

## General: Forces deterred Iran attacks

By MATTHEW ADAMS

*Stars and Stripes*

WASHINGTON — Moving more U.S. ships and aircraft into the Middle East region has deterred Iranian attacks on commercial ships in the Persian Gulf, the commander of the U.S. Air Forces Central Command said Wednesday.

The U.S. in July ramped up forces in the region after Iran harassed ships in the Strait of Hormuz, a key waterway. The Pentagon deployed a portion of the Bataan Amphibious Readiness Group with a Marine expeditionary unit.

This followed another Pentagon announcement that the USS Thomas Hudner, a new Arleigh Burke-class destroyer, and fighter jets, including F-35s and F-16s, were deploying to the region near the Strait of Hormuz and Gulf of Oman to defend the

U.S. interests.

The Air Force at the time had A-10 Thunderbolts, also known as “Warthogs,” patrolling in the region when Iranian naval forces attempted to seize oil tankers near the waterway, even opening fire on one of the vessels.

In the past two years, Iran has attacked, seized, or attempted seizure of nearly 20 internationally flagged merchant vessels in the Strait of Hormuz, a key global shipping channel, according to U.S. Central Command, which oversees operations in the Middle East region.

“Our increased air presence, but more importantly the increased presence of surface vessels ... combined with our air power has deterred Iran from taking any actions against maritime shipping,” Air Force Lt. Gen. Alexis Grynkeiwich said at a Defense Writers Group

discussion with reporters. “My hope is that they’ve seen that message and that they remain deterred over the longer term.”

A recent rash of incidents also has occurred in Syria involving Russia. A Russian aircraft flew over an American military base in Syria in what Pentagon officials described as an intelligence-gathering mission and damaging a U.S. Reaper MQ-9 aerial drone by releasing several flares. Fighter jets and surveillance drones from Russia also have buzzed U.S. bases in Syria and violated protocols that were developed to prevent fighting between American and Russian forces, Grynkeiwich said in June.

Grynkeiwich on Wednesday said Russian activity in the region has remained constant, continuing to fly into airspace over Al-Tanf garrison in Syria

and intercept MQ-9s.

Al-Tanf is an American military base located in a part of the country controlled by forces opposed to the regime of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, which is backed by Russia, and aligned with the United States. The base houses American troops and partner forces.

Roughly 900 U.S. service members are based in Syria.

Grynkeiwich said he has seen “some favorable shifts in behavior” from Russian aircraft in the last month. This includes not flying directly over American troops and not firing flares at MQ-9s.

“They will still intercept our MQ-9s, but their behavior is safe,” he said. “I would still characterize it as unprofessional ... but it is safe behavior now and, again, I welcome that change.”

## US shoots down Turkish drone over Syria

*Associated Press*

WASHINGTON — The U.S. on Thursday shot down a Turkish drone that had come in too close to U.S. troops on the ground in Hasakah, Syria, three U.S. officials said.

The drone was armed and had been dropping bombs on nearby targets, and while it was not targeting U.S. troops it was determined to be close enough to pose a danger to U.S. forces, one of the officials said.

The officials said the shoot-down was ordered after more than a dozen calls to Turkish military officials stating that U.S. forces were on the ground in the area and the U.S. military would take action to protect them if the drone didn't leave.

The drone was shot down by a U.S. F-16 fighter jet, one of the officials confirmed.

Typically, the U.S. and Turkish militaries, which are NATO allies, work in close coordination in conducting air maneuvers.

The drone had been flying in an “unsafe” and “unsynchronized” manner, one of the officials said. After the U.S. repeatedly warned its Turkish counterparts that it had dropped bombs deemed too close to U.S. troops, the drone did appear to stand down, but it then returned, another official said.

The officials spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss the incident before an announcement.

The U.S. has about 900 troops in Syria conducting missions to counter Islamic State group militants.

There was no immediate comment from Turkey on the shooting of the drone.

The country's state-run Anadolu Agency reported, however, that the Turkish intelligence service, MIT, carried out an operation against the Kurdistan Workers' Party, or PKK, and its affiliated Kurdish militia group in Syria, which is known as People's Defense Units, or YPG.

The report said the Turks struck suspected arms and ammunition depots and buildings believed to have been used by the groups' “sabotage” teams. It did not provide further details

on the operation.

On Wednesday, Turkey had carried out airstrikes in Iraq and Syria against Kurdish militant targets following a suicide attack outside Turkey's interior ministry building earlier this week.

The incident risks adding to longstanding tensions between Turkey and the United States, even as Turkey is a strategically important ally and NATO member. U.S. officials and lawmakers have criticized Turkey's human rights record and its delays in agreeing to Swedish membership in NATO.

Turkey has been frustrated by U.S. delays in approving 40 new F-16 fighter jets as well as kits to upgrade its existing fleet.

# 80% of 4-star retirees work in defense

*The Washington Post*

More than 80% of four-star officers retiring from the U.S. armed forces go on to work in the defense industry, a new study has found, underscoring the close relationship between top U.S. brass and government-contracted companies that has drawn scrutiny on Capitol Hill.

