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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

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US pressured to change Syria strategy

Tribune Washington Bureau

WASHINGTON — The Obama administration is under increasing pressure from allied leaders to expand military action in Syria, as Russia funnels in more arms and troops, Islamic State militants seize new ground and waves of Syrian refugees fleeing the bloody conflict head toward European cities.

The pressure to change the United States' approach comes one year after President Barack Obama said at a White House news conference that the U.S. did not yet have a fully developed strategy for dealing with the Syrian war. Obama has been repeatedly criticized for failing to set a clear strategy to deal with Islamic State militants who have taken control of large swaths of Syria and Iraq. But so far, he has resisted calls to commit American forces to the front lines in another prolonged war.

European officials have grown pessimistic about the U.S. strategy amid the daily in-

flux of tens of thousands of migrants, many fleeing the Syrian fighting, and the failure of the U.S.-led coalition to dislodge the Islamic State, the Sunni extremist group also known as ISIS or ISIL.

"We are not winning this at the moment," a senior Western diplomat told reporters in Washington on Wednesday. "We need to redouble our efforts collectively to see whether there isn't more that we can do to solve these dual problems: the humanitarian crisis and the growth of ISIL terrorism."

The advances by the Islamic State and other opposition groups have rattled the government of Syrian President Bashar Assad, causing him to rely increasingly on support from Russian President Vladimir Putin.

Russia has sent a detachment of marines to Syria, U.S. officials say, adding to an escalating military presence that includes increased flights of Russian cargo planes into an airport in western Syria, stepped-up

deliveries of armored fighting vehicles and other weapons and the construction of housing for additional Russian forces.

U.S. officials and allies do not yet know what Russia's intentions are in Syria, but fear its involvement could extend Assad's military capabilities and prolong a civil war that has killed more than 300,000 people over the last four years.

Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova called the U.S. claims of a Russian military buildup in Syria "a strange hysteria" and noted that the Kremlin has a long history of military aid to Damascus.

France and Britain have also increased their military involvement in Syria.

On Monday, the British government disclosed that it had carried out a drone strike in Syria that killed two British nationals fighting with the Islamic State. British Defense Secretary Michael Fallon said the government would not hesitate to launch more drone strikes in

Syria if necessary.

That same day, French President Francois Hollande said his country's military had begun reconnaissance missions in Syrian airspace and was preparing to expand the campaign against Islamic State forces by launching airstrikes.

British Prime Minister David Cameron told the House of Commons on Wednesday that he wanted a new approach to driving both Assad and the Islamic State out of Syria.

The concerns about the Islamic State's gains in Syria come as U.S. intelligence officials see signs of the group expanding its presence in Libya and in Afghanistan, where, one U.S. official said, it has begun to shift from being a distant, inspirational force to one that can carry out attacks.

The expansion contrasts with public statements by administration officials, who have described the militants as largely contained, on the defensive and even losing ground in Iraq.

Report: PCS costs rising even as number of moves drops

BY WYATT OLSON

Stars and Stripes

The average cost of moving a servicemember to a new duty station ballooned by 14 percent during the last 14 years, according to a report released Wednesday by the Government Accountability Office.

Even as the number of permanent-change-of-station, or PCS, moves dropped by 12 percent from 2001 to 2014, the costs rose from \$3.8 billion to \$4.3 billion.

That equated to an increase per move from \$5,238 to \$6,727, the GAO reported.

What is driving the cost spike remains unclear because the

Department of Defense "does not conduct periodic evaluations of the PCS program and is not in a position to identify and evaluate changes that may be occurring over time in PCS per-move costs and the factors driving such changes, nor is it in a position to take steps to manage and control cost growth," the GAO said.

Given that the Pentagon annually spends more than a half-trillion dollars, the costs of PCS moves are relatively small. The Defense Department spent about \$43 billion on almost 700,000 PCS moves from 2001 to 2014, according to data from the report.

The DOD is under pressure

to find cuts wherever it can, however, particularly due to sequestration.

Some types of PCS moves are rigid in the when-and-where they happen — such as accession and separation travel — and the services have little flexibility in cutting costs there, the report found.

