

# STARS AND STRIPES<sup>®</sup>

Thursday, September 22, 2016

A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

stripes.com

## Afghanistan, insurgent group sign peace pact

BY CHAD GARLAND  
*Stars and Stripes*

KABUL, Afghanistan — Afghan officials signed a peace agreement Thursday with representatives of Hezb-e-Islami, Afghanistan's second-largest insurgent group, led by an Islamist warlord and U.S.-designated "global terrorist."

The agreement with Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, the first Afghan peace accord since 2001, follows two years of negotiations to reconcile the onetime CIA-backed militia leader, who at times has allied his group with the Taliban and al-Qaida.

"We will try every option and possible way for peace in the country with the help of our people," said Pir Sayed Ahmad Gilani, head of the government-backed High Peace Council, after signing the agreement.

The pact is aimed at "durable peace, security and urgent end to the war in Afghanistan that guarantees development of the country," according to a draft of the agreement seen by Stars and Stripes.

The agreement was finalized earlier in the week and signed Thursday by Gilani; national security adviser Mohammad Hanif Atmar; and Hekmatyar's representative, Amin Karim. The signing ceremony was broadcast live on television.

Hekmatyar, who fought the Soviets in the 1980s, has been accused of grave human rights abuses and indiscriminate shelling of the Afghan capital during the civil war in the 1990s, which killed thousands.

On the streets of Kabul, Afghans protested the agreement Thursday morning. Twitter users posted images of people carrying signs with images of Hekmatyar, blood dripping from his lips, and of the destruction he wrought.

"We don't forgive the killer of Kabul," one sign said in English.

A preliminary agreement was signed in May, shortly after Hekmatyar, now in his 60s, dropped a key condition for ending his war of more than 40 years against Kabul — that all foreign troops leave Afghanistan.

## DOD: Islamic State group may have used chemical weapon

BY TARA COPP  
*Stars and Stripes*

WASHINGTON — The Islamic State group has attacked U.S. and Iraqi troops using a rocket that initially tested positive for mustard agent, the Pentagon said Wednesday.

The attack took place midday Tuesday at Qayyarah West Air Base in northern Iraq where U.S. and Iraqi forces are building up an operations hub to retake Mosul, the Islamic State group's stronghold in that country. The attack on Mosul is planned for October, officials have said.

No U.S. troops were hurt in Tuesday's rocket attack.

However, a U.S. explosive ordnance team went through decontamination after a shell fragment from the rocket initially tested positive for mustard agent, the Pentagon said Wednesday.

After the rocket exploded in the base, the explosive ordnance team responded to assess the munition. The team noticed a resi-

due on the shell remnants, and an initial test showed the substance to be mustard agent, said a senior defense official who spoke on the condition of anonymity.

A second test on the substance turned up negative, the official said.

However, the Islamic State group has used a crude form of mustard agent against Iraqi or Kurdish forces in other attacks. The poor quality of the chemical agent could give a negative test result.

The fragment will undergo further testing to determine whether mustard agent was used, the official said.

None of the U.S. forces that came into contact with the shell has shown any signs of injury or contamination, such as blistering, the defense official said.

Hundreds of U.S. forces are deployed to Qayyarah West Air Base, the official said.

The base is regularly targeted with indirect fire, the official said. However, he said this would be the first time mustard agent has been used against U.S. forces.

## US general: Russia responsible for attack on aid convoy in Syria

*Associated Press*

WASHINGTON — The nation's top U.S. military officer told lawmakers Thursday there's no doubt in his mind that Russia is responsible for the airstrike on a humanitarian aid convoy in Syria, and he called the attack an "unacceptable atrocity."

Marine Gen. Joseph Dunford, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said during testimony before the Senate Armed Services Committee that there were two Russian aircraft in the area of the strike when it happened. Syrian government aircraft were also nearby, he said. Dunford said he's not certain which of the two Russian aircraft dropped the bombs, which killed 20 civilians.

During a wide-ranging hearing, Dunford also said the Obama administration is con-

sidering directly arming the Syrian Kurds whom the U.S. has been backing in the fight against the Islamic State.

"They are our most effective partner on the ground," Dunford said of the battle-hardened Kurds, who are senior partners in an opposition group the U.S. calls the Syrian Democratic Forces.

Dunford said it "is very difficult" to manage the balance between supporting the Kurds and dealing with the Turkish government's adamant opposition to that support.

Asked whether arming the Kurds is a viable military option, Dunford said "reinforcing" the Syrian Democratic Forces' military capabilities "will increase the prospects of our success" in enabling the recapture of Raqqa, the de facto Islamic State capital in Syria.

# House panel: \$1T needed to reboot military

BY TRAVIS J. TRITTEN  
*Stars and Stripes*

WASHINGTON — The ongoing fight in Congress over an \$18 billion hike in military spending for 2017 has stalled the budget, but it might be small potatoes.

The price tag to rehabilitate the military after about 15 years of war and relentless overseas operations would be about \$1 trillion over a decade, according to the Republican-led House Armed Services Committee.

The committee is spearheading the \$18 billion annual increase for more equipment, training and troops. But it is facing a tough political fight with the Senate and Democrats, who oppose busting defense spending caps and raiding the Islamic State war fund to pay for the increase.

A \$1 trillion increase would require obliterating spending limits passed by Congress and doling out an average of an additional \$100 billion each year for the military through 2027.