Twenty-six of 32 four-star admirals and generals who retired from June 2018 to July 2023 were later employed in roles including executive, adviser, board member or lobbyist for companies with significant defense business, according to the analysis from the Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft, a think tank that advocates for restraining the military's role in U.S. foreign policy.

"The revolving door between the U.S. government and the arms industry, which involves hundreds of senior Pentagon officials and military officers every year, generates the appearance — and in some cases the reality — of conflicts of interest in the making of defense policy and in the shaping of the size and composition of the Penta-

gon budget," authors William Hartung and Dillon Fisher wrote in the report, a copy of which was obtained by The Washington Post before its publication.

The analysis includes former officers employed by consulting firms with clients in the defense industry and financial firms with significant investments in that sector. Many of the employers cited in the report also have nondefense business interests.

The findings shed new light on a phenomenon examined in a 2021 report from the Government Accountability Office, which found that 14 major defense contractors, mostly weapons companies, employed 1,700 ex-senior officials or acquisition officials in 2019.

The GAO concluded that while defense contractors benefit from the practice, it could "affect public confidence in the government" by creating a perception that military officials may favor a company they see as a future employer.

A separate pattern was documented in a 2022 Washington

Post investigation that explored the lucrative business deals hundreds of former military officers have conducted with foreign governments. While former Pentagon officials face some restrictions on post-government employment, they are not prohibited from working for weapons or defense companies.

The Quincy Institute's findings come as some in Congress seek to impose additional constraints, including a longer cooling-off period before senior officials can be employed by certain contractors and tighter rules for employment by foreign governments.

A report this year issued by Sen. Elizabeth Warren, D-Mass., showed that, last year, Boeing, Lockheed Martin, General Dynamics and Raytheon were among the companies that employed lobbyists who once served as senior military officials, lawmakers or congressional staffers. Warren has argued that such relationships warrant closer scrutiny because of the scale of the Pentagon's business with defense companies: The Defense De-

partment accounted for some 60% of all federal government contracts in 2021, according to Warren's report.

A proposal from Warren, along with a parallel House bill, would prohibit former top officials from working for big defense companies within the first four years after they leave the military and ban sitting officials from holding stock in companies that receive more than \$100 million in Pentagon contracts.

The Quincy Institute found that patterns of post-government employment for four-star officers have evolved over time, in that retirees are often now employed with start-ups or companies that finance arms manufacturers in addition to traditional defense contractors.

The report's authors make recommendations, including a full ban on former four-stars' employment with companies that receive \$1 billion a year or more in Pentagon contracts; the expansion of required disclosures by companies that hire former officials; and expanding the definition of what activities qualify as lobbying.

## Okinawa governor taken to court over USMC runway permits

BY MATTHEW M. BURKE  
AND MARI HIGA

*Stars and Stripes*

CAMP FOSTER, Okinawa — A Japanese Cabinet minister took Okinawa prefecture to court Thursday to wrest permitting authority from its governor and kick-start the stalled construction of a coastal airfield to replace Marine Corps Air Station Futenma.

Tetsuo Saito, Japan's minister of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism, filed suit in the Naha branch of Fukuoka High Court after Okinawa Gov. Denny Tamaki on Wednesday missed another deadline to approve permits for the runway in northeast-

ern Okinawa, a ministry spokesman said by phone Thursday.

The unfinished runway is on reclaimed land in Oura Bay at the Marines' Camp Schwab.

After Japan's Supreme Court on Sept. 4 struck down Tamaki's appeal, Saito recommended Tamaki grant the permits by Sept. 27. When Tamaki delayed, Saito demanded the governor comply by Wednesday.

The court had ordered Tamaki to approve design changes and issue the construction permits, the spokesman said.

"It is clear that the governor should take action based on the law," the ministry spokesman

said, echoing a Sept. 28 statement. The governor must approve the permits "immediately," he said.

The ministry lawsuit asks the high court to strip Tamaki of permitting authority and give it instead to Saito, the spokesman said. No court date has been set, a spokeswoman from Fukuoka High Court said Thursday.

The prefecture is already preparing for oral arguments, which will take place within 15 days, a spokesman for Okinawa's Department of Civil Engineering and Construction said by phone Thursday.

Some government officials in Japan may speak to the media on-

ly on condition of anonymity.

The Japanese government has twice taken an Okinawa governor to court over the runway permits, a spokesman for the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications said by phone Thursday. Land Minister Keiichi Ishii sued former Gov. Takeshi Onaga in 2015 after Onaga revoked the permits. Onaga eventually acquiesced to the high court.

Tamaki resumed the fight as part of his election campaign after Onaga died of pancreatic cancer in August 2018. His refusal to sign off on construction changes in November 2021 kicked off a protracted legal fight.

# Russian strike in east Ukraine kills dozens

Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine — A Russian rocket struck a village cafe and store in eastern Ukraine on Thursday, killing at least 51 civilians in one of the deadliest attacks in the war in months, according to President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and other top officials in Kyiv.

Zelenskyy, attending a summit of about 50 European leaders in Spain to drum up support from Ukraine's allies, denounced the strike in the village of Hroza as a "demonstrably brutal Russian

crime" and "a completely deliberate act of terrorism."