Service officials told the GAO they did have discretionary control over operational and rotational moves — which accounted for 64 percent of the costs during the 14-year period. Both types are used to move personnel to or from duty stations or extended training.

The GAO found that the average cost of moving an officer

from all services during fiscal years 2010 through 2014 was 134 percent higher than to move an enlisted servicemember, primarily because the latter has a higher allowance for household goods shipments, travel expenses and miscellaneous costs.

The GAO found that the Marine Corps had the highest average cost for dependent moves, at \$1,410 for the dependent of an enlisted servicemember, compared with \$614 for the same category in the Air Force.

The report did not include data on civilian PCS moves or deployment of troops downrange.

Residents trapped in flooded Japanese city

BY ERIK SLAVIN
Stars and Stripes

YOKOHAMA, Japan — Japan Self-Defense Forces teams carried out dramatic rescues from the air Thursday after floodwaters poured into a small city north of Tokyo.

SDF and media helicopters swarmed above Joso, in Ibaraki prefecture about 30 miles north of Tokyo Station, as the Kinu River swept away homes.

There were no immediate reports of casualties, but rescue officials said they were overwhelmed by pleas for help. More than 30,000 people fled their homes, and hundreds more were stranded by the water.

The heavy rain and landslides continued the day after Tropical Storm Etau drenched Tokyo, Nagoya and other heavily populated areas on Japan's Honshu mainland.

On Thursday morning, the Japan Meteorological Agency issued emergency warnings for Ibaraki and Tochigi Prefectures, triggering evacuation orders for tens of thousands of residents.

Much of eastern Japan, including Yokosuka Naval Base, remained under heavy rain and landslide warnings as of Thursday afternoon. U.S. military bases in the Tokyo metropolitan area endured another rainy day but did not appear to suffer significant damage.

Parts of eastern Japan have seen more than 2 feet of rain since Monday, according to local weather reports.

Service was suspended on several JR East train lines Thursday afternoon.

Information from The Associated Press was used in this report.
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SIGAR: Learn from Afghan rebuilding

BY STEVEN BEARDSLEY
Stars and Stripes

The U.S. government risks undermining its 14-year mission in Afghanistan and repeating the often “delusional” mistakes of its \$110 billion Afghan reconstruction mission elsewhere in the world, according to the top American watchdog for rebuilding in the country.

“If after 13 years and so much blood and treasure invested in Afghanistan we cannot be honest with ourselves about our successes and failures, we are not only leaving the Afghans in a precarious position, but also putting our entire mission there at risk,” John Sopko, special inspector general for Afghanistan reconstruction, said in prepared remarks for a speech to be delivered at Georgetown University on Thursday.

Sopko noted that the value of Afghan reconstruction aid

exceeds that given to Western Europe under the Marshall Plan after World War II, after adjusting for inflation.

Sopko spoke of the need for “evidence-based policymaking,” which would vet projects more thoroughly and determine whether they were wanted by locals and were sustainable.

Baselines to measure the effect of a project or funding effort would be key to preventing waste or corruption, he said.

His message has been well-received in Congress, which created his office in 2008. But officials at agencies like the U.S. Agency for International Development and the Defense and State departments have criticized the conclusions of some reports and pointed to the physical difficulties of working in a war-torn country with high levels of corruption.

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Islamic extremists may attack hajj pilgrimage

Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates — The Islamic State group is extending its reach in Saudi Arabia, expanding the scope of its attacks and drawing in new recruits. Its determination to bring down the U.S.-allied royal family has raised concerns it could threaten the annual Muslim hajj pilgrimage.

An attack last month, for which the Islamic State group claimed responsibility, appeared to mark a significant spread in its reach.

On Aug. 6, a suicide bomber attacked a mosque inside a police compound in Abha, 350 miles south of Mecca, killing 15 people. Eleven of the dead belonged to an elite counterterrorism unit whose tasks include

protecting the hajj pilgrimage.

A direct attack on pilgrims carrying out the hajj rites, potentially causing large casualties or damaging holy sites, might be a risky move for the group, bringing a backlash from shocked Muslims worldwide.

The group could attempt to hit pilgrims from Shiite-majority nations who would stand out since pilgrims generally move in groups by country. Sunni radicals consider Shiites heretics.