Such an increase appears highly unlikely on Capitol Hill where budget gridlock and stopgap legislative solutions have become normal. It foreshadows the hard political fight ahead for Republican defense hawks who want more money for a military that they say is depleted, inexperienced and unready for war with major world powers such as Russia and China.

“We think the number is \$100 billion a year ... and you’d need that for more than a decade to put the military back on its feet,” said Bob Simmons, the staff director for the House Armed Services Committee, which plays a lead role in setting defense policy and spending.

## More record budgets

The \$1 trillion increase would mean a return to earlier,

record-high, wartime budgets before Congress capped federal spending in the name of fiscal responsibility in 2011.

It also assumes the United States will continue its global anti-terrorism operations while building a military to fight major air and ground wars — assumptions backed by the Pentagon and expert assessments this week.

For now, budget caps are set to keep downward pressure on military spending for the next five years unless lawmakers strike a long-term budget deal, which many people believe will be difficult.

The House is now wrangling with the Senate Armed Services Committee over the \$18 billion increase in the 2017 defense budget. Due to spending caps, the increase would come out of the U.S. overseas war fund and would cause operations against the Islamic State group to run out of money in April.

Negotiations broke off this month after lawmakers could not reach a deal, and the talks are not likely to resume until later this fall.

## Evidence of a crisis

The House committee has been ringing an alarm over what it says is a military-readiness crisis. Simmons said the committee uncovered evidence of deep, growing shortcomings within the military during recent fact-finding visits to bases throughout the United States.

It found services are experiencing a permanent loss of traditional combat experience after focusing on counterinsurgency operations in Iraq and Afghanistan since 9/11.

Soldiers below the rank of major with a combat aviation brigade at Hunter Army Airfield in Savannah, Ga., a key Army air training facility, had never trained as a unit with a ground component, according to committee staff. Instead, the

Army has spent its time operating in two-ship formations running medevac and other counterinsurgency missions.

There are also critical shortages of equipment such as aircraft, which are being pushed into the war against the Islamic State group while troops at home try to make do, committee staff told Stars and Stripes. At Shaw Air Force Base in South Carolina, the committee said an F-16 squadron had 30 pilots with only four aircraft flying. Overall, the Air Force has reduced its flying-hour requirements and has begun using half-size squadrons.

Troops with certain occupational specialties are in short supply, according to the committee investigation. For example, Army armored units in South Korea are running critically short on master gunners.

Military brass also warned Congress of overstressed, underprepared forces as recently as last week. But the claim of a crisis remains controversial among some experts who have argued the military has been stressed but remains relatively well-funded and war-ready.

## No rest for US forces

There were strong indications that U.S. forces will get no break — and could face new threats in the future.

Sen. John McCain, R-Ariz., chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, warned Thursday of “a Middle East in flames where America’s influence has been squandered” without deeper intervention in Syria, where the United States is now waging an air-and-special-operations war against the Islamic State group since 2014.

President Barack Obama’s administration repeatedly has warned that the anti-Islamic State war in Iraq and Syria will be a slog. Foreign policy experts warned House lawmakers Wednesday to plan for

the fight in the Middle East to last at least another 15 years.

“This turmoil that we see now is going to go on” and it is better to destroy Islamic extremists there rather than fight tens of thousands “scattered around the globe,” said Brian Jenkins, senior adviser to the president of the Rand Corp.

The war and counterterrorism operations will take a considerable military effort, said James Jeffrey, a former ambassador to Turkey and Iraq and distinguished fellow at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, a Washington think tank.

“If we set out to contain these movements, they will beat us; if we set out to destroy them, we will probably succeed in containing them,” Jeffrey said.

## Resurgent Russia

Meanwhile, Gen. Joseph Dunford, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, on Thursday again warned Congress that Russia poses the most significant threat to the country.

Tensions are increasing with Russia, a resurgent world power that has been implicated in computer hacking aimed at the U.S. presidential election and has massed military forces around Ukraine following its annexation of Crimea. The Army is sending armored units back to Europe as a counterbalance.

Russia also has been competing with the United States for influence in war-torn Syria and aiming to prop up the regime of President Bashar Assad.

Dunford said Russia’s activities around the world and its capabilities with nuclear weapons, cyberwarfare and underseas warfare are an increasing concern.

“It is a pattern of operations we haven’t seen for over 20 years,” he said.

## GAO: Live-pathogen blunders underreported

By WYATT OLSON  
*Stars and Stripes*

The number of times that dangerous pathogens are not properly “deactivated” for safe scientific study is considerably higher than what’s been reported by agencies overseeing such research, a federal audit says.

The discrepancy arises because laboratories are not required to report such incidents in enough detail, according to a report issued Wednesday by the Government Accountability Office.

Last year, it was revealed that the Army made 575 shipments of anthrax spores that were not completely inactivated to 194 labs and contractors around the world from 2004 to 2015 from its Dugway Proving Ground Sciences Division in Utah. Lab technicians believed the spores had been rendered inactive, but the process used had failed to do so. No one was reported to have been sickened by the anthrax.

However, the safety gap has remained unresolved. In February, Dr. Gerald Parker, a retired Army colonel who once commanded the U.S. Army Medical Research Institute of Infectious Diseases at Fort Detrick, Md., told a House committee that without better management of biosecurity, incidents such as this “will happen again somewhere in the nation’s laboratory network with a worse outcome.”