About 60 people were in the cafe, attending a wake after a funeral, said Internal Affairs Minister Ihor Klymenko, who provided the death toll.

Among the dead was a 6-year-old boy, and seven other people were wounded, said presidential chief of staff Andrii Yermak and Kharkiv Gov. Oleh Syniehubov.

According to preliminary information from Kyiv, the village was hit by an Iskander missile. Emergency crews searched the

smoldering rubble of damaged buildings. Ukrainian prosecutors released photos showing bloodied bodies.

Hroza, which had a population of about 500 before the war, is in the northeastern Kharkiv region. The village and other parts of the region were seized by Russia early in the war and recaptured by Ukraine in September 2022.

The village is only 19 miles west of Kupiansk, a key focus of the Russian military effort. Zelenskyy had visited the area Tuesday to meet with troops and in-

spect equipment supplied by the West.

On Thursday, Zelenskyy was at the summit of the European Political Community in Granada, where he asked for more Western support, saying that "Russian terror must be stopped."

"Russia needs this and similar terrorist attacks for only one thing: to make its genocidal aggression the new norm for the whole world," he said in a statement posted on his Telegram channel.

## Biden suggests he has path to get more aid to Ukraine

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Facing a likely roadblock from House Republicans on aid for Ukraine, President Joe Biden said Wednesday he's planning to give a major speech on the issue and suggested there may be "another means" to provide support for Kyiv if Congress continues to balk.

"I'm going to be announcing very shortly a major speech I'm going to make on this issue and why it's critically important for the United States and our allies that we keep our commitment" to Ukraine, Biden told reporters after

giving unrelated remarks at the White House.

White House officials declined to say when Biden planned to give his speech. The president did not elaborate on the alternate method he was looking at to get additional military aid to Ukraine in its ongoing war with Russia.

"There is another means by which we may be able to find funding, but I'm not going to get into that right now," he said.

Aid for Ukraine has been a source of tension and uncertainty as several Republicans in the House have severe doubts or openly oppose additional funding

to sustain the Ukrainian military.

The president said the resistance does "worry" him, but he noted that there is broad bipartisan support. Still, last week's deal to keep the government open through mid-November excluded the \$13 billion in supplemental aid that the Biden administration sought last month, raising questions about just how long the U.S. could continue to send money to Ukraine.

The agreement to temporarily keep the U.S. government open came at a steep political price for former House Speaker Kevin McCarthy, R-Calif. At the instiga-

tion of Rep. Matt Gaetz, R-Fla., and other conservatives, McCarthy on Tuesday became the first speaker to be ousted from his post.

After Biden spoke, White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said during the Wednesday news briefing that Biden was "confident" Ukraine aid would be approved because there is broad bipartisan support. But she noted the objections by some House Republicans were an obstacle to the United States' work with allies to support Ukraine, which Russia invaded in February 2022.

## Accountant's testimony wraps at Trump's fraud trial

Associated Press

NEW YORK — An accountant who prepared Donald Trump's financial statements was back on the witness stand for a fourth day Thursday in the New York civil fraud trial examining whether the former president exaggerated his wealth.

Trump himself didn't attend the proceedings Thursday, after choosing to be there — and avail himself of the news cameras waiting outside — for the three prior days.

The business fraud trial

stems from New York Attorney General Letitia James' lawsuit alleging that Trump and his business ginned up financial statements that vastly overvalued Trump Tower, Mar-a-Lago and other assets. Trump denies any wrongdoing and says James, a Democrat, is just trying to damage his 2024 presidential campaign. He's leading the Republican field.

The witnesses so far have been two accountants who worked on the financial statements, which went to banks, insurers and others.

James' legal team is working to show that Trump and his company had complete control over the preparation of the statements, with the accountants relying on information the Trump Organization provided.

The defense has been trying to show that if there were problems with the financial statements, the flubs were accountant Donald Bender's fault. Trump lawyers on Thursday continued an exacting cross-examination of Bender, who worked on the statements for years.

Bender insisted that he asked Trump Organization executives for all required documents but didn't always get them. He said he learned about some missing appraisals only when prosecutors questioned him during their investigation into Trump's business practices.

Defense lawyer Jesus M. Suarez asked why Bender didn't notice the appraisals' absence earlier.

"I asked them for appraisals," Bender said. "They represented they gave me everything I needed."

# As House GOP flails, shutdown fears reemerge

*The Washington Post*

Kevin McCarthy's ouster from the House speakership Tuesday appears to have increased the risk that the U.S. government will shut down next month, as the far-right lawmakers who toppled him demand the GOP extract impossibly large concessions from the White House and Democratic-controlled Senate.

House Republicans on Wednesday began the process of choosing their next leader, but whoever they pick is likely to face the same political limits

that led to McCarthy's ouster.

The former speaker was deposed in part over the fury that followed his decision on Saturday to extend government funding with Democratic votes. After the House did not pass several other Republican spending bills, McCarthy agreed to essentially take up a bipartisan Senate measure, jettisoning the far right's demands for hundreds of billions in budget cuts and a crackdown on immigration.