Little is known about the group in Saudi Arabia.

Interior Ministry spokesman Maj. Gen. Mansour al-Turki said that “security forces will act swiftly and decisively with any violations of laws and instructions related to hajj.”

Apple TV steals the show from new iPad, iPhone

San Jose (Calif.) Mercury News

SAN FRANCISCO — Apple's new \$99 Pencil will bring out the inner van Gogh in every iPad user. Its newly empowered Apple Watch can monitor a baby's heartbeat and send it to the doctor. And Siri is moving into the living room.

Apple on Wednesday unveiled new products, including two new iPhones and a new larger iPad Pro.

Grabbing top billing was the souped-up and Siri-controlled Apple TV, which CEO Tim Cook unveiled with a setup reminiscent of the stagecraft of Apple co-founder Steve Jobs.

“Our vision for TV is simple and perhaps a little provocative,” Cook said. “We believe the future of TV is apps.”

There's also the new larger

iPad Pro and the two new iPhone models, both featuring new 3D Touch that allows the user to push the screen harder or softer to pull up different layers of information and detail. And there are the new Apple Watch models, with new bands and cases and now carrying more than 10,000 apps designed for them.

Yet it was the new Apple TV, introduced by Eddy Cue, Apple's head of Internet Software and Services, that stole the show. The new and improved remote control has a new user interface that turns the remote into a magic wand that can scan through movies, pull up background data and control video games.

Rounding it out is the new and improved Siri, which can call up obscure TV shows and helps the user pick out movies to watch.

Technique is secret to Seattle secondary

Associated Press

RENTON, Wash. — Kris Richard makes it sound like some covert activity. That sharing this information will be somehow equate a security leak.

Or, he's simply joking. "It's kind of one of those things to where, if we tell you we can't let you leave," Richard said.

The topic is technique. Or at least providing a definition to a specific technique, the one that has helped make the Seattle Seahawks secondary the standard bearer for suffocating supremacy among NFL defenses.

Ask Richard Sherman or, prior to their departures, Byron Maxwell and Brandon Browner what has made them among the top cornerbacks in the NFL and often the answer is "perfecting their technique."

But what exactly are they talking about with their "technique?"

For the Seahawks, and their cornerbacks specifically, it's a style of play called the "step-kick." It's not something special just to the Seahawks. Many teams employ similar techniques for their cornerbacks when playing press coverage at the line of scrimmage.

The difference for Seattle? Combined with their safeties, the defensive scheme they play and some physical attributes — tall, lengthy cornerbacks — the Seahawks have become masters of the

technique. It's not the only reason, but an important component of why Seattle's pass defense was the best in the NFL the past two seasons.

"Everybody that learns the technique, they have to do it at a high rate, and if you don't you're going to get chewed out," Seattle wide receiver Doug Baldwin said. "More so it has to do with the discipline and the style of play our defensive backs choose to play with on a day-to-day basis. They take their craft very seriously. Not to say other people don't, but I think there is another level when you come to play for Seattle."

What is it? "Step-kick" is simply the name the Seahawks have attached to how their cornerbacks are going to play when aligned in press coverage. It's a style based on patience and reaction, and not getting beaten deep by a wide receiver, rather than the traditional bump-and-run style of coverage where the cornerback tried to force where the receiver was going to go.

"I think the easiest thing to relate it to is basketball. Like playing basketball," Richard said. "You just slide, stand firm and using your arms to lock out and get your hands on the wide receiver. So in the simplest form, I think that would be the easy way to explain to somebody. Step in front of the guy and take charge."

The goal of playing this way is cutting down on mistakes or blown coverages.

The over-aggression of the traditional bump-and-run style can leave cornerbacks in a trailing position when a receiver wins coming off the snap. The style the Seahawks plays reduces risk.

"We really want them to be on top, we really want them to be in lead positions," Richard said. "So what's the easiest, best way in order for them to do that? (It) is to allow the wide receiver to push in the direction that they're going. Rather than you dictate, let him dictate."

The master: No one has figured out this style of play better than Sherman, the prototype in Seattle. Tall, long, smooth and patient. He has all the attributes that equate to success for a cornerback playing this style.