The Defense Department is reviewing best practices to inactivate anthrax spores by irradiation, the report said.

The Select Agent Program oversees U.S. laboratories that use certain dangerous pathogens that have been inactivated to destroy their hazardous qualities while retaining other characteristics for study.

The program regulates the use and transfer of select agents and is operated by the Department of Health and Human Services and the Department of Agriculture. The National Institutes of Health provides oversight and guidelines for “recombinant” pathogens artificially created in a lab.

But the program does not

require labs to submit data on incidents in which inactivation was incomplete, the GAO said.

The review examined the extent of incidents of incomplete inactivation of pathogens from 2003 through 2015 at federal, private and public labs in the United States.

The Select Agent Program identified 10 incidents during that period, but the GAO discovered an additional 11 cases during its investigation.

The 21 incidents involved a mix of pathogens, including Ebola and Marburg viruses and bacteria associated with tularemia, botulism, melioidosis and equine encephalitis.

Agency officials told the GAO that none of the incidents resulted in “human infection, severe illness, or death.”

Just over half of the 21 cases occurred at federal labs. More than a third of the cases involved anthrax.

The true number of such incidents is not known for several reasons.

First, the Select Agent Program does not use a reporting form to specifically identify this type of incident.

Federal regulations do require reporting of any incidents of theft, loss or release of select agents, but the reporting forms do not include a subset category about whether an incident involves incomplete inactivation, the report said.

Second, federal incident reporting is required only for incidents that involve certain agents. That omits a pathogen such as West Nile virus from reporting requirements.

Third, there is “currently no clear and consistent definition of inactivation in guidance or regulations” issued by any of the federal agencies involved, the report said.

Among the GAO’s recommendations are the development of clear definitions of inactivation, the revision of reporting forms to more accurately chronicle incidents of failed inactivation, and the improved documentation of where and when shipments of agents are made to facilities around the world.

## US strikes in Libya slow as targets shrink

By JOHN VANDIVER  
*Stars and Stripes*

The pace of U.S. airstrikes against Islamic State group fighters in Libya has slowed in September as the number of insurgents holed up in a hard-to-target section of the coastal city of Sirte shrinks.

So far this month, U.S. forces have conducted 50 airstrikes against Islamic State targets, compared with 108 in August, according to a tally of U.S. Africa Command-led strikes.

Since August, U.S. warplanes have been assisting forces aligned with the Libyan government in their offensive in Sirte.

“Sirte is a major city, and the areas where the last few Daesh fighters remain can be considered urban terrain that does not have a lot of open space,” said Charles Prichard, a spokesman for U.S. Africa Command, using an alternative name for the Islamic State, which is also known as ISIL and ISIS.

After nearly two months of attacks, about 200 remaining militants are believed to be tucked away in the city.

On Aug. 1, AFRICOM began its mission in Libya — Operation Odyssey Lighting — which has involved airstrikes by jets operating from the USS Wasp positioned off the Libyan coast, together with occasional assaults from Marine attack helicopters.

At the time, Libyan ground forces were involved in a wide-

ranging fight in Sirte, where the Islamic State occupied a sizable portion of territory. Shortly before U.S. operations, the military estimated that several thousand militants were positioned in the city, a burgeoning stronghold for the Islamic State in Libya.

The U.S. mission now underway in Sirte came at the request of the Libyan government, which sought support for its forces on the ground. The operation is limited to the area in and directly around Sirte.

“With the support of the U.S. airstrikes, (forces aligned with the Government of National Accord) have done the hard work on the ground to regain a substantial amount of the city territory that was under ISIL control and reduce the number of ISIL fighters to just a few hundred,” Prichard said.

Since the start of the campaign by Libyan forces, many Islamic State members have fled Sirte, “looking to hide among the population, relocate to other Libyan towns or attempting to leave Libya altogether,” AFRICOM said.

For months, U.S. officials had debated taking a stronger stance in Libya but held back, citing a lack of a stable government to work with. More recently, however, U.S. officials have expressed hope that Libya’s fragile Government of National Accord was showing signs of progress, which military officials have said was a prerequisite for action.

### Marine pilot rescued after crash off Okinawa

CAMP FOSTER, Okinawa — A Marine Corps pilot was rescued safely Thursday afternoon after an AV-8B Harrier jet crashed into the sea off the coast of Okinawa.

The jet — assigned to the 31st Marine Expeditionary Unit — went down at approximately 2 p.m., 100 nautical miles east of Okinawa, a Marine Corps

statement said. It took off from Kadena Air Base in the central part of the island, Japanese officials said.

The Harrier’s pilot ejected before impact and was rescued a short time later by members of the Air Force’s 33rd Rescue Squadron, 18th Wing, out of Kadena.

The cause of the crash remains under investigation.

news@stripes.com

## For-profit colleges seeing enrollment slide amid scrutiny

Associated Press

Some of the nation's largest for-profit colleges are suffering steep declines in enrollment amid growing competition, new regulation and government pressure that led to the collapse this month of one of the industry's biggest players, ITT Technical Institute.

The industry has been losing students for the past six years, but the crisis appears to be deepening with alarming speed. In their latest corporate filings, some schools reported a pronounced drop.

Enrollment at the University of Phoenix chain fell 22 percent this year, to 171,000 students, marking a 70 percent loss since 2010. DeVry University reported a 23 percent drop this year, to just under 26,500. Hondros College, a chain of nursing schools, slid 14 percent.

