

DOD: Despite Russia war, China top threat

By **DOUG G. WARE**
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — China remains the greatest threat for U.S. interests at home and abroad, despite Russia's ongoing war in Ukraine, according to a Pentagon defense strategy released Thursday.

"[China is] the only country with both the intent to reshape the international order, and, increasingly, the economic, diplomatic, military, and technological power to do so," Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin states in the foreword to the 2022 National Defense Strategy.

The Defense Department unveiled its first National Defense Strategy in four years, a comprehensive security assessment that identifies China, Russia, North Korea, Iran — and climate change — as some of the top threats for which the U.S. military is preparing.

While the strategy identifies several potential threats, it calls China the chief U.S. competitor.

"[China] remains our most consequential strategic competitor for the coming decades. I have reached this conclusion based on [its] increasingly coercive actions to reshape the

Indo-Pacific region and the international system to fit its authoritarian preferences, alongside a keen awareness of [Beijing's] clearly stated intentions and the rapid modernization and expansion of its military," Austin said.

The Pentagon released the strategy along with its nuclear posture and missile defense reviews, which detail the military's key priorities and approaches to modern warfare worldwide. It's a department-specific follow-up to the National Security Strategy that Biden released earlier this month.

The defense strategy outlines four top-level defense priorities — defending the homeland, deterring attacks against the United States, deterring aggression and preparing for possible conflict and building a "resilient joint force and defense ecosystem."

The 80-page strategy is the Pentagon's unclassified version. Its classified version was given to Congress last spring, not long after Russia invaded Ukraine, but officials said there isn't a lot of foundational difference between the two versions.

Biden and other military officials have previously identified China as a potential threat to U.S. interests, in part, because it has made

aggressive statements toward Taiwan, which it considers a breakaway territory.

Air Force Gen. Jacqueline Van Ovost, commander of the U.S. Transportation Command, said earlier this month that Beijing creates a unique challenge because China and Taiwan are in the vast Pacific Ocean, which poses some logistical difficulties in transporting military equipment and personnel.

The defense strategy identifies Russia as an "acute" threat. Austin told reporters the word was chosen because it's unlikely that Russia can "systemically challenge the U.S. over the long term."

A significant component to the new strategy, officials said, is the U.S. military's need to plan for a scenario in which it might need to address multiple conflicts at once.

"In a potential conflict with a competitor, the United States would need to be able to deter opportunistic aggression by another competitor," according to the strategy. "We will rely in part on nuclear weapons to help mitigate this risk, recognizing that a near-simultaneous conflict with two nuclear-armed states [Russia and China] would constitute an extreme circumstance."

Leaking pipes blamed for tainted water on USS Lincoln

By **DOUG G. WARE**
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Contaminated water found in some of the tanks aboard the USS Abraham Lincoln as it was moored off the Southern California coast a few weeks ago got into the ship's potable water system through a leak in one of its pipes, Navy officials said.

The Navy said earlier this month that E. coli bacteria and some foul-smelling water that was cloudy in appearance was found in some of the potable water tanks aboard the warship as it was off the coast of San Diego.

Officials said the water's unusual appearance and smell led

to the discovery of the E. coli in three of the ship's 26 potable water tanks. However, they noted the two issues were not related to each other.

After the discovery of the bacteria, the Navy said the tanks were taken out of service and inspected.

"Those tanks were immediately isolated and secured from the potable water system, and the odor and cloudiness in the water abated by [the following day]," said Cmdr. Zachary Harrell, spokesman for the commander of the Naval Air Forces.

Harrell also said the affected tanks would be deep-cleaned and inspected and a thorough

root-cause analysis was being done.

The Navy said the cloudy and smelly water was contaminated with bilge water, which contains various waste elements such as oil and chemicals that accumulate on lower parts of the ship.

"Personnel from Puget Sound Naval Shipyard and USS Abraham Lincoln completed the inspection of the affected potable water tanks. The inspection concluded that bilge water entered one of the potable water tanks through a hole that was found in the tank's air vent line, causing the cloudy appearance and odor in the ship's potable water," Naval Air Forces officials

said in a statement.

Typically, bilge water is pumped into a storage holding tank on ships and properly disposed of.

Navy officials said no confirmed illnesses from the bilge water or the E. coli contamination have been documented. About 3,000 sailors were aboard the USS Abraham Lincoln when the tainted water was found Sept. 21.

Harrell said all drinking water that's stored on all Navy ships is tested regularly.

No similar contaminations have since been found on any other U.S. Navy vessels, the Naval Air Forces said.

Report: Lack of info-sharing harms troops

By JOHN VANDIVER
Stars and Stripes

A Navy SEAL sniper's killing of an Islamic State fighter in Cameroon, the wounding of a Marine in battle in Tunisia and large-scale gunfights in Somalia.

Those are among the reporting failures across presidential administrations that have put U.S. troops at heightened risk because of insufficient oversight, according to a transnational think tank based in Brussels.

In a report released Wednesday, the International Crisis Group called for greater congressional oversight of ongoing American counterterrorism missions.