"I think it's one of the most difficult techniques to learn out there because it goes against most of the things you learn," Sherman said. "Especially when you are first learning it, you feel like you should be moving, you feel like you should be reacting, but you have to pace yourself, you have to train yourself and discipline yourself to not react to certain things."

Sherman often stays on the field long after practice has wrapped up working with various young cornerbacks. His most attentive student this training camp has been rookie Tye Smith.

"I think I do my best to teach as much as I can. I think everybody in our group does," Sherman said. "It's pretty difficult,

it's like riding a bike with training wheels, and then taking the training wheels off immediately and somebody says you should be able to ride just as fast as you have been riding with no training wheels."

The students: Seattle has a handful of new faces in its secondary this season, including veterans Will Blackmon and Cary Williams, and Smith. For Williams and Blackmon, the learning curve is steep because there are old habits that need to be broken.

"I think it's a lot different from what I'm used to. I've been elsewhere doing my technique for seven years and I come here on my eighth year and basically trying to scrap that out of my head and buy into a new system, which is fun," Williams said. "It's awesome. ... It's about getting more consistent in technique and believing in the system and staying patient."

Patience. Everyone mentions it as the most important trait for playing this style: patience in the learning curve, patience to perform it effectively on the field.

Far from simple, but it's the prerequisite for being a cornerback in Seattle.

"I like to initiate the contact and sort of impose my will on the receivers as best I know how, and you know it's totally different from what we're doing up here," Williams said. "It just takes time for you to understand and really get a good feel for it."

Bills' QB Taylor preparing for first start

Associated Press

ORCHARD PARK, N.Y. — Long before quarterback Tyrod Taylor was labeled "T-Mobile" for his explosive dual-threat ability at Virginia Tech, the Buffalo Bills new starter picked up a different nickname in high school for his unflappable demeanor.

"We called him 'Big Smooth,'" Bills receiver Percy Harvin recalled. "He's always been that smooth guy. Not real talkative off the field, but once he got on the field, he was always one of the best athletes."

Little has changed a decade later since Harvin first encountered Taylor as an opponent while the two grew up in Virginia's Hampton-Chesapeake Bay region.

"It's kind of hard to get him rattled," Harvin said.

That was evident Wednesday, when Taylor had no difficulty containing his emotions while preparing to make his first NFL start in Buffalo's opener against Indianapolis on Sunday.

"Nah, I actually haven't really had a chance to sit back and think about how everything's going to play out," Taylor said. "Trust me, I'm definitely excited. But I can't look too far ahead. It's only Wednesday."

What's a few more days to wait for Taylor, who spent his first four NFL seasons barely getting a sniff of playing time as Joe Flacco's backup in Baltimore.

Taylor finally got his shot in Buffalo in March, when he signed a three-year contract in free agency.

He spent the offseason displaying his strong arm and explosive speed to win the No. 1 job ahead of former starter and 2013 first-round draft pick EJ Manuel, and journeyman Matt Cassel.

In three preseason games, Taylor went 24-for-31 for 236 yards without a touchdown or interception. He added 108 yards rushing on 11 carries and a touchdown.

"I think he won the job based off of everything," offensive coordinator Greg Roman said. "He has the ability to play in the pocket, outside the pocket, command the huddle, and I love his preparation. So it's kind of like check, check, check, check."

The only blank checkbox is NFL experience, which does not concern Roman.

"It's just a football game," he said. "You chalk up the field wherever you want and go out and play. And I think that's what he'll do."

Taylor proved that at high school in Hampton, where he was rated the nation's top dual-threat quarterback by Rivals.com.

In four seasons at Virginia Tech, Taylor set school records with 9,123 yards combined offense, 34 wins, and 23 touchdowns rushing by a quarterback. He also set a single-season record with 24 touchdowns passing in 2010, when Taylor was ACC player of the year.

The only real knock against Taylor is

his size. At 6-foot-1 and 215 pounds, he's comparatively small by NFL standards — especially for a mobile quarterback who risks injury by exposing himself to being tackled.

In Buffalo, Taylor prepares to become the fourth quarterback to start a game since 2013, while attempting to settle a position that has been in flux since Hall of Famer Jim Kelly retired following the 1996 season.