Meanwhile, community colleges are reaping the benefits.

In Columbus, Ohio, Beth Kulp withdrew from ITT Tech when she heard it was in trouble. She considered other nearby for-profit colleges but feared they might close too, so she transferred to Columbus State Community College.

"I didn't want to waste any time or money just to end up where the students at ITT ended up — with nothing," said Kulp, 34, who is studying to become a nurse.

For-profit colleges underwent years of rapid growth before seeing their fortunes change. With jobs more plentiful, fewer adults are going back to school, experts say. Traditional universities have lured students away with new online programs.

And the Obama administration has cracked down on for-profit colleges amid allegations many were using aggressive recruiting tactics, lying about the success of their students, pushing them into risky loans and leaving them saddled with heavy debt and few job prospects.

## Charlotte chief: Man's kin to see video of shooting

Associated Press

CHARLOTTE, N.C. — Charlotte's police chief said Thursday he plans to show video of an officer shooting a black man to the slain man's family, but the video won't be immediately released to the public.

The announcement came hours after violence prompted North Carolina's governor to declare a state of emergency and to call in the National Guard.

In the news conference, Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Chief Kerr Putney has said that Keith Lamont Scott, 43, refused officers' repeated commands to drop a gun, but he said during a news conference that the video does not definitely show Scott pointing a gun at anyone.

Putney said he is working to honor the request from the family of Scott to view the video. It's unclear when or if the video might be released publicly.

"Right now, my priority is the people who really are the victims of the shooting," Putney said. "I'm telling you right now if you think I say we should display a victim's worst day for consumption, that is not the transparency I'm speaking of."

The video could be key to resolving the chasm between police, who say Scott refused repeated commands to drop his gun, and residents who say he was unarmed.

Residents say Scott was unarmed,

holding only a book, and disabled by a brain injury. But it's unclear what the body cameras worn by three officers who were present during the shooting may have captured. The plainclothes officer who shot Scott, Brently Vinson, was not wearing a camera. He has been placed on leave, standard procedure in such cases. Vinson is black.

As officials tried to quell the unrest, at least three major businesses — Bank of America, Wells Fargo and Duke Energy — were asking their employees to stay home for the day as the city remained on edge. Mayor Jennifer Roberts told ABC's "Good Morning America" that officials were considering a curfew, and she said in an interview with NPR that the timing of the video's release depends on how the investigation progresses.

When asked if officials shouldn't be more transparent, she said: "The transparency would be helpful if the footage is clear and if it covers all the different parts of what happened that evening. Since I haven't seen it, I'm not certain of that and that may be the case. There were a couple of different body cameras, there was a dash camera, but as you know, sometimes those can be not clear."

North Carolina has a law that takes effect Oct. 1 requiring a judge to approve releasing police video, and Police Chief Kerr Putney said he doesn't release video when a criminal investigation is ongoing.

## Police seek 2 potential NYC bombing witnesses

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Investigators of last weekend's bombings have released an image of two men who took a suitcase they found on a city street, possibly without realizing a wired pressure cooker they removed from it and left behind could have blown them to bits.

Police investigating the bombings in New York and New Jersey have been saying for several days they were looking for the men, who they stressed were being sought as potential witnesses in the case, not as suspects.

"They're not in any jeopardy of being arrested," Jim Watters, chief of the New York Police Department's counterterror-

ism unit, said on Wednesday. "We have no reason to believe they're connected."

Federal prosecutors have charged Ahmad Khan Rahami, 28, with detonating a pipe bomb in a New Jersey shore town on Saturday morning and a pressure cooker bomb in New York City's Chelsea neighborhood later that night. Thirty-one people were injured in the New York blast. A second pressure cooker bomb left in Manhattan didn't explode and is the subject of the latest public plea.

Prosecutors said surveillance video shows Rahami rolling a suitcase down the street, then abandoning it on the sidewalk where that second device was found.

A few minutes later, two men pass by

the luggage and appear to admire it, police said. They then remove a pressure cooker from the luggage, leave the pressure cooker on the sidewalk and walk away with the luggage.

"I think they were more interested in the bag, not what they were taking out," Watters said, adding that they were "very, very lucky" the bomb didn't explode.

Rahami, 28, was arrested on Monday following a shootout with police in Linden, N.J. He is being held on \$5.2 million bail, and he faces state charges of attempted murder of police officers.

Attorney General Loretta Lynch said Rahami will be moved to New York to face federal charges in the "near future."

## AMERICAN ROUNDUP

### Girl afraid of clowns takes knife to school

**GA** ATHENS—Police say a fearful 11-year-old Georgia girl who took a knife to school told officers she needed the weapon to fend off clowns.

The Athens Banner-Herald reported the girl was arrested Sept. 16 at Burney-Harris-Lyons Middle School in Athens amid reports and social media posts about clowns frightening children in Georgia and other states.

An Athens-Clarke County police report states the girl said she needed the knife to protect her and her family because she had heard the stories about clowns jumping out of the woods and attacking children.

Police said they released the girl to her mother on a charge of possession of a weapon on school grounds.

### 6 indicted in fake marriage scheme

**MO** KANSAS CITY — Five women and a man from Kansas City have been indicted in a conspiracy to arrange fake marriages for immigrants wanting to live in the U.S.