Already, the chaos on the House floor is eating into the time necessary to forge a bipar-

tisan agreement on spending. Congress passed a law on Saturday night to keep the government operating for about 45 days. But now the House is in recess through this weekend, and the mess consuming the GOP will carry on at least into next week's vote on the next speaker, reducing the number of days lawmakers have to work to about 30, said Bill Hoagland, senior vice president at the Bipartisan Policy Center, a nonpartisan think tank.

"It becomes substantially harder to do a government

spending deal, because the message has been sent that Republicans should not rely on Democrats to pass any bills," said Brian Riedl, a former aide to Sen. Rob Portman, R-Ohio, who is now a policy analyst at the Manhattan Institute, a conservative-leaning think tank.

"Things can always get worse. The no-compromise fringe has been strongly empowered and essentially has a veto over House Republican policy — which can't be squared with what Democrats and the White House want."

## Federal laws waived to allow construction on border wall

*Associated Press*

McALLEN, Texas — The Biden administration announced it waived 26 federal laws in South Texas to allow border wall construction on Wednesday, marking the administration's first use of a sweeping executive power employed often during the Trump presidency.

The Department of Homeland Security posted the announcement on the U.S. Federal Registry with few details outlining the construction in Starr County, Texas, which is part of a busy Border Patrol sector seeing "high illegal entry." According to government data, about 245,000 illegal entries have been recorded so far this fiscal year in the Rio Grande Valley Sector which contains 21 counties.

"There is presently an acute and immediate need to construct physical barriers and roads in the vicinity of the border of the United States in order to prevent unlawful entries into the United States in the project areas," Alejandro Mayorkas, the DHS secretary, stated in the notice.

The Clean Air Act, Safe Drinking Water Act and Endangered Species Act were some of

the federal laws waived by DHS to make way for construction that will use funds from a congressional appropriation in 2019 for border wall construction. The waivers avoid time-consuming reviews and lawsuits challenging violation of environmental laws.

Starr County's hilly ranchlands, sitting between Zapata and McAllen, Texas, is home to about 65,000 residents sparsely populating about 1,200 square miles that form part of the Lower Rio Grande Valley National Wildlife Refuge.

Although no maps were provided in the announcement, CBP announced the project in June and began gathering public comments in August when it shared a map of the additional construction that can add up to 20 miles to the existing border barrier system in the area. Starr County Judge Eloy Vera said it will start south of the Falcon Dam and go past Salineno, Texas.

"The other concern that we have is that area is highly erosive. There's a lot of arroyos," Vera said, pointing out the creeks cutting through the ranchland and leading into the river.

## NYC seeks to suspend shelter law as migrant influx lingers

*Associated Press*

ALBANY, N.Y. — New York City is challenging a unique legal agreement that requires it to provide emergency housing to anyone who asks for it, as the city's shelter system strains under a large influx of international migrants who have arrived over the past year.

The city filed a request late Tuesday asking a court to allow it to suspend the requirement when there is a state of emergency where the shelter population of single adults increases at a rapid rate.

The filing came as Mayor Eric Adams embarks on a four-day trip through Latin America, starting Wednesday in Mexico, where he said he will discourage people from coming to New York, telling them the city's shelter system is at capacity and its resources are overwhelmed.

The city has been moving to suspend the so-called right to shelter for months under the surge of migrants, with this week's filing representing its latest attempt in a protracted legal battle.

The shelter requirement has been in place for more than four decades in New York City, following a legal agreement struck in 1981 that required the city to pro-

vide temporary housing for every homeless person. No other big city in America has such a requirement.

"With more than 122,700 asylum seekers having come through our intake system since the spring of 2022, and projected costs of over \$12 billion for three years, it is abundantly clear that the status quo cannot continue," Adams, a Democrat, said in a statement. "New York City cannot continue to do this alone."

Adams had heralded the shelter requirement at the start of the crisis as a display of the city's empathy toward asylum seekers. In the months since, his rhetoric has hardened as the city has spent more than a billion dollars to rent space in hotels, erect large emergency shelters and provide government services for migrants who arrive without housing or jobs.

Josh Goldfein, a staff attorney at The Legal Aid Society, said the city's request, if successful, would be disastrous for the city.

"What is the alternative? If we do not have a right to shelter, if we are turning people away from the shelter system, if people are now living in the streets, in the subways, in the parks, is that the outcome that they want?" he said.

## AMERICAN ROUNDUP

## City to pay after man dies in blacklist address mix-up

**WA** SEATTLE — The city of Seattle will pay \$1.86 million to the family of a man who died of a heart attack after a caution note attached to his address delayed medics' response.

William Yurek, 48, died in his town house in 2021 after his son called 911 and arriving Seattle Fire Department medics initially waited outside for law enforcement before entering, *The Seattle Times* reported.

The family alleged Yurek was wrongly included on a blacklist of people known to be hostile to police and fire crews. Yurek lived in the unit a couple of years before his death and the previous tenant had been on the outdated list, according to the lawsuit filed last year.

## 'Tiger King' trainer gets suspended sentence

**VA** WINCHESTER — An animal trainer featured in the popular Netflix series "Tiger King" has received a suspended two-year sentence after being convicted of wildlife trafficking in Virginia, the state attorney general's office announced.