"The failure to report such hostilities, or quietly and retroactively sweeping them under the 2001 (Authorization for Use of Military Force) ... increases the risk that the U.S. will unwittingly slide into new conflicts," the report said.

The report, which focused on authorizations granted after the 9/11 terrorist attacks, argues that lawmakers should take a range of steps to bring more scrutiny to globe-spanning military missions.

For years, critics have lamented that the 2001 legislation has been used by successive U.S. administrations to carry out secret counterterrorism missions outside the public eye and with little pushback from Congress.

Such missions, which the Pentagon generally refers to as "advise, assist and accompany" operations, continue even as the military has shifted its attention to countering adversaries like Russia and China.

On numerous occasions, things have quickly turned violent. According to one unidenti-

fied former U.S. official cited in the report, American forces ended up "running with scissors" and "chasing (high-value targets), which they never should have been doing."

Since 2015, U.S. armed forces have engaged in several clashes that should have been reported to Congress under the War Powers Resolution but weren't, the Crisis Group report said.

One little-known episode occurred in 2017 in northern Cameroon, where SEALs accompanied a local unit to a compound flying an ISIS flag. The SEALs took up overwatch 300 yards away as Cameroonian troops approached the site.

"An unidentified man emerged with an AK-47, and a Cameroonian soldier tried to fire upon him, but the soldier's gun reportedly jammed," the report said. "Acting in what a former of-

ficial characterized as 'collective self-defense' of the Cameroonian forces, a SEAL sniper shot and killed the man with the AK-47."

Another 2017 battle involved U.S. Marines accompanying Tunisian partners, who got into a firefight with militants along the Tunisia-Algeria border.

A former U.S. official told the Crisis Group that a Marine was shot during the battle when a bullet ricocheted underneath his body armor.

But those instances and several others like them in places such as Niger and Mali weren't reported to Congress within the War Powers Resolution's 48-hour reporting period, according to the Crisis Group's findings.

"Nor was any of this fighting widely understood to be authorized at the time," the report said.

Sailor convicted for sale of illegal machine guns

By ROSE L. THAYER
Stars and Stripes

A Virginia-based sailor was convicted Friday by a federal jury on five counts of owning and selling unregistered machine guns online, after authorities found dozens of weapons, including antitank missile launchers, in his home, according to the Justice Department.

Petty Officer 1st Class Patrick Tate Adamiak, a 28-year-old master at arms first class in the Navy, became the focus of a Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, or ATF, investigation about a year ago when an informant told agents that the sailor sold machine guns and altered other weapons making them easy to convert into machine guns, according to online court records.

When contacted by the informant, Adamiak gave his name and home address in Virginia Beach to receive payment through a money order for weapons and machine gun receivers.

With the informant's help, agents continued to make purchases from Adamiak through March, spending thousands of dollars. The weapons sold to ATF investigators and the informant were considered illegal because Adamiak had not registered them in compliance with the National Firearms Act, according to the court documents.

Adamiak was found guilty by a jury of receiving, possessing and transferring unregistered machine guns, and possession of four destructive devices, the Justice Department said.

DIY checkout option coming soon to AAFES exchanges

By SETH ROBSON
Stars and Stripes

YOKOTA AIR BASE, Japan — The Army and Air Force Exchange Service is rolling out 500 self-checkout units at its military department stores worldwide over the next few months.

The DIY stations will be available at AAFES exchanges, convenience stores and specialty locations, according to AAFES spokesman Chris Ward.

"Self-checkout allows more customers to be served, improves in-store productivity and increases the availability of associates on the sales floor to assist customers with purchase decisions," he said Wednesday in an email to Stars and Stripes.

Ward declined to reveal how much the project cost. Self-checkout will have "no impact on

staffing," he said.

Employees who staffed checkout lanes will instead focus on answering customer questions or providing specialized service, according to Ward.

AAFES follows the Defense Commissary Agency, which installed self-checkout lanes 14 years ago at its supermarkets on U.S. military bases.

The exchange at Yokota, home of U.S. Forces Japan in western Tokyo, put four self-checkout machines into service Oct. 19, store manager Andrew Defelice said Thursday as he watched customers scan their purchases.

"It's more expeditious," he said.

A store employee must approve sales of alcohol and over-the-counter medicines that have age restrictions, he said.

Russia warns it could target US satellites

Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine — Ukrainian forces attacked Russia's hold on the southern city of Kherson on Thursday while fighting also intensified in the country's east. The battles came amid reports that Moscow-appointed authorities in Kherson have fled the city, joining tens of thousands of residents who have been evacuated to other Russia-held areas.

Ukrainian forces were surrounding Kherson from the west and attacking Russia's foothold on the west bank of the Dnieper River, which divides the region and the country.

Amid the battles, Russia warned that Moscow could target Western commercial satellites used for military purposes in support of Ukraine.

Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova accused the United States of pursuing "thoughtless and mad" escalation. She argued that Washington should take a more responsible approach shown during the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis — when the Cold War superpowers stepped back from the brink of nuclear confrontation.

Ukraine has pushed ahead with an offensive to reclaim the Kherson region and its

capital of the same name, which Russian forces captured during the first days of a war now in its ninth month.