The U.S. attorney's office says the 14-count indictment was returned last month and unsealed Monday when the six had their initial court appearances.

The indictment alleges that Delmar Dixon, 48, arranged marriages between Americans and African nationals from Kenya and Tanzania.

### Sidewalk sleeping ban rejected by council

**WI** MADISON — The Madison City Council has rejected a plan that would have banned people from sleep-

ing on downtown sidewalks during certain hours.

Opponents say the proposal from Mayor Paul Soglin was pushing the homeless out of the area while failing to provide any alternatives. Supporters say that allowing people to sleep in the Central Business District inhibits the vitality of the area and creates safety and health problems.

The State Journal reported the plan would have banned sleeping between 7 a.m. and 10 p.m. One verbal warning was allowed before a fine of \$10 for a first offense was imposed.

Soglin offered a similar plan last October, which was rejected by the council.

### Lightning suspected in diversion of plane

**MA** BOSTON — Police say a JetBlue flight from New York to Bermuda might have been struck by lightning before making an unscheduled landing at Boston's Logan International Airport.

The Boston Globe reported the plane was heading from Kennedy Airport on Monday morning when it was diverted.

A Massachusetts Port Authority spokesman said the plane landed without incident.

State police spokesman David Procopio said it's possible the plane was hit by lightning, but it hadn't been confirmed.

### Couple takes in man living on street corner

**ID** POCATELLO — An Idaho man who spent six months living on a Pocatello street corner has found a new home.

The Idaho State Journal reported that Nichole Lindstrom and her fiancé took Gary Kerness in after watching him on the street corner for months.

Kerness was living on the streets to protest what he claims is unfair housing accommodations for Pocatello's disabled citizens after he was evicted for multiple disturbing the peace violations.

Kerness is diabetic and has muscular dystrophy. Lindstrom had previously worked as his caregiver and during his homelessness she would often stop to take pictures and chat.

### Prosecutors: Driver's MS not crash factor

**WA** WOBURN — The driver of an SUV that crashed through the front of a Massachusetts pizza restaurant, killing two customers, has multiple sclerosis, but the condition did not play a role, prosecutors said Monday.

Bradford Casler, 55, of Newton, was released on personal recognizance after pleading not guilty Monday in Middlesex Superior Court to two counts of motor vehicle homicide and operating a motor vehicle to endanger. Prosecutors had asked for \$10,000 bail.

Casler was speeding and did not apply his brakes when he went through an intersection and crashed into Sweet Tomatoes restaurant in Newton on March 1, prosecutor Chris Tarrant said.

Gregory Morin, 32, of Newton, and Eleanor Miele, 57, of Watertown, were killed. Seven other people were injured.

Casler feels "sorrow and grief" about the crash, has not driven since and likely never will again, his lawyer said.

### 2 teens arrested after police chase

**ND** BISMARCK — Two South Dakota teens were arrested in North Dakota after leading officers from two

police departments on a chase in a van that police say had been stolen.

Police in Bismarck told the Bismarck Tribune that the 15- and 16-year-old girls were arrested Sept. 18.

Police said the teenagers led officers on a chase that began in Mandan and crossed over into Bismarck. The chase ended when the teenagers crashed the van.

Details of the incident, including how the teenagers got the van, were not immediately clear.

The teenagers are in custody at the Youth Correctional Center in Mandan.

### Suit filed over coed swimming restrictions

**NJ** TOMS RIVER — Several homeowners are suing an adult community in New Jersey that restricts coed swimming because most of the residents are Orthodox Jews.

The Asbury Park Press reported that residents Steve Lusardi; his wife, Diana; and Marie Curto are suing A Country Place in Lakewood seeking to quash the policy and the \$50 fines levied against them for violating the restrictions. Their complaint says the policy violates federal and state anti-discrimination laws.

The association's board decided men and women can swim together from 1 to 3 p.m. on Sunday through Friday. There also is open swimming on Saturday, the Jewish Sabbath.

Swimming is restricted by gender at all other times in observance of Jewish law that prohibits men and women from bathing together.

From wire reports

On a mission to provide objective reporting to America's military, wherever they serve.  
Read us online at [www.stripes.com](http://www.stripes.com).

STARS AND STRIPES®

# Trio of SEC freshman QBs enjoys success

Associated Press

ATHENS, Ga. — Three precocious passers are trying to prove it's now possible for true freshman quarterbacks to win big in the Southeastern Conference.

Alabama's Jalen Hurts, Georgia's Jacob Eason and South Carolina's Brandon McIlwain are a combined 5-0 as starters. Hurts and Eason directed comeback wins last week.

Hurts was named SEC offensive player of the week after No. 1 Alabama overcame a three-touchdown deficit to beat then-No. 19 Mississippi. Eason calmly threw a go-ahead touchdown pass on fourth down with less than 2 minutes remaining in No. 12 Georgia's win at Missouri.

McIlwain ran for two touchdowns in his first start, a win over East Carolina.

Excluding redshirts, no first-year quarterback has led his team to a SEC division title since Tennessee's Erik Ainge in 2004.

It's not difficult to measure just how tough it is to win big as a rookie quarterback in the SEC. Two of the league's biggest stars, Tennessee's Peyton Manning in 1994 and Georgia's Matthew Stafford in 2006, played on four-loss teams as true freshmen. Manning won

seven of his eight starts.