Bhagavan "Doc" Antle also was banned from owning and dealing in exotic wild animals in the state for five years, Attorney General Jason Miyares said Tuesday in a statement.

Antle was accused of illegally buying endangered lion cubs in Frederick County, Va., for display and profit at his South Carolina zoo. A jury convicted him in June of two felony counts each of wildlife trafficking and conspiring to wildlife traffic.

Antle, who owns the Myrtle Beach Safari, appeared in "Tiger King: Murder, Mayhem and Madness," a Netflix documentary miniseries that focused on tiger breeders.

## Male nanny convicted of assaulting boys in his care

**CA** SANTA ANA — A male nanny who worked for families across Southern California was convicted Tuesday of sexually assaulting 16 young boys in his care and showing another boy child pornography, prosecutors said.

Matthew Antonio Zakrzewski, 34, of Costa Mesa, was arrested in May 2019 after a couple told Laguna Beach police he touched their son inappropriately. More alleged victims were identified, and Zakrzewski was ultimately charged with 34 felonies, including lewd and lascivious acts with a minor.

Zakrzewski's victims ranged from 2 to 12 years old, investigators said. A jury convicted him on all counts, according to the Orange County District Attorney's Office.

## Retiree group files suit to block voter residency laws

**NC** RALEIGH — North Carolina laws requiring citizens to reside in the state and within a precinct at least 30 days before an election date to be eligible to vote are unlawful and must be blocked, a union-affiliated retiree group said in a federal lawsuit this week.

Lawyers for the North Carolina Alliance for Retired Americans wrote that the 30-day residency mandate violates the U.S. Constitution and Voting Rights Act and

denies newcomers to the state the right to vote for no compelling reason. People who currently comply with that residency window can participate in same-day registration at early voting sites up to the Saturday before the election.

The lawsuit, if successful, could allow more people to cast ballots in the 2024 elections in the ninth-largest state, which is often marked by very close results in races for president and other statewide offices.

Lawyers who helped file the lawsuit on Monday on behalf of the alliance against State Board of Elections members and its executive director have represented Democratic interests previously.

## After suit, state pledges better services to kids

**IA** DES MOINES — Iowa's health agency will take steps to develop home and community-based services for children with severe mental and behavioral needs as part of an initial agreement with civil rights groups that filed a class-action lawsuit.

The lawsuit was filed in January on behalf of three children. It alleges that Iowa has for decades failed to meet its legal obligations to Medicaid-eligible children who should have access to individualized and coordinated care plans, in-home therapy and emergency services. The complaint includes children who have been institutionalized for services they were previously recommended to receive — and said they were entitled to receive, given the Medicaid Act — in their communities or homes.

Iowa's Department of Health and Human Services agreed to

consult at least monthly with groups that filed the lawsuit, including Disability Rights Iowa and Children's Rights, as officials develop a plan to provide these services and manage oversight.

## Pilot allegedly stalked woman via small plane

**VT** BENNINGTON — A man has been accused of stalking a woman in New York via his small airplane, flying out of an airport in nearby Vermont, police said.

Michael Arnold, 65, was arrested Tuesday as he was driving into William H. Morse State Airport in Bennington. Police said his single-engine Cessna 180 was at the airport and he had been flying from there.

Arnold, of Manchester, N.H., had been served with a temporary order of protection from a court in Saratoga, N.Y., in May. A specific condition of that order was that he "cease and desist from flying any and all aircraft while the order remains in effect," Bennington Police Chief Paul Doucette said in a news release.

Police had been notified by the FBI in Albany that New York authorities had been investigating Arnold on suspicion of stalking the woman in Schuylerville for several years, Doucette said. Schuylerville is about 30 miles away from the Bennington airport.

"Officers were able to determine that Arnold was in fact flying his airplane from the William H. Morse State Airport and last seen flying west toward New York several days earlier," Doucette said.

— From wire reports

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# Grand slam helps Phils wallop Marlins

*Associated Press*

PHILADELPHIA — Bryson Stott swung the bat, then stared almost in a daze as the ball plopped 412 feet away into the right-field seats. Stott swears he has almost no memory of the second grand slam in Philadelphia Phillies postseason history.

His light trot, then — slam! — the thud of his bat as the lumber spiked the turf, well, Stott doesn't remember that, either. This playoff highlight was a blur. He yelled something at his Phillies teammates, who had already turned the dugout into a jubilant mosh pit.

What did he say? Who knows? Stott couldn't hear himself or anyone else near him — the slam set off pandemonium inside another packed Phillies ballpark.

"I was running around the bases in kind of a blackout," Stott said. "I don't know, I have to go back and watch it."

Stott's grand slam punctuated a postseason sweep and Aaron Nola tossed seven shutout innings in a performance worthy of

a playoff ace that led to a 7-1 win over the Miami Marlins in Game 2 of their NL Wild Card Series on Wednesday night.

"We know we're a really good team and we've just got to continue to do that," slugger Bryce Harper said inside a rowdy, boozy clubhouse.

After making quick work of the surprising Marlins, it's time for an anticipated rematch.