More than 70,000 residents from the Kherson city area have evacuated in recent days, the region's governor, Vladimir Saldo, said Thursday.

Members of the Russia-backed regional administration were included in the evacuation, the deputy governor, Kirill Stremousov said.

Monuments to Russian heroes were moved, along with the remains of Grigory Potemkin, the Russian general who founded Kherson in the 18th century, that were kept at the city's St. Catherine's Church.

In eastern Ukraine, Russian forces continued to bombard the city of Bakhmut in the Donetsk region, making slow gains toward the center.

Amid the heavy combat on two fronts, Russian officials stepped up warnings that the West could become part of the conflict.

"The more the U.S. is drawn into supporting the Kyiv regime on the battlefield, the more they risk provoking a direct military confrontation between the biggest nuclear powers fraught with catastrophic consequences," said Zakharova, the Russian Foreign ministry spokeswoman.

"Washington now keeps upping the ante, apparently believing that it's capable of controlling the escalation," she said.

The deputy head of Russia's delegation at a U.N. arms control panel, Konstantin Vorontsov, described the use of U.S. and other Western commercial satellites for military purposes during the fighting in Ukraine as "extremely dangerous."

"The quasi-civilian infrastructure could be a legitimate target for a retaliatory strike," Vorontsov warned.

As they have all month, Russian forces carried out attacks on Ukraine's energy infrastructure, which have caused increasing worry ahead of winter.

A Russian drone attack early Thursday hit an energy facility near the capital of Kyiv, causing a fire, said Kyiv regional Gov. Oleksiy Kuleba. He said the latest attacks inflicted "very serious damage."

"The Russians are using drones and missiles to destroy Ukraine's energy system ahead of the winter and terrorize civilians," Kuleba said in televised remarks.

Kuleba announced new rolling blackouts and urged consumers to save power. He said authorities were still pondering over specifics of the blackouts needed to restore the damaged power facilities.

China accused of tracking dissidents

Associated Press

THE HAGUE, Netherlands — China has reportedly established dozens of "overseas police stations" in nations around the world that activists fear could be used to track and harass dissidents as part of Beijing's crack-down on corruption.

Information about the outposts underscored concerns about the ruling Chinese Communist Party's influence over its citizens abroad, sometimes in ways deemed illegal by other countries, as well as the undermining of democratic institutions and the theft of economic and political secrets by bodies affiliated with the one-party state.

Spanish-based non-government group Safeguard Defenders published a report last month, called "110 Overseas. Chinese Transnational Policing Gone Wild," that focused on the foreign stations.

Laura Harth, a campaign director with the group, told The Associated Press that China has set up at least 54 overseas police service stations.

"One of the aims of these campaigns, ob-

viously, as it is to crack down on dissent, is to silence people," Harth said. "So people are afraid. People that are being targeted, that have family members back in China, are afraid to speak out."

Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Mao Ning said Thursday that Beijing wasn't doing anything wrong. "Chinese public security authorities strictly observe the international law and fully respect the judicial sovereignty of other countries," Mao said.

The Dutch government said this week it was looking into whether two such police stations — one a virtual office in Amsterdam and the other at a physical address in Rotterdam — were established in the Netherlands.

"We are investigating the activities of these so-called police centers. Once there is more clarity on the matter, we will decide on appropriate action," the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs said in a statement sent to the AP. "We have not been informed about these centers via diplomatic channels."

Putin: West seeks global domination by using Ukraine

Associated Press

MOSCOW — Russian President Vladimir Putin on Thursday sought to cast the conflict in Ukraine as part of efforts by the West to secure its global domination. Speaking at a conference of international policy experts, Putin accused the U.S. and its allies of trying to dictate their terms to other nations in a "dangerous and bloody" domination game.

Putin, who sent his troops into Ukraine on Feb. 24, has cast Western support for Ukraine as part of broad efforts by Washington and its allies to enforce what they call a rules-based world order that only foments chaos. The leader warned that "he who will sow the wind will reap the whirlwind."

Putin claimed that "humankind now faces a choice: accumulate a load of problems that will inevitably crush us all or try to find solutions that may not be ideal but working and could make the world more stable and secure."

US economy returned to growth last quarter

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The U.S. economy grew at a better-than-expected 2.6% annual rate from July through September, snapping two straight quarters of economic contraction and overcoming punishingly high inflation and interest rates.

Thursday's estimate from the Commerce Department showed that the nation's gross domestic product — the broadest gauge of economic output — grew in the third quarter after having shrunk in the first half of 2022. Stronger exports and steady consumer spending, backed by a healthy job market, helped restore growth to the world's biggest economy.

The latest GDP report comes as Americans, worried about inflation and the risk of a recession, have begun to vote in midterm elections that will determine whether Presi-

dent Joe Biden's Democratic Party retains control of Congress. Inflation has become a signature issue for Republican attacks on the Democrats' stewardship of the economy.

Consumer spending, which accounts for about 70% of U.S. economic activity, expanded at a 1.4% annual pace in the July-September quarter, down from a 2% rate from April through June. Last quarter's growth also got a big boost from exports, which shot up at an annual pace of 14.4%. Government spending also helped: It rose at a 2.4% annual pace, the first such increase since early last year, with sharply higher defense spending leading the way.