Former Alabama quarterback Blake Sims said he has marveled at the early success enjoyed by Hurts and Eason.

"I've been watching Alabama, I've been watching Georgia and I think both quarterbacks are doing a great job," said Sims, who signed to the Atlanta Falcons' practice squad as a running back last week.

Sims was a backup quarterback and running back at Alabama before starting his first game at quarterback as a senior in 2014. After waiting so long for his chance, he appreciates seeing true freshmen win as starters.

"It's really tough," Sims said. "You've got to be real strong mentally and very calm and you've got to understand the little things."

There are several reasons why true freshmen are having success.

South Carolina coach Will Muschamp said players leaving school early for the NFL or transferring creates more opportunities.

"Quarterback is the one we focus on, but I think it's all positions there are more guys coming out for the draft," Muschamp said. "So there are more younger players playing now."

Georgia's Kirby Smart be-

lieves the growth of the passing game in high school has made quarterbacks better prepared to play immediately in college.

"They see so much more, they throw so much more, they've seen a lot of the defenses before," the Bulldogs coach said earlier this month. "There are a lot more prolific offenses out there in high school football. ... I certainly think quarterbacks come in with more ability to play early."

It can also help a quarterback to adjust more quickly to the college game if he has played in a similar scheme as in high school.

"I think if a guy played in spread offense, he's probably more apt to be able to come in and play early in a spread offense in college," Alabama coach Nick Saban said. "If a guy played in a pro-style, drop-back sort of offense in high school, he's probably going to be more apt to play in that style of offense in college."

Hurts, Eason and McIlwain opened the season as backups.

Senior Greyson Lambert started in Georgia's opening win. Redshirt freshman Blake Barnett started Alabama's opener against USC. Eason and Hurts became starters for their second games; McIlwain had to wait one more week.

Eason was rated by some as the nation's top high school recruit at quarterback. He enrolled early but even after going through spring practice is still learning.

Smart has given candid criticisms about Eason's difficulty in running the huddle, calling plays and throwing to the correct receiver. Even so, Smart said he and offensive coordinator Jim Chaney never doubted Eason's poise.

"Coach Chaney has always said this kid is not affected by the environment," Smart said. "He's really not. He's affected by what he's got to say in the huddle. He's affected by some of the decisions he's got to make coverage-wise, but he's a very confident player."

Hurts has impressed with his cool demeanor, including after his lost fumble was returned for a touchdown by Ole Miss.

Running back Damien Harris said after the play Hurts was "no different than he was before."

Sims said he told Hurts to remember it's still the same game.

"It's like, hey, I'm back in high school, I'm in the backyard still," Sims said. "That's how my process was."

"I talked to Jalen and I told him the same thing."

## ACC still has hurdles to clear in picking title game site

Associated Press

RALEIGH, N.C. — There's a lot for the Atlantic Coast Conference to sort out between now and December — on and off the field.

Louisville's Lamar Jackson and Clemson's Deshaun Watson have the inside track in a compelling Atlantic Division race, and No. 15 Miami sure looks like the team to beat in the Coastal.

But the biggest question looming over the league is where those two division winners will meet in the title game, after it was pulled from Char-

lotte over concerns about a state law that limits the protections of LGBT people.

Where, when and how a replacement will be selected and announced is unclear.

League athletic directors referred questions about the process to the ACC office, and league officials declined multiple interview requests to discuss the topic.

Nobody from the ACC has spoken publicly about it since the league's council of presidents voted last week at a regularly scheduled meeting to relocate 10 neutral-site championships from North Carolina

until the law known as HB2 is repealed.

Signed into law earlier this year by Republican Gov. Pat McCrory, HB2 requires transgender people to use restrooms at schools and government buildings corresponding to the sex on their birth certificates. It also excludes gender identity and sexual orientation from local and statewide antidiscrimination protections.

In announcing the decision to relocate the title game, ACC Commissioner John Swoford said the process of making such a move in only 2½ months "our next challenge."

The league also must find new homes for the women's basketball and baseball championships, among others.

Among the issues that must be addressed:

■ Making sure there are enough hotel rooms available for the teams, their fans and the conference officials who will attend.

■ Arranging the activities surrounding the game.

■ Issuing refunds to those who already purchased game tickets for Charlotte.

Now that Charlotte is out, the question everybody is asking is where the game will be held.

# Cowboys' rookie QB proves he's ready

Associated Press

FRISCO, Texas — Dak Prescott converted a long third down on the go-ahead drive in his first NFL win by changing the protection and the route at the line of scrimmage.

Later, the rookie Dallas quarterback wisely slid to take a sack on a bootleg that didn't work when the most important thing for the Cowboys was forcing Washington to use its last timeout in the final two minutes.

The former Mississippi State standout keeps telling people he felt ready for the NFL from the beginning. And he keeps showing it after injuries to Tony Romo and Kellen Moore suddenly made him the starter.

"This isn't a dream where I'm like wowed every day," Prescott said with the same demeanor he had as a third-teamer during offseason workouts. "I feel like this is where I belong, so I've got to continue to get better."

Prescott has an NFL-record 75 pass attempts without an interception to start a career, although he's still looking for his first touchdown pass.

He'll shoot for a number much more im-

portant to him when the Cowboys host Chicago on Sunday night.

With a win, the 23-year-old will have double the number of victories the Cowboys had without Romo in 14 games over the three seasons before the fourth-round pick showed up.