No pressure.

Taylor credits the past four seasons working with Flacco and the Ravens' coaching staff as having prepared him for this opportunity.

"I definitely think I've grown as a football player. I've grown as a quarterback," he said. "Some people say, the best way to go out there and learn is on the field. But in my case I didn't have the opportunity to do that. I had to learn a different way."

Taylor has impressed his teammates with his knowledge of the Bills' extensive offensive playbook, his command in the huddle and play-making ability.

"He makes the good throws. He's very elusive and gets away from defenders. But he's smart. I mean, he demands respect in the huddle," running back LeSean McCoy said. "I'm not surprised if he has a big game. I think a lot of people will feel like that. But I won't, because he's talented."

Phillies fire general manager Amaro

PHILADELPHIA — The Philadelphia Phillies have fired general manager Ruben Amaro Jr.

President-in-waiting Andy MacPhail made the announcement Thursday. Assistant General Manager Scott Proefrock replaces Amaro as interim general manager.

The Phillies have the worst record in the majors at 54-86 and will miss the postseason for the fourth straight year after winning five consecutive NL East titles.

Amaro rose from team batboy in 1980-83 to playing for the Phillies for five seasons in the 1990s. He guided the Phillies to the 2009 NL pennant and division titles and three division titles.

DT Dareus signs 6-year extension with Bills

ORCHARD PARK, N.Y. — Defensive tackle Marcell Dareus has become the Buffalo Bills' top-paid player after signing a six-year contract extension worth just over \$100 million.

The Bills announced the signing Thursday. The agreement was reached before the season opener against Indianapolis on Sunday. Dareus will miss the game due to a one-game suspension for violating NFL substance abuse policy.

Dareus is a former Pro Bowl and All Pro selection. He has a year left on his rookie contract signed in 2011 (he was drafted third overall). His extension surpasses the six-year, \$100 million deal Bills defensive end Mario Williams signed in 2012.



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NASCAR: No Chase rule changes

Associated Press

CHARLOTTE, N.C. — Moments after Carl Edwards climbed from his winning Southern 500 car, he began lobbying for NASCAR to apply the rules package used at Darlington Raceway in the upcoming playoffs.

Edwards and his Joe Gibbs Racing teammates are among the loudest supporters of an aerodynamic package that has been experimented with twice this summer, most recently Sunday night at Darlington Raceway. Although his drivers want the low-downforce package used in the 10-race Chase for the Sprint Cup championship, team owner Joe Gibbs is content using the much-maligned current rules.

"There's some things that I can't change, and NASCAR said 'Hey, look, we're not going to go changing things and go to a different package for the Chase,' and I think that's fair," Gibbs said Tuesday in a telephone interview.

NASCAR did indeed announce on Aug. 14 that the current package will be used in the Chase, which begins next week. The decision came five weeks before the playoffs begin, and Gibbs agreed with NASCAR's rationale that there wasn't enough time for teams to prepare for a new package that would be when the stakes are the highest.

"That's fair, and that will be a fair way for us to approach the Chase this year," he said.

That's in direct contrast to what the sport's biggest stars want.

NASCAR chairman Brian France has tasked his upper management with improving the on-track product, which has

become increasingly boring this year. The poor on-track product came as a bit of a surprise after the dramatic racing that occurred in last fall's 10-race playoffs.

As the quality of racing deteriorated throughout the spring, NASCAR decided to in-season test some different aerodynamic packages. The tests, though, came during actual Sprint Cup races, giving fans a glimpse of three different ideas: The current rules package, the low-downforce package used at Kentucky and Darlington, and a high-drag package used at Indianapolis and Michigan.

The current rules aren't satisfying anyone, and the low-drag package did nothing to improve the racing. But the low-downforce package has wide support, mostly because the majority of the elite drivers strongly back these rules, which make the cars difficult to handle and forces the wheelmen to up their game.

"It separates the racecar drivers from the pretenders, and that's the way it should be," said Darlington runner-up Brad Keselowski.

It's quite possible NASCAR will ultimately use a version of the low-downforce package when setting the 2016 rules, and series executive vice president Steve O'Donnell seemed to indicate after Sunday's race that the sanctioning body was pleased with the show at Darlington.