Housing investment, though, plunged at a 26% annual pace, hammered by surging mortgage rates as the Federal Reserve aggressively raises borrowing costs to combat

chronic inflation. It was the sixth straight quarterly drop in residential investment.

Overall, the outlook for the overall economy has darkened. The Fed has raised interest rates five times this year and is set to do so again next week and in December. Chair Jerome Powell has warned that the Fed's hikes will bring "pain" in the form of higher unemployment. Concern about the likelihood of a recession next year has been growing.

With inflation still near a 40-year high, steady price spikes have been pressuring households across the country. At the same time, rising interest rates have derailed the housing market and are likely to inflict broader damage over time. The outlook for the world economy, too, grows bleaker the longer that Russia's war against Ukraine drags on.

US unemployment claims inch higher, but remain low

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Slightly more Americans applied for unemployment benefits last week as the labor market remains one of the healthiest parts of an uneven U.S. economy.

Jobless claims for the week ending Oct. 22 inched up by 3,000 to 217,000 from 214,000 the previous week, the Labor Department reported Thursday.

The four-week moving average rose to 219,000 from 212,250 the previous week.

Applications for jobless claims, considered a proxy for layoffs, have remained historically low even as the Federal Re-

serve has cranked up its benchmark borrowing rate in an effort to cool the economy and tame inflation.

Fed officials have warned that the unemployment rate will likely have to rise as part of their fight against rising prices, and the most recent government jobs report likely snuffed out any hope that the Fed would pause rate increases when it meets next week.

American employers slowed their hiring in September but still added 263,000 jobs and the unemployment rate fell from 3.7% to 3.5%, matching a half-century low.

Earlier this month, the government re-

ported that inflation in the United States accelerated in September, with the cost of housing and other necessities intensifying pressure on families and businesses.

Four-decade high inflation has prompted the Federal Reserve to keep raising its key interest rate, which is currently in a range of 3% to 3.25%. A little more than six months ago, that rate was near zero. The sharp rate hikes have pushed mortgage rates up near 7%, and made other borrowing costlier. The Fed hopes that higher interest rates will slow borrowing and spending and push inflation closer to its traditional 2% target.

Walker faces abortion allegation from a 2nd accuser

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — A woman came forward Wednesday to accuse Herschel Walker, the anti-abortion Republican running for U.S. Senate in Georgia, of encouraging and paying for her 1993 abortion — an accusation that came just weeks after a former girlfriend said he did the same for her in 2009.

Walker dismissed the newest allegation as "foolishness" and "a lie," similar to his vehement denials earlier this month of the abortion alleged to have happened 13 years ago.

"I'm done with all this foolishness. This is all a lie, and I will not entertain any of it. I

also did not kill JFK," Walker said in a statement later Wednesday.

The second accuser, identified only as "Jane Doe," spoke to reporters via an audio Zoom call arranged by her lawyer, Gloria Allred. The woman alleged that Walker, a former college and professional football star making his first bid for public office, pressured her into an abortion and paid for one after she became pregnant during their six-year relationship while he was married to his first wife.

"The reason I am here today is because he has publicly taken the position that he is 'about life' and against abortion under any circumstances when, in fact, he pressured

me to have an abortion and personally ensured that it occurred by driving me to the clinic and paying for it," the woman said. She said she was not revealing her identity because she fears "reprisals against myself, my family and my livelihood."

"I do not believe that Herschel is morally fit to be a U.S. senator and that is the reason why I am speaking up and providing proof," she said.

She said partisan allegiances were not a factor in her decision to come forward. She called herself a registered independent and said she voted twice for Donald Trump, the former Republican president who has endorsed Walker.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Caverns visitors rescued with ropes, harnesses

AZ PEACH SPRINGS — Rescuers used ropes and harnesses to hoist five people to safety after an elevator at a national tourist attraction broke down 21 stories underground.

A husband and wife, a couple with two young children and at least two people in their 70s had taken a 30-minute tour of the Grand Canyon Caverns on Sunday and were preparing to return above ground when they discovered that the lift was not working, Coconino County Sheriff's officials said in a news release.

A man in the group was able to get out and notify authorities after climbing the emergency staircase to the surface, the release said. Authorities determined that the five other members of the group could stay overnight in the hotel suite located at the bottom of the cavern while repair personnel worked on the elevator.

Notified on Monday morning that the repair was unsuccessful, the sheriff's search and rescue unit and the Flagstaff Fire Department's technical rescue team set up a rope rescue system in the elevator shaft. They secured each of the tourists in a harness and raised them one at a time up the shaft.

Former officer helped drug dealer robberies

TN MEMPHIS — A former officer has been sentenced to 12 years in federal prison for giving police information and equipment to civilians who robbed drug dealers in Memphis, Tenn., prosecutors

said.

Former Memphis Police Officer Sam Blue, 63, pleaded guilty in January 2020 to conspiracy to violate civil rights by using force, violence and intimidation, and conspiracy to commit robbery affecting interstate commerce

Blue was sentenced Tuesday, the U.S. attorney's office said.