Prescott inherited starting jobs in high school and college because of injuries and didn't surrender it either time.

At Mississippi State, he finished as the school's passing leader while joining Tim Tebow as the only SEC quarterbacks with at least 70 touchdowns passing and at least another 40 rushing.

A day after getting his first win, 27-23, over the Redskins, naturally Prescott was asked what he thought if the wins kept coming while Romo recovers from his fourth back injury in less than four years. He was quick to call it Romo's team, another thing he has said all along.

"I think Dak said it best," owner and general manager Jerry Jones said on his radio show this week.

"Tony would be the first to tell you it's everybody's team. But still, it's Tony's team. Tony has the experience and he has the ability to make us a better team. And that's

the only way you look at it right now."

Prescott became the backup when Moore broke his right ankle in training camp. And he became the starter when Romo broke a bone in his back in the third preseason game at Seattle.

Along the way, Prescott led the NFL in passer rating in the preseason, helping the Cowboys change their mind about adding a new backup to Romo. Eventually, Dallas signed Mark Sanchez as the No. 2 behind Prescott, who had a rushing TD against Washington.

After receiver Dez Bryant had just one catch in an opening loss to the New York Giants, Prescott found the 2014 All-Pro seven times for 102 yards against the Redskins. The critical third-and-11 conversion against Washington was to Cole Beasley, who has a team-high 13 catches through two weeks.

If Prescott beats the injury-riddled Bears, he'll have one more victory than veterans Brandon Weeden, Matt Cassel and Moore managed in 12 starts last season.

And the Cowboys will have a winning record while being a week closer to Romo's return with a young quarterback who's looking like the future beyond the 36-year-old and 10-year starter.

## Broncos rely even more on Ray

Associated Press

ENGLEWOOD, Colo. — Saying Shane Ray has been preparing for DeMarcus Ware's absence is an understatement.

Ray, the Broncos' top draft pick last year, and Shaq Barrett got the vast majority of snaps with the starters at outside linebacker during the offseason because Ware's bad back was acting up again and Von Miller was mired in a contract stalemate.

As a nod to Ray's rise and Ware's health and age, the Broncos elevated Ray to the starting job opposite Miller this season. Ware, 34, transitioned into a role as a pass rushing specialist.

That plan worked well through six quarters until Ware broke his right forearm Sunday when he smashed into Miller's right knee while trying to corral Colts quarterback Andrew Luck.

Ware tweeted Tuesday that surgery on the ulna bone was a success and "now the hard part begins." He's expected to miss four to five weeks.

Even more will be asked of Ray in that time.

"This is what we've been trained for. This is what I've been doing all offseason. With DeMarcus being out, I took a lot of reps with the ones and I think that helped

me grow as a player," Ray said. "Now with the added reps on top of what I've been getting, I think I'm ready. I'm well-prepared, well-coached and I'm going to do the best job that I can."

Ray played a career-high 45 snaps Sunday and expects that number to increase to 60 during Ware's absence.

With more experience and a better grasp of the scheme, Ray has heeded Ware's advice this year to play more relaxed and rely on his reflexes.

The Broncos (2-0), who visit Cincinnati (1-1) on Sunday, are taking a silver lining view of Ware's absence, not only because of their depth but because they saw just how effective and disruptive a rested and ready Ware could be last season when he missed five games but was an absolute rock star in the playoffs.

Ware collected a dozen quarterback hits, 3½ sacks, four tackles for loss and recovered a fumble as he tormented Ben Roethlisberger, Tom Brady and Cam Newton in helping the Broncos win it all.

Miller also had a monster playoff run and the Super Bowl MVP is off to a great start this year with 10 tackles, four sacks, four more QB hits and two tackles for loss.

### NFL, Panthers, monitor protests ahead of game

CHARLOTTE, N.C. — The NFL said its plans are for Sunday's game between the Minnesota Vikings and Carolina Panthers to be played as scheduled, although the league will continue to monitor the ongoing violent protests that have gripped Charlotte.

Gov. Pat McCrory declared a state of emergency in Charlotte on Wednesday night and has sent the National Guard in to help restore peace.

"We are planning to play the game as scheduled on Sunday," NFL spokesman Brian McCarthy said in an email to The Associated Press on Thursday. "We are monitoring events in Charlotte and have been in communication with local officials and authorities, and both the Carolina Panthers and the Minnesota Vikings."

Panthers president Danny Morrison said in a statement earlier Thursday that the team is "in contact with government officials, the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department and the NFL. We are continuing to monitor events as we prepare for Sunday's home game."

From The Associated Press

# Braves rob Cespedes of winning HR

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Right in the middle of a pennant race, the New York Mets were robbed.

In an electrifying finish to a pressure-packed game for the Mets, center fielder Ender Inciarte took away a three-run homer from Yoenis Cespedes for the final out of Atlanta's 4-3 victory Wednesday night.

"Tremendous catch," New York manager Terry Collins said. "One of the best you'll ever see."

With two runners on in the bottom of the ninth inning, Cespedes made a bid for a game-winning homer by launching a drive to deep right-center. Inciarte raced a long way to the wall and timed his jump perfectly, catching the ball just above the orange line atop the fence.

"Probably the best catch I've ever made," Inciarte said. "I thought that ball was gone right [off] the bat. But it was the last play

of the game. I was just giving everything I've got."