J.T. Realmuto also homered as the Phillies advanced to another best-of-five Division Series against Ronald Acuña Jr., Matt Olson and the Braves. Game 1 is Saturday in Atlanta. The Phillies did not announce a scheduled starter.

The NL champion Phillies finished third last season in the NL East at 87-75, a full 14 games behind the 101-win Braves, only to beat them in four games in the NLDS. The Braves were even better this season with a major league-best 104 wins and a sixth straight NL East crown — clinched last month in Philadelphia — while the Phillies again

earned a wild card with 90 wins.

"It's going to be an electric series and we can't wait," Harper said.

More postseason thrills are surely ahead.

Stott provided one Wednesday when he turned on reliever Andrew Nardi's first-pitch fastball in the sixth and launched it into the right-field seats for a 7-0 lead. He slammed his bat as he ran down the first-base line, and the Stott Shot sent Phillies fans into a delirious frenzy with the countdown to a clinch officially on.

Nola followed Game 1 starter Zack Wheeler's excellent effort with one of his own, and had 46,000 fans on their feet chanting "Let's Go, Nola!" when he needed a lift.

"He went through a lot this year because he struggled at times and there were the home runs and the big innings and things like that, but he just kept grinding and he kept fighting, kept working," Phillies manager Rob Thomson said. "Finally, he found some stuff at the end of the

year, and he's been lights out."

The Marlins briefly caught a break in the third when Jon Berti's deep drive into the left-center gap knocked off left fielder Cristian Pache's glove for a one-out double. Berti then inexplicably tried to steal third and was busted by Nola as the righty went into his delivery. Nola noticed Berti taking off and simply stepped toward third and threw him out.

## Bring a broom

The Phillies joined Minnesota, Arizona and Texas in pulling off first-round sweeps as all four Wild Card Series ended in two games. There have been seven sweeps — including the Phillies over St. Louis last season — in the eight Wild Card Series during the first two years of expanded playoffs.

## Slat stat

Shane Victorino hit the other postseason grand slam for the Phillies in Game 2 of the 2008 NLDS off Milwaukee's CC Sabathia.

# Diamondbacks overcome early deficit to top Brewers

*Associated Press*

MILWAUKEE — Two years after suffering through a 110-loss season, the Arizona Diamondbacks are spraying champagne and heading to the NL Division Series.

They feel like they belong, too.

"In '22, you kind of saw the shift toward the end of the year, and then we came in this year and this is what we expected to do," Zac Gallen said after he pitched the Diamondbacks to a 5-2 victory over the Milwaukee Brewers on Wednesday night and a sweep of their NL Wild Card Series. "We expected to be playing in October."

It's the first NL Division Series for the franchise since 2017. The Diamondbacks will take on

the NL West champion Dodgers in the opener of their best-of-five series on Saturday in Los Angeles.

The NL Central champion Brewers have dropped nine of their last 10 playoff games, a stretch that started with their Game 7 home loss to the Dodgers in the 2018 NL Championship Series.

"The playoffs are a tough animal to conquer," Brewers manager Craig Counsell said. "They are. Unfortunately, we have not."

Attention in Milwaukee now turns to the future of Counsell, who has managed the Brewers since 2015 and guided them to five playoff appearances over the last six seasons. Brewers principal owner Mark Atanasio

has said the team wants Counsell back, but the manager hasn't indicated whether he wants to return.

The 53-year-old Counsell declined to address his future after Wednesday's loss.

"That ain't for tonight, man," he said.

Ketel Marte put Arizona ahead for good with a two-run single during a four-run rally in the sixth inning as Milwaukee right-hander Freddy Peralta faded after a strong start. Gallen allowed two runs in the first, and then sailed through the rest of his six innings.

The sweep was another step in a rapid climb for the Diamondbacks.

Arizona's 52-110 record in 2021 tied the Baltimore Orioles

— another team currently in the playoffs — for MLB's worst record that year. The Diamondbacks went 74-88 last season.

Now they're in the playoffs thanks in part to Corbin Carroll's breakthrough rookie season and stellar performances by Gallen and Merrill Kelly atop the rotation.

"Considering what we've walked through and the dark times that we had, this is a pretty special moment," manager Torey Lovullo said. "There's a lot of emotion inside of this organization, inside of this clubhouse right now."

Arizona showed its grit by rallying each of the last two nights. They erased an early 3-0 deficit against Corbin Burnes to win 6-3 in Game 1.

# Twins win first playoff series in 21 years

Associated Press

MINNEAPOLIS — Carlos Correa endured the worst hitting season of his career after signing the richest contract in Minnesota Twins history, playing through a painful bout of plantar fasciitis in his left foot.

The defense, intelligence and leadership were always there, though. Postseason prowess was part of the package, too.

Correa had an RBI single and a quick-twitch tag on a pivotal pickoff throw from Sonny Gray, and the Twins swept the Toronto Blue Jays with a 2-0 win in Game 2 of the AL Wild Card Series on Wednesday.

“Everything is October. The mentality is different. I’m just giving everything out there, everything I have,” Correa said. “I’m going to keep doing that for the rest of the time that I’m here in Minnesota.”

The Twins advanced — for the first time in 21 years — to play the defending World Series champion Astros. Game 1 of the best-of-five AL Division Series

is in Houston on Saturday.