From 2014 to 2018, Blue conspired with others to rob drug dealers. Blue gave robbers home addresses for targets. He also provided robbers with an official Memphis Police Department badge and a car dashboard blue light.

In 2018, several men put on fake police uniforms and used a blue police dashboard light to stop Eric Cain near his apartment, prosecutors said. Attackers handcuffed, kidnapped and tortured Cain, demanding to know where he kept his drugs and money. Cain escaped and spent a week in the hospital.

Canadian man charged in connection with threats

MA BOSTON — A Canadian man has been arrested in connection with a series of bomb threats last month targeting several prominent locations in Boston, police said Monday.

Joshua Kimble, 42, of Peterborough, Ontario, faces multiple charges in Canada, Boston police said in a statement.

A series of threats were transmitted to Boston Children's Hospital on Sept. 9, police said. Over the next four days, the Prudential Center shopping mall, the Orpheum Theater, Massachusetts General Hospital, and the Boston Public Library all received threats, police said.

All shared similar details and all appeared to have originated in Canada, police said. Police did not disclose a motive.

Kimble is currently being held pending trial in Canada on 12 counts of public mischief and 12 counts of false information, police said.

Girl, 14, took loaded gun to high school campus

CA WESTMINSTER — A 14-year-old girl was arrested Tuesday after she brought a loaded handgun to a Southern California high school, police said.

The girl showed the gun to a student in a restroom at Westminster High School at around noon, although she didn't make any threats and nobody was hurt, according to Sgt. Eddie Esqueda, the Orange County Register reported.

School staff were alerted, took the gun and detained the girl, police said.

The girl didn't attend Westminster but is a student at Fountain Valley High School, about five miles away, police said. It wasn't immediately clear why she was on the Westminster campus.

Man pleads guilty in connection with barn fires

IN GOSHEN — A man has pleaded guilty in connection with a series of barn fires set last year in several northern Indiana counties.

An Elkhart County judge gave preliminary approval Monday to the plea agreement with Joseph Hershberger, who was charged with eight counts of arson, the South Bend Tribune reported.

The fires were started in Elk-

hart, Kosciusko, Marshall and St. Joseph counties between April and October in 2021.

Cellphone data placed Hershberger's phone at the scene of several of the fires, according to court records. He was arrested in December.

As part of the deal, prosecutors dismissed a charge of contributing to the delinquency of a minor and placed an upper limit of 50 years on any sentenced imposed against Hershberger. He is scheduled to be sentenced Nov. 21.

Sherry Thomas, his girlfriend, also was charged late last year with eight counts of arson.

In addition, she and Hershberger also face charges connected to a fire at an Amish school in Marshall County. Some of the barns set ablaze belonged to members of Indiana's Amish community.

Man dragged to death by subway train at station

NY NEW YORK — A 20-year-old man was dragged to his death by a New York City subway train after his clothing or backpack apparently got stuck in the doors, authorities said.

The man was killed by a southbound 1 train just before 5 p.m. Monday at the Columbus Circle station, a busy transfer hub at the southwest corner of Central Park, transit officials said. His name was not immediately released.

"While the investigation is in its earliest stages, it appears this was a terrible accident that did not involve criminal activity," Richard Davey, the president of New York City Transit, said in a statement.

— From wire reports

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Schwarber powering Phillies in playoffs

Associated Press

Kyle Schwarber crushed a 98 mph slider beyond the center-field fence and the ball disappeared into a thicket of English ivy, Arborvitae, Holly, and other evergreen flourishing as the greenery backdrop at Citizens Bank Park.

Most of Schwarber's homers land — and yes, they do land even as some he hits might best be viewed through the Hubble once they reach orbit — in easy-to-track spots.

This particular ball, hit against San Diego during Game 4 of the National League Championship Series, almost needed a search party to locate. The area was swept, not by the grounds crew as might be the assumption, but by the team in charge of collecting game-used memorabilia. Schwarber doesn't make it easy; he hit two into the bushes in one game this year and it couldn't be verified which ball was which.

The NLCS ball was, indeed, found (though the authenticator was careful not to disturb one worn ball resting in a bird's nest).

"Trees and shrubs, you've got to really look through," said John Hollinger, who runs the authentication program. "Balls do get wedged in different spots."

Schwarber will say there is no spinach that fuels his muscle — even as his mammoth

shots through the years have sunk into ivy or even smashed car windshields as he did in college — and that he's just a slugger who happens to have a little extra oomph in his swing.

Let everyone else stand in awe of Schwarber's prodigious blasts, that include the NL-best 46 he hit this season and three more in the NLCS. The Philadelphia Phillies slugger only counts the runs that each homer scores, not the distance they go.

"Everyone likes to talk about the far homers," Schwarber said Wednesday. "I really don't care how far they go for me. It's more about getting a run on the board."

Schwarber has bashed and mashed baseballs his entire career and his power surge in the first season of his \$79 million, four-year contract with the Phillies has fueled their run to the World Series. Schwarber took his hacks during Wednesday's workout at the ballpark before the team left for Houston. The Phillies will start right-hander Aaron Nola in Game 1 and right-handed ace Zack Wheeler in Game 2.

