toronto manager John Schneider said.

"After last night and all the recognition that went into Shohei individually, and he's on the mound today, it's a huge swing to get us going, and it gives you some momentum."

Ohtani retired 11 of 12 after Guerrero's homer, but the Blue Jays chased him with Daulton Varsho's single and Ernie Clement's double off the wall to start the seventh.

Toronto scored on Andrés Giménez's single and Ty France's groundout off Anthony Banda before Bo Bichette and Barger added RBI singles off struggling reliever Blake Treinen.

Toronto played without ALCS hero George Springer, who left Game 3 in the seventh inning after injuring his right side on a swing.

Up next

Dodgers lefty Blake Snell (3-1, 2.42 ERA) faces Blue Jays rookie Trey Yesavage (2-1, 4.26) in the pivotal Game 5. It's a pitching rematch of the Series opener, when Toronto handed Snell his only loss of a previously dominant postseason by chasing him at the start of a nine-run sixth inning in an 11-4 win.

Yesavage pitched four innings of two-run ball.

NBA sees record 16 40-point games

Associated Press

SALT LAKE CITY — A week into the NBA season, the defenses are losing. By a lot.

If it seems like there's never been this many high-scoring performances in the first few days of a season, that's because this indeed is unprecedented. Going in to Tuesday, there have been 16 instances of a player scoring 40 or more points in a game already this season.

Austin Reaves and Luka Dončić of the Los Angeles Lakers have already had 40-point games twice, and Philadelphia's Tyrese Maxey has two so far himself.

The others who have done it so far this season: Denver's Aaron Gordon, Minnesota's Anthony Edwards, Brooklyn's Cam Thomas, Milwaukee's Giannis Antetokounmpo, Denver's Jamal Murray, Boston's Jaylen Brown,

Utah's Lauri Markkanen, Oklahoma City's Shai Gilgeous-Alexander, Golden State's Stephen Curry and San Antonio's Victor Wembanyama—who did it in his first regular-season game in eight months following the deep vein thrombosis scare last season.

On average, there are 2.4 instances of the league seeing a player scoring 40 points in the first four games of a season. The previous record for such events was nine, three seasons ago. This season's number is nearly double that, and there's still a couple days left for players to add to that total.

"It is only a week into it ... but the offensive explosion is nothing new in the league," Phoenix coach Jordan Ott said. "I think it's a little surprising here early in the season. I'm not sure if that's

been the trend over the last couple years."

Teams are playing faster, and they're also getting to the foul line. Teams are shooting more free throws per game — again, small sample size, but still — than at any point over the last 30 seasons. That's a fairly potent combination and the perfect recipe for a ton of points to be scored, especially in this era where just about every player in the league is a 3-point threat.

The Heat — not known for playing super-fast — scored more points in their first three games this season than any opening three-game stretch in franchise history.

There were four such games on Monday alone: Reaves had 41, Maxey had 43, Murray had 43 and Markkanen scored 51.

"Lauri played great, 51 points

is a lot," Jazz coach Will Hardy said, stating the obvious.

Thing is, players are making these big nights look so easy right now.

This is the first time in NBA history that there have been four 50-point games — Markkanen's 51, Reaves' 51 on Sunday, and last Thursday's 50-point game from Gordon along with a 55-point game from Oklahoma City's reigning scoring champion and MVP in Gilgeous-Alexander — so early in a season.

Reaves joined a short list of players with 40 or more on back-to-back nights over the first four games of a season. O'Neal did it, Michael Jordan did it three times (1986, 1989, 1991), Reggie Theus did it in 1982, and — who else? — Wilt Chamberlain actually did it on back-to-back-to-back days in 1961 and 1962.

Steelers defense flounders despite 'historic' potential

Associated Press

PITTSBURGH — Mike Tomlin went on a local radio station over the summer and said he believed the Pittsburgh Steelers defense could do "historic things" in 2025.

It's on a path to do just that, just not in the way the NFL's longest-tenured head coach or anyone else inside the organization imagined.

Yet even after getting shredded for a second consecutive week and with the Steelers (4-3) 30th in the NFL in yards against — territory the franchise hasn't sniffed since the late 1980s — Tomlin does not see any need for panic.

Tomlin brushed aside the suggestion he should take over play-calling duties from defensive coordinator Teryl Austin, instead putting the onus on all involved to help a well-compensated but floundering group find its footing.

"We just got to keep doing

what we're doing, and do it better," Tomlin said Tuesday.

