

## TROUBLE IN THE SOUTH CHINA SEA



EDRA ACHAM/GETTY IMAGES

# Peril of war over a rusting ship

In the most hotly contested waterway in the world, the risk of Asia's next war hinges increasingly on a ramshackle ship past her time, pockmarked with holes, streaked with rust and beached on a reef.

To buttress its claims in the South China Sea, the Philippines in 1999 deliberately ran aground a World War II-era landing ship on a half-submerged shoal, establishing the vessel as an outpost of the Philippine navy. The BRP Sierra Madre, which has remained on Second Thomas Shoal ever since, has now become the epicenter of escalating tensions between the Philippines and China —

## Philippine vessel beached on a disputed reef becomes focus of rising tensions with China

BY REBECCA TAN, REGINE CARATO AND LARIS KARKLIS IN MANILA

Philippine personnel watch a Chinese ship during a resupply mission to the BRP Sierra Madre at Second Thomas Shoal.

and a singular tripwire that could draw the United States into an armed conflict in the Pacific, say officials and security analysts.

China claims the vast majority of the South China Sea and, in recent months, has ramped up efforts to prevent the Philippines from providing supplies to personnel aboard the Sierra Madre. Analysis of ship-tracking data and videos over the past year shows that Chinese coast guard and militia ships have repeatedly swarmed and collided with Philippine resupply vessels. The Chinese vessels have also increasingly de-

SEE PHILIPPINES ON A15

# Israel holds firm on invasion plans despite U.S. threat

## BIDEN WARNS OF CUTOFF TO ARMS SUPPLY

Shift marks most serious public rift since war's start

BY SHIRA RUBIN, MICHAEL BIRNBAUM AND KAREN DEYOUNG

TEL AVIV — Israel is ready to “stand alone” in the fight against its enemies, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said in a statement Thursday, after President Biden warned that he would halt the flow of certain weapons if Israeli troops invaded Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip.

“If we have to stand alone, we will stand alone,” Netanyahu said in a recorded video message, without specifically mentioning the United States, Israel's closest ally. Other Israeli officials criticized Biden directly, calling his decision “disappointing and frustrating,” and referring to the shift in U.S. policy as an “arms embargo” against Israel, the most serious public rift since the

SEE ISRAEL ON A14



ITHAM MAJLAK/EPIC/SHUTTERSTOCK

A Palestinian child injured in an airstrike is brought to a hospital Wednesday in Rafah, where health facilities remain overburdened.

GOP blowback: Biden's red line on weapons to Israel draws anger. A11

# Health crisis in Rafah: Wounds, burns, disease

Israel's operations have overwhelmed already struggling hospitals

This article is by Kareem Fahim, Louisa Loveluck, Claire Parker, Huzefa Baloch and Hajar Harb

Rafah's threadbare health network is collapsing when people there need it most. The city's largest hospital was shuttered two days ago, in a panic, after Israel ordered

100,000 Palestinians in southeastern Gaza to evacuate. Small clinics that accommodated hundreds of people a week closed as well, with staff members forced to flee the violence.

Bodies lay where they fell, in the “red zone” as the few ambulances available could not reach because of Israeli bombardment, a Palestinian Red Crescent spokesperson said Tuesday. Border crossings remained closed Thursday, stranding critically ill patients waiting to be evacuated to Egypt and preventing international doctors and badly needed

SEE HEALTH ON A14

# Standoff with Daniels angers Trump, attorneys

BY SHAYNA JACOBS, PERRY STEIN, MARIANNE LEVINE AND DEVLIN BARRETT

NEW YORK — Stormy Daniels finished testifying Thursday in Donald Trump's criminal trial, capping a tumultuous day and a half of courtroom accusations, denials and counter-accusations that infuriated Trump, briefly raised the

risk of a mistrial and left the jury to decide whether the adult-film actress's tale of secret sex should matter in a financial crimes case. Daniels first took the stand on Tuesday, describing in sometimes disturbing language what she said was an evening in 2006 when she and the businessman turned reality-TV star had sex in a Lake Tahoe hotel. Trump, the former president

who is also the presumptive GOP nominee, listened intently to what she said, at times reacting so audibly that the judge warned his attorneys that he could be intimidating the witness and must stop. When Daniels returned to the witness stand Thursday, it was to face off against Trump lawyer Susan Necheles, who took a no-holds-barred approach to challenging the porn actress's credibil-

ity on a host of issues. Daniels's testimony was often explosive — in her rapid-fire, often indignant delivery, and in the details she offered of a sexual encounter that at times sounded nonconsensual. Trump lawyer Todd Blanche argued unsuccessfully for a mistrial based on Daniels's testimony, saying it went too far in suggesting to