Schwarber has done the bulk of his damage from the leadoff spot, as the game moves far away from the days of speedy table-setters such as Vince Coleman or Rickey Henderson at the top of the lineup. Schwarber

struck out 200 times and hit only .218 but had a knack for hitting some of the memorable homers of Philadelphia's surprising run at the pennant.

Schwarber slammed a homer off the second-deck facade on opening day in his first at-bat with the Phillies. He led off Game 3 of the NLCS with a homer off Padres ace Joe Musgrove. And the capper, so far, of all the Schwarbombs — as they're affectionately known in Philly — the 488-foot blast in Game 1 against the Padres that had an exit velocity of 120 mph.

That homer — the second longest overall in the postseason since Statcast started tracking distance in 2015 — launched 1,001 memes thanks to teammate Bryce Harper's bug-eyed, mouth-agape reaction in the dugout.

"I thought it got pretty small pretty fast," Harper said.

The 29-year-old Schwarber simply remembered the homer came in a postseason win. It's a run, no matter that Schwarber turns into some sort of Paul Bunyan mythical figure that can scare the leather off the ball with each colossal moon shot.

"Who cares about distance?" he asked. "I think it's more about trying to impact a game in any way that you can, especially in important times, too."

Cardinals' Wainwright, 41, returning for 18th season

Associated Press

Adam Wainwright will pitch for the St. Louis Cardinals next season, choosing to return for an 18th and final year with the club even as longtime teammates Albert Pujols and Yadier Molina head off into retirement.

The 41-year-old Wainwright agreed Wednesday to a \$17.5 million, one-year contract that includes \$10 million in deferred pay and the chance to earn \$1 million in bonuses for starts.

He informed the NL Central champions of his decision to return shortly after they were eliminated by the Philadelphia Phillies in the wild-card round of the playoffs. Wainwright did not pitch in either game in part because he had struggled with his delivery late in the season.

"I do tend to think the way the season ended led even more to me coming back," Wainwright said Wednesday, "because I just didn't like that. I don't like going out like that. I wasn't performing like I know I should have been performing. Wasn't help-

ing the team like I knew I should have been helping the team. We didn't win. I love my teammates."

"But looking back on it now, it just seemed like everything that happened led me to coming back one more year," he said.

Asked whether it would be just that — one final year — he replied: "Yes." But then Wainwright made it clear that he has no interest in answering questions about retirement every week, instead imploring folks to "just let me go out and pitch."

Wainwright finished 11-12 with a 3.71 ERA in 32 starts, his first losing season in which he made at least 20 starts. He won just twice over his final six starts, though, and had a 7.22 ERA while dealing with what he called a "dead arm."

Wainwright's deal includes \$1 million payable each July 1 from 2024-33 and the chance to earn \$500,000 each for 28 and 30 starts.

He gets a full no-trade provision and a hotel suite on road trips. He would earn \$500,000 for finishing among the top 10 in

Cy Young Award voting, \$50,000 each for making the All-Star team, winning the League Championship Series or World Series MVP awards or a Gold Glove, and \$25,000 for a Silver Slugger.

Wainwright earned \$17.5 million on a one-year deal last season.

"We all know how competitive he is, we know how special he is in that clubhouse and what he means to this organization," Cardinals president John Mozeliak said, "so we're just glad we could get it done."

Wainwright heads into next season needing five wins to reach 200. The right-hander is 15 behind Jesse Haines for the second-most wins in franchise history; Bob Gibson is the leader with 251 of them.

Wainwright and Molina set the major league record for career starts as a battery last season, eventually hitting 328 starts together. But with Molina heading into retirement, Andrew Knizner is in line to be the everyday catcher, though Mozeliak did indicate Wednesday that the club would be in the market for help behind the plate.

Nikola Jokic, Nuggets keep Lakers winless

Associated Press

DENVER — Nikola Jokic had 31 points and 13 rebounds, Jamal Murray hit a big three-pointer and the Denver Nuggets kept the Los Angeles Lakers winless with a 110-99 victory Wednesday night.

The Lakers dropped to 0-4 under new coach Darvin Ham. They remain in the company of Orlando and Sacramento as the only teams yet to win this season.

Trailing by two moments into the second half, the Nuggets went on a 29-9 to grab control. Or so it looked. The Lakers worked their way back and cut it to single digits in the fourth. But Murray hit a 3-pointer — his only one in seven attempts — for some breathing room.

Anthony Davis, dealing with lower back tightness, had 22 points and 14 rebounds for Los Angeles. LeBron James had 19 points to run his double-digit streak to 1,100 games. Russell Westbrook was held out to rest a sore left hamstring.

Jokic finished an assist shy of a triple-double.

Struggling with his long-range jumper, Murray found his touch in close and finished with 13 points. He showed flashes of his explosiveness as he works his way back from a knee injury.

Bucks 110, Nets 99: Giannis Antetokounmpo had 43 points, 14 rebounds and five assists and host Milwaukee went on a lopsided run after Brooklyn coach Steve Nash was ejected in the third quarter.