A lot better.

The Steelers, dead last in the league against the pass, let Green Bay's Jordan Love do whatever he wanted whenever he wanted during a second-half barrage on Sunday night that left Pittsburgh's veteran-laden defense reeling. Love completed 20 straight passes at one point on his way to 360 yards and three touchdowns without an interception or a sack.

Longtime Steelers defensive captain Cam Heyward said afterward he was alarmed by what he considered a lack of fight. Tomlin didn't necessarily see that on tape, but he also didn't see the kind of splash plays — turnovers in particular — that have been the team's calling card defensively for years.

Four of the Steelers' next five games are against teams currently above .500 and that's before a finishing stretch that in-

cludes a pair of showdowns with rival Baltimore, which finds itself in last place but will also return two-time MVP quarterback Lamar Jackson this week.

To survive, Pittsburgh will need to do a better job not only on defense but also in keeping its composure when things go sideways.

That didn't happen against the Packers, when a non-call on an apparent offside by the Packers early in the second half seemed to shift momentum in a way the Steelers couldn't recover from.

Asked if a team with such an experienced group, particularly on defense, should be reacting better to adversity at the season's midway point, Tomlin nodded. "Our kids should do what we tell them to do, but they often don't," he said. "You know, we all fall short of perfection, man. That's why we're always working, as individuals and as a collective, whether it's football or life."

Pittsburgh will have to face In-

dianapolis without safety DeShon Elliott, who is out indefinitely with a hyperextended right knee. They have well-traveled replacements at the ready in Chuck Clark and Jabrill Peppers, although Tomlin didn't rule out adding another player or two to the mix. The Steelers worked out nine-year veteran Vonn Bell on Tuesday.

The bigger issue for Pittsburgh is a defense that is not meeting expectations.

While it's not unheard of for the Steelers to fire a coordinator during the season Tomlin does not seem ready to make such a move with the popular Austin.

"I've largely been pleased with his work," Tomlin said of Austin, who has been with the club since 2019 and the defensive coordinator since 2022. "But certainly he and I are not pleased with where we are right now from a defensive unit perspective, and so we're just going to keep working."

Brink lifts Flyers past Pens in shootout

Associated Press

PHILADELPHIA — Travis Konecny scored a milestone goal, Bobby Brink scored the shootout winner and had a goal and an assist and the Philadelphia Flyers defeated the Pittsburgh Penguins 3-2 on Tuesday night.

Konecny notched his 200th career goal, beating Pittsburgh goalie Arturs Silvs over his blocker on a shot from the right circle in the second period. He became the 17th player in Flyers history to reach the 200-goal plateau.

Brink scored on the power play in the first by poking a rebound past Silvs for his third goal of the season. He also made a deft double-deke move on a goal in the shootout. Samuel Ersson made 24 saves for the Flyers, who won for the fourth time in five games.

Sidney Crosby scored his team-leading eighth goal of the season to force overtime for the Penguins, who have registered at least one point in seven straight (5-0-2).

Justin Brazeau scored his sixth goal of the season for Pittsburgh.

Maple Leafs 4, Flames 3: Max Domi and Matthew Knies each scored two goals as and host Toronto topped Calgary.

Knies also had an assist as Toronto earned its second straight victory. Anthony Stolarz stopped 26 shots.

The Flames dropped to 1-8-1 in their past 10 games.

Golden Knights 6, Hurricanes 3: Jack Eichel scored twice in the final 4:59 to help visiting Vegas beat Carolina.

Eichel forced a turnover near the blue line with Carolina on the attack, then raced the other direction to beat Frederik Andersen for a 4-3 lead. Minutes later, he finished a feed from Ivan Barbashev to make it 5-3 with roughly 2½ minutes left.

Blue Jackets 4, Sabres 3 (OT): Miles Wood scored twice, with his second goal coming 2:53

into overtime, to rally Columbus to a road victory over Buffalo.

Zach Werenski and Yegor Chinakhov had a goal and assist each as and the Blue Jackets won their fourth straight road game. Jet Greaves made 35 saves, including kicking out his right pad to stop Jiri Kulich on a breakaway 40 seconds into overtime.

Bruins 5, Islanders 2: David Pastrnak had a goal and an assist to help Boston rally for a home victory over New York.

Pastrnak, Elias Lindholm and Mikey Eyssimont scored during Boston's second-period rally after the Bruins managed only four shots on goal in the opening period. Morgan Geekie added a power-play goal in the third and Fraser Minten had an empty-netter as Boston rebounded from a 7-2 loss at Ottawa on Monday night.

