

# U.S. Destroyer Sails in Disputed South China Sea



The USS Wayne E. Meyer (DDG-108) Arleigh Burke-class Destroyer sits docked in San Diego, California, April 12, 2015.

WASHINGTON (Reuters) -- A U.S. Navy destroyer sailed near islands claimed by China in the South China Sea on Wednesday, the U.S. military said, a move likely to anger Beijing at a time of tense ties between the world's two largest economies.

The busy waterway is one of a growing number of flashpoints in the U.S.-China relationship, which include a trade war, U.S. sanctions and Taiwan. Reuters reported on Tuesday that China had denied a request for a U.S. Navy warship to visit the Chinese port city of Qingdao.

The U.S. Navy destroyer Wayne E.

Meyer carried out the operation, traveling within 12 nautical miles of Fiery Cross and Mischief Reefs, Commander Reann Mommsen, a spokeswoman for the U.S. Navy's Seventh Fleet, told Reuters.

Mommsen added that the operation was done to "to challenge excessive maritime claims and preserve access to the waterways as governed by international law."

The U.S. military operation comes amid an increasingly bitter trade war between China and the United States which sharply escalated on Friday, with both sides leveling more tariffs on each other's exports.

China and the United States have repeatedly traded barbs in the past over what Washington says is Beijing's militarization of the South China Sea by building military installations on artificial islands and reefs.

The U.S. incursion came a day after China accused the United States of "maliciously hyping up" the South China Sea situation and making warrantless criticism.

A Chinese survey vessel on Saturday extended its activities to an area closer to Vietnam's coast and the Pentagon said China had "resumed its coercive interference in Vietnam's longstanding oil and gas activities in the South China Sea."

Chinese foreign ministry spokesman Geng Shuang, referring to the China-Vietnam issue, said the United States had again and again "made thoughtless remarks, made warrantless criticisms against China, completely distorting the facts and confusing right from wrong".

"China urges the United States to stop this kind of malicious hyping up behavior, and play a positive and constructive role in regional and international matters," he said.

The Pentagon statement came as U.S. President Donald Trump on Monday predicted a trade deal with China after positive gestures by it, calming global markets that have been roiled by escalating tension between the world's two largest economies.

## 'Horrendous' Arson Attack Kills At Least 25 in Mexico



A man is comforted at a crime scene following a deadly attack at a bar by unknown assailants in Coatzacoalcos, Mexico August 28, 2019.

OATZACOALCOS, Mexico (Reuters) -- At least 25 people were killed in an arson attack by suspected gang members on a bar in the southeastern Mexican port of Coatzacoalcos late on Tuesday, President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador said, in a fresh blow to his efforts to curb violence.

Calling the attack "horrendous," Lopez Obrador told a regular morning news conference on Wednesday that the deaths occurred after the suspected gangsters closed the emer-

gency exits of the bar in Coatzacoalcos and set fire to it.

The attorney general's office of the state of Veracruz said overnight that eight women and 15 men died in the fire at the "Caballo Blanco" bar, and 13 people who were seriously wounded were hospitalized for treatment.

Lopez Obrador said 25 people had died so far and that initial investigations indicated that some suspects behind the attack had been in custody this year and were later released.

The attack was one of the worst

mass killings since the veteran leftist Lopez Obrador took office in December pledging to pacify Mexico by battling corruption and inequality.

So far, however, the number of murders has continued to rise after hitting record levels in 2018.

The deaths follow an attack in April on another bar in Veracruz in the city of Minatitlan that killed 13 people.

While saying he did not want to blame previous governments, Lopez Obrador nevertheless pointed to past policies for laying the groundwork for the crime.

"This is the rotten fruit of the economic policy that was imposed, the policy of pillage," the president said.

Veracruz state governor Cuitlahuac Garcia suggested in a post on Twitter that the attack was the result of a dispute between gangs.

The Gulf Coast state is a major transit point for drugs making their way north towards the U.S. border and has long been convulsed by violent turf wars between organized crime groups.

Some Mexican media reports said that gunmen had fired shots on the bar before setting it ablaze with Molotov cocktails.

## Three Killed in Shooting at Protest in Indonesia's Papua

JAKARTA (Reuters) -- Shooting broke out at a protest in Indonesia's easternmost province of Papua on Wednesday, and police there said that one soldier and two protesters had been killed.

A news website earlier said that as many as six people had been killed, but the army dismissed that as "a hoax".

Since last week, thousands of people in Papua have protested over perceived ethnic discrimination, leading to the torching of a market, a jail and government offices. Separatist conflicts have flared in the region for decades.

Shooting broke out on Wednesday when hundreds of protesters demonstrated in front of the office of the local regent in the town of Deiyai, local authorities said.

Papuan police spokesman Ahmad Kamal said in a statement that one soldier had been killed and two protesters had died. He said one of the protesters was killed by a bullet and the other by an arrow. He did not say how the soldier died. Five people had been wounded, he said.