That’s familiar territory for Correa, who spent seven seasons with the Astros. He signed with Minnesota in 2022 and re-upped for \$200 million this year after agreed-to deals with the Giants and Mets fell apart over concern about an old ankle injury.

“Superstars show up in the biggest moments,” Gray said. “Just the way he sees the game, the way he can slow it down, is a special player.”

Correa helped Houston reach three World Series, winning it all in 2017, and he’s one round into another memorable October.

“They’ve got a great team, and so do we,” Correa said. “Everywhere you look, we’re ready.”

The two-time All-Star, who went 3-for-7 with a hit-by-pitch against the Blue Jays, ripped a bases-loaded single in a two-run fourth. The patient Twins delivered precisely when they needed to at the plate, and their

bullpen tossed 7½ scoreless innings in the series.

Jhoan Duran, after a delay to tend to a cut on his thumb following his warmup, struck out the side in the ninth to trigger a celebration around the mound.

The Blue Jays, who lost their seventh straight game in the playoffs since the AL Championship Series in 2016, left nine runners on base in each game. Matt Chapman had a line drive hook just foul before grounding into an inning-ending double play with the bases loaded in the sixth against Caleb Thielbar.

“One run in two games, one extra-base hit isn’t going to cut it,” Toronto manager John Schneider said.

The Blue Jays made Gray work for his first career win in the playoffs, but the veteran right-hander finished five effective innings. He had three inning-ending strikeouts before the slick move to finish the fifth when he was in the most trouble.

Gray threw a wild pitch that put runners on second and third.

But with a full count on Bo Bichette, Gray whipped around and threw to the shortstop Correa, who grabbed the ball and grazed Vladimir Guerrero Jr.’s chest with his glove a split-second before Guerrero’s hand hit the base.

Blue Jays starter Jose Berríos threw three scoreless innings against his former team, but Schneider followed through on his promise that the entire pitching staff, excluding Game 1 starter Kevin Gausman, was available to try to extend the series.

Schneider pulled the right-hander Berríos after a leadoff walk by Game 1 star Royce Lewis in the fourth inning. Left-hander Yusei Kikuchi, one of four Blue Jays who made 31 or more starts this season, was greeted with a single by Max Kepler. Pinch-hitter Donovan Solano walked, Correa put the Twins up with his single, and pinch-hitter Willi Castro’s double-play groundout got another run on the board.

## Rangers use big home runs to ease past Rays in sweep

Associated Press

ST. PETERSBURG, Fla. — Two years after losing 102 games, the resilient Texas Rangers are savoring a journey that’s transformed them into a playoff team.

“It’s all about bouncing back, dealing with the tough times. You know you’re going to have them,” manager Bruce Bochy said Wednesday after the Rangers beat the Tampa Bay Rays 7-1 to finish a two-game AL Wild Card Series sweep.

“What’s important is how you handle it, and these guys have handled it so well,” Bochy added. “I think we were counted out earlier in the season or late August ... but what a job they did to bounce back and to be in this position.”

The Rangers rode a rollercoaster of emotions while losing three of four games at Seattle and letting the AL West division title slip away on the final day of the regular season. Instead of returning home with a first-round playoff bye, Texas was rewarded with a cross-country flight to Florida.

“We had to fly right over Dallas, so that could have been really a downer for the club,” said Bochy, a first-year manager with Texas after winning three titles with San Francisco. “They reset, refocused, and just put together two of the best games back to back that we probably have had all year when you look at the pitching, the offense, the defense — everything we knew we had to do to beat a club like Tampa.”

The next stop is Baltimore, where the Rangers begin a Division Series against the AL East champion Orioles on Saturday.

Adolis Garcia and Evan Carter, a 20-year-old rookie who became the second-youngest postseason player in franchise history, homered off Zach Eflin, a 16-game winner unable to save Tampa Bay’s season.

Nathan Eovaldi gave Texas an outstanding pitching performance. The Rays’ scoreless streak reached 33 innings, one shy of the postseason record held by the 1966-74 Los Angeles Dodgers, before Curtis Mead’s RBI single in the seventh.

Texas won a postseason series for the first time since 2011, when the Rangers reached the World Series before losing to St. Louis.

Meanwhile, Tampa Bay followed a stellar start with a fizzling finish.

The Rays opened 13-0 to match the 1982 Atlanta Braves and 1987 Milwaukee Brewers for the best start of the modern era, trailing only the 20-0 start by the 1884 St. Louis Maroons of the Union Association. They led the AL East from opening day and then were overtaken by the Orioles in mid-July.

After gaining the AL’s top wild card, Tampa Bay extended its postseason losing streak to seven straight. In getting swept in consecutive Wild Card Series, the Rays scored two runs over four games while hitting .161.

Cash didn’t offer any excuses for being swept again.

“Look, that’s the easy narrative,” Cash said. “We are who we are, and we finished the regular season with the guys that we had. I still feel that we could have had a better showing with the roster that we had.”

# Replacing Red River Rivalry a tall order

Associated Press

The Big 12 is losing its marquee matchup when the Red River Rivalry is played Saturday for the final time under the league's umbrella.