Antetokounmpo scored 34 points in the second half as the Bucks outscored the

Nets 67-44 over the final two periods. After shooting just 3-for-10 in the first half, Antetokounmpo went 13-for-15 in the second half.

Kevin Durant scored 33 points for Brooklyn. Kyrie Irving had 27.

Nash was ejected for the first time as Nets coach since taking over at the start of the 2020-21 season. Nash was ejected twice during his 18-season playing career.

Heat 119, Trail Blazers 98: Bam Adebayo scored 18 points and visiting Miami ended Portland's season-opening winning streak at four.

Damian Lillard had 22 points for Portland when he came up limping with just over five minutes to go in the third quarter and headed straight for the locker room. He did not return and the Blazers said he had a right calf strain.

Kyle Lowry and Jimmy Butler each had 17 points for the Heat.

Hawks 118, Pistons 113: Trae Young scored 35 points to lead visiting Atlanta in the opener of a two-game set at Detroit.

John Collins added 19 points, 10 rebounds and four blocks, and De'Andre Hunter had 17 points to help the Hawks improve to 3-1.

Bojan Bogdanovic scored 33 points for Detroit.

Raptors 119, 76ers 109: Pascal Siakam scored 20 points and matched his career high with 13 assists, Gary Trent Jr. scored a season-high 27 points and host

Toronto beat Philadelphia.

Joel Embiid and Tyrese Maxey each scored 31 points and James Harden had 18 for Philadelphia. The 76ers lost for the fourth time in five games.

Jazz 109, Rockets 101: Lauri Markkanen had 24 points and eight rebounds to help host Utah beat Houston.

Kevin Porter, Jr had 24 points and five assists for Houston.

Cavaliers 103, Magic 92: Evan Mobley scored a season-high 22 points, Jarrett Allen had 18 points and 16 rebounds and host Cleveland beat Orlando.

Top overall draft pick Paolo Banchero had 29 points, eight rebounds and four assists for Orlando, extending his streak of 20-plus point games to begin his career to five. Orlando is the lone team without a victory in the Eastern Conference.

Knicks 134, Hornets 131 (OT): Jalen Brunson scored 27 points, hitting the go-ahead basket in overtime, and host New York beat Charlotte.

Brunson also had 13 assists and seven rebounds for New York, at 3-1 off to its best start in 10 years.

Gordon Hayward led Charlotte with 21 points.

Timberwolves 134, Spurs 122: Anthony Edwards scored 34 points, reserve guard Jaylen Nowell added 23 and host Minnesota beat San Antonio.

Bulls 124, Pacers 109: Zach LaVine scored 28 points, including a key three-pointer early in the fourth quarter, in host Chicago's victory over Indiana.

Big Ten boasts some of nation's best defenses

Associated Press

COLUMBUS, Ohio — Just four Big Ten teams are ranked in the AP Top 25, but six of the top 12 defenses in college football reside in the conference.

The Big Ten's surprise team this year, Illinois — 17th in the AP poll — has the top-ranked defensive unit in the nation, followed by No. 2 Ohio State, which appears more and more each week to be a complete package.

Michigan (AP No. 4) is ranked fifth in defense. Iowa, unranked in the poll because of a moribund offense, was propped up by its tough defense before running into the speeding Buckeyes last week. The Hawkeyes are still sixth best in the nation in terms of yards allowed per game.

Rutgers and Minnesota have needed the help of their defenses, ranked seventh and 12th, respectively, to stay above .500.

All six of the teams are allowing fewer than 300 yards per game. Five of them, with Rutgers being the outlier, are giving up under 20 points per game. Penn State is also giving up less than 20 points per game.

By contrast, the Big 12 and ACC have just one team allowing 300 yards or fewer per game, and the Pac-12 has none.

In the SEC, Georgia, Kentucky and Alabama are allowing fewer than 300 yards and 20 points.

Illinois (6-1, 3-1 Big Ten) is the conference's biggest surprise this season, with a defense allowing 221.1 yards and fewer than nine points per game. The only loss for the

Illini came in a 23-20 setback at Indiana in Week 2 — the most points they've allowed all season.

"Really, from the pilots we hop on the plane with to the schools that we talk to, just everybody is a lot more aware of Illinois football," second-year coach Brett Bielema said.

He noted this week that Illini cornerback Devon Witherspoon was named a finalist for the Thorpe Award given to the best defensive back in college football. Penn State's Joey Porter Jr. and Ohio State's Lathan Ransom also are finalists.

It's not a surprise when Ohio State shows off an explosive offense, but the Buckeyes now have the second-ranked defense to go along with it.

7 NASCAR drivers chase 3 playoff spots

Associated Press

Joey Logano has little stress headed into Martinsville Speedway, where his results won't make a difference in his march toward the NASCAR championship.

The rest of the field?

Well, expect chaos.

There are still three spots open in the title-deciding finale and seven drivers head into Sunday's race at NASCAR's smallest and oldest track with a chance. Only 58 points separate Ross Chastain in second from Chase Briscoe in eighth, and a victory can earn a driver an automatic berth into the winner-take-all finale at Phoenix Raceway.