Still, O'Donnell reiterated that the rules won't change for the Chase, something Edwards made a strong campaign for after his win.

"I'm kind of a shoot-for-the-moon kind of guy," he said about his hope that NASCAR couldn't overlook the racing throughout the field Sunday.

"Everybody has developed this package. I believe it's pretty obvious that it races really well and it's really fun to do and it's fun to watch." JGR has certainly excelled at this package. At its debut in July at Kentucky, all four JGR drivers finished in the top five and Kyle Busch went to victory lane. Edwards won at Darlington, while Denny Hamlin and Busch finished third and seventh.

But JGR has shown it can win this season anywhere and under any rules package. Busch won in the first race with the high-drag package, and all four JGR drivers have won races using the 2015 rules package. The organization has won 10 races this year, seven of those wins coming in the last 10 events.

Alas, the low-downforce package likely won't be seen again until next year, and NASCAR needs to hope the racing the final 11 weeks is dramatic and series leaders don't end up with egg on their face for failing to make a change that fans so clearly support.

Pleasing the fans, after all, is ultimately what NASCAR wants most. Gibbs expected fan feedback to drive NASCAR toward embracing the low-downforce at least for 2016.

"I think (fans) saw Kentucky, they saw this past weekend, and I think what you are going to find is they are going to be voting — voting by calling the radio, by TV, they are going to be writing letters and they are going to say 'This is what we want,'" Gibbs said. "And I'd be willing to bet you that NASCAR is going to listen."

IndyCar's Wilson laid to rest

PAULERSPURY, England — The daring moves and steely determination of Justin Wilson were remembered at the IndyCar driver's funeral in an English village on Thursday, three weeks after his fatal accident during a race.

Former Formula One teammate Mark Webber and three-time Indianapolis 500 winner Dario Franchitti helped to carry the coffin, draped in a Union Jack, into a church near the central England circuit of Silverstone.

Hundreds of mourners, including three-time F1 champion Jackie Stewart, packed into the St. James and Great Church while a few Paulerspury residents gathered outside to hear the service being relayed over a speaker.

A poem written by Wilson's wife, Julia, read in part: "It's not fair you had such a short life."

Wilson, 37, died on Aug. 23, a day after being hit in the helmet by debris from another car at Pocono Raceway in Pennsylvania.

Wilson won seven times over 12 seasons in open-wheel racing, and finished as high as fifth in the Indianapolis 500.

"Justin had raw talent in abundance," former F1 driver Jonathan Palmer said in the eulogy. "His overtaking skills were incredible ... and he would always achieve this cleanly and fairly."

Associated Press

Pirates top Reds as Votto gets ejected

Associated Press

CINCINNATI — Joey Votto just went berserk.

The Reds star erupted after a called strike and got ejected, with teammates and even an umpire needing to hold him back Wednesday night in Cincinnati's 5-4 loss to the Pittsburgh Pirates.

Votto was tossed by plate umpire Bill Welke while the Reds were trying to rally in the eighth. The 2010 NL MVP slammed down his batting helmet after strike two, hollering and gesturing as he went nose-to-nose with Welke.

"My understanding is that Joey asked for time and Welke didn't grant it," Reds manager Bryan Price said. "That's what got it started."

"I know that Joey looked over to the dugout and that's my sign to get out there. He was already ejected before I could get there. Our argument is that if someone asks for time he should get it. Joey handled the situation professionally until he got upset," he said. "You can argue about how you act when you're upset. Joey was upset. Bill was upset. I was upset. There were a lot of upset people out there."

The dispute quickly escalated and Reds teammates intervened to restrain Votto, with first base umpire Laz Diaz helping prevent the big hitter from reaching Welke. Price also was ejected.

Votto had left the clubhouse when reporters arrived after the game. Welke declined comment.

Jung Ho Kang hit Pittsburgh's first grand slam of the season, a tiebreaking shot in the sixth inning. The Pirates hold the top spot in the NL wild-card race.

J.A. Happ (5-1) struck out a season-high 10. He won his fifth straight start, pitching into the seventh inning and giving up three hits.