No. 3 Texas and No. 12 Oklahoma head to the Southeastern Conference in 2024, the same year the Big 12 expands to 16 schools in what the league hopes will be an exciting launch of a new era. But gone will be its most hyped regular-season game, along with the Sooners' annual Bedlam meeting with Oklahoma State in a league with no other rivalries on par with those two.

"The spotlight of college football" is on this game, said Texas coach Steve Sarkisian, who also had stops in the Pac-12 and in the SEC. He calls Texas-Oklahoma at the Cotton Bowl in Dallas "the best setting in college football" with the howling fans split between orange and crimson.

The storied series dates to 1900 and it will belong to the SEC soon enough. It's one that the Big 12 shouldn't rush to replace, said Vassilis Dalakas, a sports marketing researcher at San Diego State who specializes in rivalries.

For starters, big rivalries tend to be born out of proximity. Like other conferences being spread out under the latest wave of realignment, the Big 12 now spans three time zones. Proximity is more of a challenge.

"It's a lot easier to sell the heat and passion of the rivalry when the two rival teams are nearby," Dalakas said. The landscape starting in 2024 "is a weird situation in college sports in general. And I think it does make sense to just figure it out first, see how things settle in the new reality."

Rivalries also thrive through longstanding traditions, bad blood, title implications and back-and-forth, nail-biting outcomes. TV viewership pushes interest well beyond state borders.

The Longhorns and Sooners check most of those boxes. Every October, they play before more than 92,000 in Dallas about three hours from their respective campuses. Except for last year's 49-0 win by Texas, the series was decided by eight points or less in the eight Red River meetings before that.

From a fan and team perspective, Dalakas believes the Red River Rivalry should retain its

intensity once the teams head to the SEC.

To the Big 12, though, "that is a big hit. That is a big loss," he said.

"Obviously, part of it is simply losing two marquee programs. But the fact that those two programs had a rivalry with each other added even more of an element of excitement, especially from a branding and marketing standpoint that at least in the short run will be hard to replace or replicate with some other clubs," Dalakas said.

New rivalries could emerge for the Big 12 starting next season when it welcomes Arizona, Arizona State, Colorado and Utah, joining four newcomers from this year: BYU, Cincinnati, Houston and UCF.

Arizona and Arizona State have played every season since 1946. The winner of the Duel in the Desert is awarded the Territorial Cup. But only three meetings since 2000 have involved a ranked team. Then there's the Holy War between Big 12 newcomer BYU and 2024 entrant Utah, which have met in 20 of the past 23 seasons.

"That might be an opportunity for the conference to try to market an existing rivalry," Da-

lakas said. "Trying to manufacture a rivalry usually doesn't work. Fans can see through that very easily. If the conference is trying to do something like that, my guess is it will fail pretty bad."

The immediate chance of a brand boost could also come from Colorado, which rejoins the Big 12 next year from the Pac 12.

Under first-year coach Deion Sanders, Colorado won its first three games, vaulted into the AP Top 25 and attracted ESPN and Fox pregame broadcast teams to campus before cooling off with losses to Oregon and USC.

The Buffaloes have ties with four current Big 12 teams who were members of the old Big Eight — Iowa State, Kansas, Kansas State and Oklahoma State. But Colorado hasn't played any of those teams since 2016.

Having Colorado back in the league "might not create a rivalry, but it might create enough interest that can help drive viewership to the conference games," Dalakas said. "And I do think they add a lot of value and excitement. There is something here to be gained even if it doesn't involve a rivalry."

## Harden returns to 76ers camp despite trade request

Associated Press

FORT COLLINS, Colo. — James Harden made his return to the Philadelphia 76ers on Wednesday for training camp. He went through most of the drills. His new coach said he "looked good."

That's about as much clarity as there is at the moment for the disgruntled guard who had been seeking a trade.

No, he didn't address his teammates about the situation before practice. No, he didn't give any updates on his plans.

And no, he shouldn't have to,

teammate Tobias Harris maintained.

"His participation, in my opinion, is addressing that he's here," Harris said. "His attitude and energy today allowed everybody to understand that. He wants to go out here and compete with us and get stuff done. That's just all really that matters, is his energy, and effort toward myself and all the teammates."

The 10-time All-Star arrived on the Colorado State campus for practice in spite of a fractured relationship with the Six-

ers' front office. He skipped the team's media day in New Jersey on Monday and the first day of camp in Colorado on Tuesday.

Harden in June picked up his \$35.6 million contract option for this season with the belief the team would try to trade him. He blasted team president Daryl Morey at a promotional event in China when no trade materialized, calling Morey a liar.

That was the backdrop entering Wednesday, when new Sixers coach Nick Nurse said he had a chat with Harden just before practice.

"The whistle blew, and we got to work," Nurse said as he took over for Doc Rivers, who never led the Sixers past the second round of the playoffs. "He looked good, participated in a majority of it anyway. Looks like he's physically in good shape."

The 76ers are conducting workouts this week at Moby Arena, which is the home of the Rams' basketball teams. Harden didn't talk to reporters Wednesday. His teammates understand this is just the business side of hoops.