"Some civilians were killed, but there is no certainty as to how many victims there are," Hengky Pigai, the deputy regent for Deiyai, told Reuters. He said a number of wounded were taken to the hospital.

Markus Haluk, a leader of the pro-independence separatist group United Liberation Movement for West Papua, told Reuters by WhatsApp that six had people had died and seven

people were shot and injured.

An official Twitter account for the Indonesian Armed forces dismissed an earlier Reuters report quoting news website Suarapapua.com, a local resident and an activist as saying that six people had been killed.

"It's a hoax. Protect the unity on Indonesia," the Tweet said.

In Jakarta, the capital, national police spokesman Dedi Prasetyo dismissed reports of protesters being killed as "a provocation", but said one soldier was killed and three police officers injured in the clash.

"Security forces are trying to establish order in the area," he said, adding that only information from the Papua police was trustworthy.

Demonstrations over the past week were triggered by a racist slur against Papuan students, who were hit by tear gas in their dormitory and detained in the city of Surabaya on the main island of Java on Aug. 17, but some protest rallies grew into a broader demand for an independence vote.

The government has cut internet access in the region in the past week to stop people sharing "provocative" messages that could trigger more violence, a step criticized by rights group and journalists, who said it had made reporting difficult.

## Brazil Announces South American Meeting on Amazon



Brazil's President Jair Bolsonaro greets Chile's President Sebastian Pinera at the Alvorada Palace in Brasilia, Brazil August 28, 2019.

BRASILIA (Reuters) -- Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro said on Wednesday that South American countries would meet to determine a common policy in defense of the Amazon rainforest, and took another swipe at France for an offer of \$20 million in aid.

In an indication that Bolsonaro, a far-right conservative, is forging closer ties with neighboring countries than European nations, he also accepted Chile's offer of four aircraft to help fight the fires sweeping through the world's largest rainforest.

Speaking to journalists after a meeting with Chilean President Sebastian Pinera in Brasilia, Bolsonaro said a meeting with regional neighbors except Venezuela to discuss a common policy in defense of the Amazon will be held on Sept. 6 in the Colombian city of Leticia.

Pinera offered his full backing to Bolsonaro, saying the sovereignty of the nations that share the Amazon had to be respected, while Bolsonaro said Brazil's sovereignty had "no price, not even \$20 trillion."

That was a reference to an offer of

\$20 million aid announced by French President Emmanuel Macron at a summit of the G7 wealthy nations in Biarritz over the weekend, which Bolsonaro dismissed as an insulting attempt to "buy" Brazil's sovereignty.

Macron has accused Bolsonaro, a longtime skeptic of environmental concerns, of lying about climate change.

"The French government called me a liar. Only after it has recanted what it said about me ... and the Brazilian people, who do not accept this diminution of the Amazon's sovereignty ... if so, then we can talk again," Bolsonaro said.

Brazil's Environment Minister Ricardo Salles, who shares Bolsonaro's skepticism of environmental concerns and has been at the forefront of the Brazilian government's response to the Amazon crisis, remained in the Armed Forces Hospital in Brasilia on Wednesday.

Salles, 44, was admitted to the hospital's emergency unit on Tuesday after complaining of not feeling well, the hospital said in a statement. Hospital staff opted to carry out "routine examinations," and he is in stable condition, it said.

## Far Right Set to Deal Blow to Merkel Coalition



Supporters wave flags during the inaugural AfD election rally in Brandenburg state elections on July 13, 2019 in Cottbus, Germany.

BERLIN (Reuters) -- The far right is set to make strong gains in two regional elections in eastern Germany on Sunday, potentially upending 30 years of rule by the two main parties and hastening the break-up of Chancellor Angela Merkel's national coalition.

The Alternative for Germany (AfD) is harnessing voter anger over refugees and the planned closure of coal mines in the region and cast themselves as the heirs of the demonstrators who brought about the fall of the Berlin Wall three decades ago.

Double-digit gains for the AfD threaten Merkel's conservatives in Saxony and could mean her Social Democrat (SPD) national partner lose power in Brandenburg. The parties have led the respective states since reunification in 1990, mostly in coalitions.

The AfD is expected to take votes from both parties in the elections held two months before Germany marks 30 years since the fall of the Cold War's most potent symbol, the Berlin Wall.

AfD election posters tell voters to "Complete the change started in 1989". With the word "Wende", used to describe the fall of East German Communism, the posters say: "1989 2019. Wende 2.0. Be there when history is made!"

"There is a very broad disillusionment in much of the east with all the established parties and the AfD is

dominant as it makes people feel they are being listened to," said Hans Vorlaender, director of a political research center in Dresden.

The next few months will be crucial if the already rocky national coalition is to survive until a federal election in 2021, with attention on the eastern votes, including a third in Thuringia in October, and on policy.

The parties are due to review the coalition, weakened by rows over migrant policy, tax and pensions, by the end of the year. Many SPD members want to quit an alliance that has kept Merkel in power for 10 of the last 14 years and rebuild in opposition.