And with that, the Mets were handed another damaging defeat by the last-place Braves after squandering a three-run lead.

Rather than regaining sole possession of the NL wild-card lead, New York remained tied with San Francisco and St. Louis for the league's final two playoff spots. The Giants lost to the Dodgers, and the Cardinals were routed in Colorado.

At his locker, a disappointed Cespedes would answer only one question from reporters.

"I knew I hit the ball well," he said through a translator. "I knew there was a good chance it was going to make it out, but he made a better play."

Once he landed, Inciarte held up his glove in excitement and then kissed the ball as he jogged toward the infield to greet teammates. Cespedes turned and walked slowly off the field.

"Guys were flying over the railing," Braves interim manager Brian Snitker said. "It just erupted. I don't think you could have won the World Series and had a bigger explosion than that right there."

Some fans in the stunned crowd of 32,187 at Citi Field still had their hands on their heads as they filed up the aisles toward the exits.

"I still can't wrap my mind around that, how he did that. Just incredible," Braves slugger Freddie Freeman said.

Bartolo Colon and Jeurys Familia failed to protect a 3-0 lead for the Mets. An error by normally sure-handed first baseman James Loney helped Atlanta tie the game with an unearned run in the eighth.

Inciarte had an RBI groundout against Familia (3-4) in the ninth, sending the feisty Braves to their fifth straight victory. They completed their second consecutive three-game sweep at Citi Field, including one in June.

# Sanchez's 2 HRs, 5 RBIs fuel Yankees

Associated Press

ST. PETERSBURG, Fla. — Rookie Gary Sanchez keeps putting up numbers at an astounding rate — and putting the New York Yankees in position to make a run at a playoff spot.

Sanchez hit two more homers and drove in five runs, Masahiro Tanaka won despite allowing four home runs in the same inning and the Yankees beat Tampa Bay 11-5 on Wednesday night.

The Yankees moved within 2½ games of Baltimore for the second AL wild-card spot. New York also would have to jump over Seattle, Houston and Detroit to earn a postseason berth.

Sanchez homered in his fourth straight game. The catcher hit a three-run shot in a four-run second off Alex Cobb (1-1) and added his 19th homer in 43 games this season on a solo drive in the sixth against Justin Marks.

"What he's doing is so impressive," said teammate Brian McCann, who had four hits in his 1,500th major league game.

Including two games last sea-

son, Sanchez became the first player in major league history to hit 19 homers in his first 45 games. Wally Berger, with the Boston Braves in 1930, went deep 19 times in his first 51 games.

Sanchez was hit on the left arm by a back swing in the ninth but stayed in the game and later said he was fine.

Sanchez has eight shots in his last 12 games after a 10-game home-run drought.

Tanaka (14-4) won his seventh straight decision. He was staked to a 7-0 lead entering the bottom of the third before Tampa Bay teed off.

Bobby Wilson led off with a home run. After Tanaka got two consecutive outs, Evan Longoria, Brad Miller and Corey Dickerson hit three consecutive shots. The four home runs in an inning set a Rays record.

**Dodgers 9, Giants 3:** Yasiel Puig's three-run homer highlighted a five-run first inning and the host Dodgers routed the Giants, extending their NL West lead to six games with 10 remaining.

**Cubs 9, Reds 2:** John Lackey pitched seven solid innings

for his first win in six weeks, Miguel Montero drove in three runs, and host Chicago swept Cincinnati.

**Red Sox 5, Orioles 1:** Boston scored five unearned runs in the sixth inning after first baseman Chris Davis' throwing error and beat host Baltimore to pad its AL East lead.

Baltimore is a game behind the Blue Jays for the top AL wild card.

**Mariners 2, Blue Jays 1 (12):** Robinson Cano drove in the winning run with a sacrifice fly in the 12th inning and host Seattle beat Toronto to avoid a series sweep.

**Nationals 8, Marlins 3:** Max Scherzer pitched 6⅔ innings to tie for the National League victory lead with 18, helping Washington beat host Miami.

**Indians 4, Royals 3:** Corey Kluber allowed two runs and struck out nine in 6⅓ innings, and host Cleveland eliminated the reigning World Series champions from the AL Central race.

**Angels 5, Rangers 4:** Mike Trout hit his 28th homer and Jered Weaver went six innings for his 150th victory in an An-

gels uniform, helping visiting Los Angeles beat the AL West-leading Texas.

**Rockies 11, Cardinals 1:** Nolan Arenado hit a grand slam, German Marquez pitched five solid innings for his first major league win and host Colorado slowed St. Louis' playoff chase.

**Astros 6, Athletics 5:** Evan Gattis homered twice, catcher Jason Castro threw out a runner to end the game and Houston beat host Oakland to complete a series sweep.

**Pirates 4, Brewers 1:** Sean Rodriguez hit a home run and a two-run single, Andrew McCutchen went deep, rookie Chad Kuhl pitched six strong innings and Pittsburgh beat host Milwaukee.

**Phillies 8, White Sox 3:** Tommy Joseph homered, doubled and drove in three runs and Jerad Eickhoff outpitched Chris Sale in host Philadelphia's victory.

**Diamondbacks 3, Padres 2:** Paul Goldschmidt homered twice, including a go-ahead, two-run shot in the sixth inning, and Zack Greinke pitched six strong innings to lead visiting Arizona.