Mark Melancon worked the ninth for his major league-leading 44th save.

Sampson (2-4) took the loss. Votto was ejected for the third time this season after the Reds had scored once in the eighth to make it 5-3. There were runners on first and second with one out at the time, and Ramon Cabrera batted for Votto and singled for his first major league hit.

Mets 5, Nationals 3: Yoenis Cespedes hit a go-ahead homer in the eighth inning moments after pinch-hitter Kelly Johnson connected for a tying shot, and visiting New York rallied past Washington for a pivotal three-game sweep.

Jacob deGrom (13-7) pitched seven strong innings in a tight duel with Nationals starter Stephen Strasburg, who struck out a season-high 13.

Cardinals 4, Cubs 3: Matt Carpenter tripled and scored twice, and Stephen Piscotty doubled in the decisive run as host St. Louis beat Chicago to end a three-game skid.

The NL Central leaders scored three times in the eighth inning to avoid their first sweep at home this season and their first against the Cubs since September 2010.

Cubs starter Jon Lester left after seven dominant innings. He didn't allow a hit after the third batter and retired 20 of his final 21 hitters.

Red Sox 10, Blue Jays 4: David Ortiz hit a three-run shot for his 498th home

run, and host Boston handed AL East-leading Toronto just its second series loss since late July.

Despite the loss, the Blue Jays maintained a 1½-game lead over New York, which lost to Baltimore. Toronto heads to Yankee Stadium for a four-game series that began Thursday night.

Orioles 5, Yankees 3: CC Sabathia's strong start in his return from the disabled list was undone by Stephen Drew's fielding misplays at second base, and visiting Baltimore rallied past New York.

Steve Pearce hit a tiebreaking homer in the eighth inning for the Orioles off Adam Warren (6-6).

Astros 11, Athletics 5: Collin McHugh earned his 16th win and visiting Houston hit four home runs to avoid being swept.

Colby Rasmus, Evan Gattis, Carlos Gomez and Marwin Gonzalez homered for the Astros, who increased their AL West lead over Texas to two games. They are tied with Toronto for the major league lead with 192 home runs.

Mariners 6, Rangers 0: Vidal Nuno allowed one hit in seven dominant innings for his first victory in more than a year, and Mark Trumbo and Kyle Seager each had four hits and a two-run homer to lead host Seattle past Texas.

Nuno (1-2) had gone 20 starts without a win, which was tied with Atlanta right-hander Shelby Miller for the longest active stretch in the majors.

Angels 3, Dodgers 2: At Anaheim, Calif., Albert Pujols drove in Kole Calhoun with the tiebreaking run in the eighth inning, and the Los Angeles Angels snapped their eight-game skid in the Freeway Series.

Calhoun doubled into the right-field corner leading off the eighth against Luis Avilan (2-5). Pujols then bounced a one-out single through the middle against Pedro Baez.

Braves 8, Phillies 1: Julio Teheran threw seven impressive innings, Christian Bethancourt hit a go-ahead homer and visiting Atlanta beat Philadelphia.

Rays 8, Tigers 0: At Detroit, Jake Odorizzi pitched six strong innings and Tampa Bay hit four homers in a rout.

Marlins 5, Brewers 2: Tom Koehler tied career highs with 10 strikeouts in eight innings and Christian Yelich had a tiebreaking, two-run double in the seventh as host Miami beat Milwaukee.

Indians 6, White Sox 4: Francisco Lindor had three hits, including a home run, and Jose Ramirez also went deep in visiting Cleveland's victory.

Twins 3, Royals 2 (12): Pinch-hitter Miguel Sano homered with two outs in the 12th inning, and visiting Minnesota beat Kansas City.

Diamondbacks 2, Giants 1: Zack Godley pitched six effective innings and host Arizona intentionally loaded the bases to get out of a seventh-inning jam and beat San Francisco.

The Diamondbacks took a bit of a gamble in the seventh, intentionally walking Buster Posey with runners at the corners to avoid facing the NL's third-leading hitter. Randall Delgado got Angel Pagan to pop out to end the inning.

Padres 11, Rockies 4: Matt Kemp and Jedd Gyorko homered, and James Shields pitched host San Diego past Colorado.