SEE TRUMP ON A4

## ELECTION 2024

# Inside a \$1 billion pitch from Trump to Big Oil

Bluntly seeking funds for campaign, he promised a vast deregulatory effort

BY JOSH DAWSEY AND MAXINE JOSELOW

As Donald Trump sat with some of the country's top oil executives at his Mar-a-Lago Club last month, one executive complained about how they continued to face burdensome environmental regulations despite spending \$400 million to lobby the Biden administration in the last year.

Trump's response stunned several of the executives in the room overlooking the ocean: You all are wealthy enough, he said, that you should raise \$1 billion to return me to the White House. At

the dinner, he vowed to immediately reverse dozens of President Biden's environmental rules and policies and stop new ones from being enacted, according to people with knowledge of the meeting, who spoke on the condition of anonymity to describe a private conversation. Giving \$1 billion would be a “deal,” Trump said, because of the taxation and regulation they would avoid thanks to him, according to the people. Trump's remarkably blunt and transactional pitch reveals how the former president is targeting the oil industry to finance his reelection bid. At the same time, he has turned to the industry to help shape his environmental agenda for a second term, including rollbacks of some of Biden's signature achievements on clean energy and electric vehicles.

The contrast between the two

SEE OIL ON A17

# The admiral who had a breakdown over Fat Leonard

Some aides suspected him of faking mental struggles to dodge an epic corruption scandal

BY CRAIG WHITLOCK



WASHINGTON POST ILLUSTRATION; CONGA LINE IMAGE OBTAINED BY THE WASHINGTON POST; JACOB STEPHENSON/DEFENSE DEPARTMENT PHOTO; SHOCK

As a commanding officer in Afghanistan, Rear Adm. Robert Gilbeau led a joint logistics unit in the war zone. But after federal authorities announced the arrest of two Navy officials in California on bribery charges in 2013, the admiral grew paranoid, hoarding junk in his office and mumbling incoherently about his escapes with a defense contractor known as “Fat Leonard.” Admitted to Gilbeau, then 52, complained that he stayed up all night in his quarters in Kabul binge-watching episodes of “Californication,” a show about a brooding novelist addicted to sex and booze. The staffers didn't know who he was, they had never seen a senior officer go to pieces like this.

One day, Gilbeau whispered conspiratorially to his chief of staff that he had never seen a senior officer go to pieces like this.

SEE FAT LEONARD ON A12

## IN THE NEWS

**VA investigation** Nearly 200 senior leaders raked in \$11 million in improper bonuses from funds earmarked for reprocessor. A2

**Sexual harassment settlement** D.C. reached an agreement with two women who filed complaints against a former top aide to Mayor Muriel E. Bowser (D). B1

**THE NATION** College faculty have felt a duty to support students' protests of the Israel-Gaza war. A3  
**President Biden** is trying to shore up his support through use of executive orders. A6

**THE WORLD** Russia marked Victory Day with nuclear-capable weapons at its annual parade. A10  
**Climate change** is raising the risk of another pandemic, researchers said in a new study. A15

**THE ECONOMY** Rural areas could lose cell service if Congress doesn't fill a \$3 billion funding gap, the FCC warned. A16  
**A political divide** between Republican skeptics and Democrats is slowing the adoption of electric vehicles in the United States. A18

**THE REGION** Six current GWU students were among 93 people arrested as police cleared a pro-Palestinian encampment. B1  
**Jewish students** said they wanted more information from Montgomery County schools leader at a Maryland hearing on antisemitism. B1

**STYLE** “Critical Role” is streaming games of Dungeons & Dragons to millions of viewers around the world. C1

**WEEKEND** As flowers bloom in the heat of a D.C. spring, we find the best gardens in which to take in the burgeoning local color.

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CONTENT © 2024  
BY THE WASHINGTON POST  
ISSN 01-12-1082