A collapse of the coalition could trigger a snap election or result in a minority government - unappealing options for stability-loving Germans. National polls put the conservatives first, with the Greens close behind and the SPD trailing neck and neck with the AfD.

The Greens have also made big gains in both states and may end up coalition kingmaker.

Heavy losses in state votes last year led Merkel, brought up in East Germany, to quit as CDU leader and announce this would be her last term. The SPD, which rules with the radical Left party in Brandenburg, sank into turmoil after its worst performance in European elections in May, is hovering close to record lows and is still searching for a leader.



KIEV (Reuters) - U.S. National Security Advisor John Bolton warned on Wednesday of the threat of unfair Chinese trade practices during a trip to Kiev and said he had discussed his concerns with officials, including President Volodymyr Zelenskyy. Asked about a possible acquisition by China of Ukrainian aircraft engine maker Motor Sich, Bolton told reporters he did not want to discuss specific companies or transactions and that such deals were a sovereign matter for Ukraine. But he made clear Washington disapproved. "We laid out our concerns about... unfair Chinese trade practices, threats to national security we've seen in the United States..." he said at a news conference in Kiev.

DAKAR, Senegal (AP) -- While the world has turned its gaze to fires burning in Brazil's Amazon rainforest, satellite images show a far greater number of blazes on the African continent. NASA says that at least 70% of the 10,000 fires burning worldwide on an average August day are in Africa. Yet the agency says their number is consistent from year to year. Experts say African fires mostly burn across savanna lands and on fields cultivated by small farmers. Although scientists say they do not pose the same threat to the environment as the Amazon fires, some warn that burning areas for agriculture purposes needs to be better managed to protect nearby forests.

TOKYO (AFP) -- Two people were confirmed dead on Wednesday as heavy rains pounded southwest Japan, prompting flood and landslide warnings and orders for 870,000 people to seek safety. More than a million more people were advised to leave their homes after the country's weather agency raised the alert to its highest level for parts of northern Kyushu. The emergency warning is issued "if there is a significant likelihood of catastrophes". Officials confirmed two deaths, one in western Saga prefecture where a man was found in a car that had been swept away. A second man died in Fukuoka as he tried to escape from a car trapped in rising floodwaters. Government spokesman Yoshihide Suga said a third person, in Saga, was in a state of "cardiorespiratory arrest" -- a term usually employed by Japanese officials to indicate a person's death before it is officially confirmed by a doctor.

JAKARTA (AFP) -- Malaysia's ex-prime minister Najib Razak played a pivotal role in plundering state fund IMDB and hundreds of millions of dollars were illicitly channelled to his bank account, a prosecutor said Wednesday at the opening of his biggest graft trial. Claims that Najib and his cronies pilfered massive sums from the fund and spent it on everything from real estate to artwork contributed to the defeat of his long-ruling coalition to a reformist alliance. After losing power last year, the former prime minister was arrested and hit with dozens of charges related to IMDB. He is expected to face several trials. The first started earlier this year but Wednesday's is the biggest, with Najib accused of 21 counts of money-laundering and four of abuse of power, centring on allegations that he illicitly obtained 2.28 billion ringgit (\$540 million) from IMDB. Opening the trial, lead prosecutor Gopal Sri Ram said that Najib used an "elaborate charade" and played a "pivotal role" in plundering 1Malaysia Development Berhad, a fund established with the ostensible aim of boosting Malaysia's economy.

LIMA (AFP) -- Archeologists in Peru say the 227 bodies they have unearthed from a site used by the pre-Columbian Chimu culture is the biggest-ever discovery of sacrificed children. Archeologists have been digging since last year at the huge sacrificial site in Huanchaco, a beachside tourist town north of the capital Lima. "This is the biggest site where the remains of sacrificed children have been found," chief archeologist Feren Castillo told AFP on Tuesday. Castillo said the children, who were aged between four and 14, were sacrificed in a ritual to honor the Chimu culture's gods. "They were sacrificed to appease the El Nino phenomenon," and show signs of being killed during wet weather, he said. He added that there may still be more to be found. "It's uncontrollable, this thing with the children. Wherever you dig, there's another one," Castillo said. The children's remains were found in a position facing the sea. Some still had skin and hair.

MEXICO CITY (Reuters) -- Puerto Rico was bracing on Wednesday for the arrival of Tropical Storm Dorian, closing schools and diverting cruise liners even as it is still struggling to recover from devastating back-to-back hurricanes in 2017. Those hurricanes killed about 3,000 people just months after the territory filed for bankruptcy to restructure \$120 billion of debt and pension obligations. Having been criticized over the response to the 2017 storms, the White House said in a statement that President Donald Trump had approved an emergency declaration for Puerto Rico late on Tuesday, allowing for the Federal Emergency Management Agency to provide assistance in coordination with ongoing disaster preparedness efforts.