Ducks 3, Panthers 2 (SO): Troy Terry and Mason McTavish scored in the shootout as visiting Anaheim beat Florida.

Leo Carlsson had a goal and an assist, and Cutter Gauthier also scored to help the Ducks end a five-game trip with a victory in coach Joel Quenneville's first game against his former team.

Lightning 5, Predators 2: Zemgus Girgensons scored two goals to lead Tampa Bay to a victory at Nashville.

Brandon Hagel, Nikita Kucherov and Charl-Edouard D'Astous also scored for the Lightning, and Andrei Vasilevskiy made 18 saves. After winning just one of their first seven games, the Lightning have won three straight.

Red Wings 5, Blues 2: Dylan Larkin scored twice and Alex DeBrincat also scored to help visiting Detroit beat St. Louis.

Ben Chiarot and Elmer Soderblom also scored, and John Gibson made 20 saves for the Red Wings, who had rallied from a four-goal deficit to beat the Blues 6-4 on Saturday night.

Jets 4, Wild 3 (OT): Kyle Con-

nor's wrist shot 46 seconds into overtime as Winnipeg won at Minnesota, its ninth straight victory against its Central Division rival.

Connor scored his fifth goal of the season off a clean look from the slot after a drop pass from Mark Scheifele.

Kirill Kaprizov and Brock Faber scored in the second period and Marcus Johansson got the go-ahead goal on a power play early in the third for the Wild, who outshot the Jets 38-22.

Stars 1, Capitals 0: Jake Oettinger made 24 saves, recording his first shutout of the season, and Tyler Seguin scored a power-play goal as Dallas beat visiting Washington.

Washington's Alex Ovechkin, the NHL career leader with 899 career regular-season goals, was held without a goal for the second consecutive game.

Washington's Logan Thompson, who leads the NHL in goals against average at 1.29, stopped 18 shots.

Blackhawks 7, Senators 3: Connor Bedard had three goals and an assist in his first career hat trick as host Chicago beat Ottawa.

Frank Nazar and defenseman Louis Crevier each had a goal and an assist for Chicago in its third win in four games. Ryan Donato and Colton Dach also scored.

Avalanche 8, Devils 4: Victor Olofsson had his first career NHL hat trick and added two assists, Nathan MacKinnon scored two goals, and host Colorado beat New Jersey in the second game in three days between the teams.

The loss snapped the Devils' eight-game winning streak, which tied a franchise record for the most victories through the first nine games of a season, while Colorado broke a skid of four consecutive games without a victory.

MacKinnon's goals were the 375th and 376th of his career, moving him past Milan Hejduk

for fourth place on the franchise's career scoring list.

Oilers 6, Mammoth 3: Connor McDavid had two goals and Evan Bouchard added three assists as host Edmonton exploded for five second-period goals to beat Utah.

Leon Draisaitl and Mattias Ekholm each had a goal and an assist, while Isaac Howard and Ty Emberson also scored for the Oilers (5-4-2), ending a two-game losing skid.

Rangers 2, Canucks 0: Jonathan Quick made 23 saves and visiting New York blanked Vancouver in captain J.T. Miller's return.

Mika Zibanejad scored in the first period on a give-and-go with Will Cuyllie, and Sam Carrick added an empty-netter with 93 seconds left. Adam Fox had two assists.

Canadiens 4, Kraken 3 (OT): Cole Caufield set a Montreal franchise record with his 11th career overtime goal, lifting the Canadiens to a victory at Seattle after squandering a 3-0 lead midway through the third period.

Caufield, who had two goals and an assist, moved into a tie for the NHL lead with his ninth goal of the season. He skated behind the net before sneaking back toward the line to catch Kraken goalie Joey Daccord off guard and tuck the puck inside the post 44 seconds into OT.

Juraj Slafkovsky and Alex Newhook each scored a power-play goal and Nick Suzuki had three assists for the Canadiens (8-3), who improved to 5-2 on the road this season while wrapping up a four-game trip.

Kings 4, Sharks 3: Brandt Clarke scored the tiebreaking goal from the right circle with 6:40 left as Los Angeles won at San Jose after blowing a three-goal lead.

Corey Perry got his third goal in four games for the Kings.

Jeff Malott and Drew Doughty also scored, and Darcy Kuemper made 37 saves.