Logano is locked into the championship race via his victory at Las Vegas two weeks ago. The remaining seven playoff drivers will be fighting for every point possible on a 0.526-mile track that proved in April to be impossible to pass on.

"Nobody's passing anybody at Martinsville, so better bring it," said 2020 NASCAR cham-

pion Chase Elliott. "It's gonna be tough."

Elliott knows. He started from the pole at Martinsville in the spring and led 185 laps. But he lost the lead to Hendrick Motorsports teammate William Byron and that was it for Elliott, who finished a perplexing ninth as he stalled out in traffic the rest of the race.

In fact, only four drivers led laps in the Next Gen car's debut at Martinsville, and Ryan Blaney and Austin Dillon combined to lead a whopping six of the 403 laps. The show belonged to Byron and Elliott, who combined to lead the remaining 397 laps (98.5%). That pushed Hendrick Motorsports to 10,000 laps led at the track in Rick Hendrick's home state of Virginia.

So what does it mean?

Track position is crucial and the Next Gen car, created in part to level the playing field, has left little separation from the front to the back of the grid. The 18-inch Goodyear tire on the cars has created more grip, which has alleviated the poten-

tial for driver mistakes. With the chance to race for the Cup championship on the line, drivers are going to have no choice but to be very, very aggressive.

But NASCAR has made it clear over the past three weeks that it is watching closely and won't tolerate any sort of race manipulation or retaliation. Bubba Wallace was suspended for Sunday's race at Homestead-Miami Speedway for deliberately crashing Kyle Larson a week before, and Cole Custer and Stewart-Haas Racing had a Thursday appeal scheduled of their \$200,000 fines for allegedly assisting Briscoe's advance into the third round of the playoffs.

Denny Hamlin, co-owner of Wallace's car, wrecked Elliott once at Martinsville to trigger a heated post-race exchange. After the recent message sent by NASCAR, drivers will have to carefully consider what's acceptable.

Blaney, who led five laps at Martinsville in the spring but thought he had a car capable of winning, sits sixth behind Ham-

lin below the cutline along with Christopher Bell and Briscoe. Bell and Briscoe both believe they are in must-win situations to advance to the Phoenix finale, but Blaney believes he can qualify on points.

He also knows now he must do it within NASCAR's boundaries.

"I personally think it is good that NASCAR is putting the law down, the hammer down on things that they think are wrong and that they want to act," Blaney said. "That is the only way you can kind of police it. You have to do those things. At the end of the day, it is their call.

"If they see something that they don't like, I expect them to act on it, and they have the last couple of weeks. It doesn't change the approach of the way I do anything. In my mind, you never think about, 'If I do something malicious with intent, or something like that, that you can get away with it.'"

With the season on the line for seven drivers come Sunday, it might make for desperate measures in the waning laps.

Sorokin has 41-save shutout as Islanders beat Rangers

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Kyle Palmieri scored twice, Ilya Sorokin stopped 41 shots for his first shutout of the season and the New York Islanders beat the crosstown-rival Rangers 3-0 on Wednesday night.

Josh Bailey also scored, and Jean-Gabriel Pageau and Adam Pelech each had two assists to help the Islanders snap a three-game losing streak.

Jaroslav Halak had 26 saves against his former team while losing for the third time in three starts for the Rangers.

After a scoreless first, Palmieri broke through at 8:44 of the second, rifling the puck past Halak for his first of the season.

"We were able to turn some

pucks over and played a little faster and that resulted in a couple more opportunities for us," Palmieri said.

Bailey made it 2-0 at 5:37 of the third, and Palmieri capped the scoring with 4:38 remaining.

"I thought we defended well. They are a dangerous team," Islanders coach Lane Lambert said. "It was our overall commitment and battle level. I'm glad we were rewarded tonight."

Sorokin made 17 saves in the first, 12 in the second and 12 more in the third for his 11th career shutout. He had seven shutouts last season.

"He was outstanding. He made a couple of saves early on," Lambert added. "I thought

he was terrific."

The long-time rivals split four games last season — with the road team winning each time. However, the Islanders have now won seven of the past nine meetings and are 9-4-0 against the Rangers since January 2021.

Oilers 3, Blues 1: Ryan Nugent-Hopkins scored his 200th goal to break a tie in the third period, and Stuart Skinner stopped 35 shots, as Edmonton beat host St. Louis.

Zach Hyman had a goal and an assist and Jesse Puljujarvi also scored to help the Oilers win their first road game after starting the season with a six-game homestand.

Ryan O'Reilly scored for St. Louis and Jordan Binnington

finished with 25 saves.

Lightning 4, Ducks 2: Brandon Hagel scored the tiebreaking power-play goal with 4:27 to play to lead visiting Tampa Bay over Anaheim.

Mikhail Sergachev and Nikita Kucherov scored early goals, Nicholas Paul added an empty-net goal and Victor Hedman had two assists in the Lightning's third victory in four games. Brian Elliott made 19 saves for the three-time defending Eastern Conference champions.

Troy Terry had a goal and an assist for the Ducks, and Trevor Zegras scored his fourth goal. John Gibson stopped 26 shots in rebuilding Anaheim's sixth consecutive loss (0-5-1) since a season-opening win over Seattle.