

July 29, 2024

Headlining This Week's Brief

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Top Stories

Nearly 100 Active Large Wildfires Over Western U.S.

As of Monday morning, **94 large fires** are burning across the U.S., requiring the attention of over 27,000 personnel. Regionally, firefighting resources are strained the most in the Northwest, including Washington and Oregon; however, California's **Park Fire** is the most prominent of all major fire incidents. As of Monday morning, the Park Fire has burned over 368,000 acres and is only 12% contained. The latest acreage makes it the **sixth-largest wildfire in California history**. At least 134 structures have been **destroyed**, and evacuation alerts remain in place across Butte, Plumas, Shasta, and Tehama counties. Year-to-date (YTD), nationwide, over 3.9 million acres have burned. This is above the 10-year YTD average of 3.4 million acres. By the end of July last year, only 1.1 million acres had burned. Looking ahead, red flag (fire weather) warnings remain abundant across Montana, Wyoming, Idaho, western Colorado, Utah, and California. During August, **above-normal fire danger** is expected to continue across much of the West.

Rail, Telecom Network, and Weather-Related Disruptions Mark First Days of Olympic Games

French transportation officials have **strengthened** security measures along the country's rail network after a series of coordinated arson attacks on Friday led to train delays and cancellations, impacting around 800,000 travelers ahead of the Olympic Opening Ceremony. The high-speed train network has been restored as of today; officials suspect "**far-left groups**" were behind the

sabotage. Vandals have also **targeted** communications infrastructure, with damage to telecom networks **impacting** approximately 11,000 people as of early Monday morning.

Back in Paris, while climate activist group Extinction Rebellion **called off** a planned demonstration on Saturday after police intervened, related activity may be on the horizon, with intelligence officials **warning** that "radical environmental groups" may target airports in France amid a **pan-European protest campaign** against the aviation industry. In other demonstration news, pro-Palestine activists may target the **Israel- Japan soccer match** scheduled for Tuesday evening at Nantes' La Beaujoire Stadium. The Olympics organizing committee **filed** a complaint over "anti-Semitic gestures" from attendees at Sunday's Israel- Paraguay match. On the competition side, organizers say they're confident they will be able to hold the swimming portion of the triathlon in the Seine River as planned in the coming days. Heavy rainfall forced organizers to **cancel** practice runs due to water quality concerns, but conditions are expected to improve.

Tensions Increase Between Israel, Hezbollah Following Weekend Strike on Golan Heights

Fears of a wider regional war are once again growing after a **rocket strike** on a soccer field in the Golan Heights killed 12 people, most of them children. It was the largest loss of life in Israeli-controlled territory since Hamas' attack on October 7. Israel accused Hezbollah of launching the strike, while Hezbollah said a misfired Iron Dome air-defense missile caused the explosion. Following the incident, the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) launched drone strikes deep into Lebanese territory on what they **said** were Hezbollah weapons caches and infrastructure. Further Israeli reprisals have been **authorized**, with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu **claiming** that their ultimate response "will be severe." A **report** from Reuters quoting two unnamed Israeli officials said that they were planning a "limited but significant" response meant to stop short of triggering an all-out war.

In response to the increased tensions in the region, several countries are **reiterating** calls for their citizens to depart Lebanon. U.S. Embassy Beirut posted a **video message** to social media recommending constituents develop a "crisis plan of action" and be prepared to shelter in place for long periods if commercial transit options become unavailable. Over the weekend, several airlines moved to **cancel** or delay flights in Beirut, including Air France, Lufthansa, Swiss, Eurowings, Middle East Airlines, and others. Fears of further cross-border strikes are also expected to lead to continued disruptions to Global Position System (GPS) signals. Researchers have traced the disruptions, which have been reported in **Lebanon, Jordan, and Israel**, to an **air base** in northern Israel. GPS "spoofing" and "jamming," used primarily to thwart missile and drone attacks, have interfered with civilian airline navigation and phone applications that rely on GPS signals to function. **OpenSky Network** and other **sites** publish live data tracking reports of GPS spoofing.

Climate and Natural Hazards

- **Multiple Areas to Watch in the Tropics:** The **National Hurricane Center** (NHC) is tracking a disturbance in the central Atlantic for potential development. The feature may remain a disturbance as it passes through the Leeward Islands and Puerto Rico on Wednesday and Thursday. Afterward, there is significant forecast uncertainty. Interests within the Bahamas, Florida, Cuba, and the far eastern Gulf of Mexico can expect the feature to be in their vicinity Friday into Saturday. In the Eastern Pacific, south of Mexico, the **NHC** has highlighted three areas of interest. Increased coastal rain and rough seas are expected through mid-week, though none of the systems are expected to hit land directly.
- **Heavy Precipitation to Impact Central Chile Into Early August:** Medium-range forecast data is signaling that a significant Pacific weather disturbance will impact Central Chile between July 31 and August 4. Multiple rounds of heavy rain will move across the region, likely leading to localized rainfall totals in excess of four to eight inches. Scattered flash flooding, landslides, and power outages are possible.
- **Storm Causing Significant Damage in Latvia:** Extensive **wind** and **flood** damage are reported in Latvia. Over the past 24 hours, parts of the country have received over 100mm (4in) of rain.
- **China Flood Impacts Continue:** The National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC) has allocated 500 million yuan (70 million USD) to support **disaster relief efforts** in Hunan, Henan, Sichuan, Shaanxi, and Fujian. Meanwhile, dangerous flooding continues with new reports of a **levee breach** in Xintang Village, Hunan Province.
- **Ethiopia Landslides Kill Hundreds, Death Toll Still Climbing:** Two landslides that occurred on July 21 and 22 in the Gofa Zone of southern Ethiopia have killed at least 257 people, according to the **United Nations** citing local authorities. As crews continue to search for those missing, officials fear the death toll could rise as high as 500. The area remains susceptible to additional landslides, with more than 15,000 residents needing to be evacuated due to the risk.
- **Kim Jong-un Tours Flood Damage, Rescue Efforts:** Approximately **4,200 people were rescued** across northern parts of North Korea on Monday. **Kim Jong-un** visited flood damage sites in Sinuiju and Uiju counties. Forecast guidance indicates that above-normal rainfall may return Thursday into Friday.

Worldwide

- **Violence, Unrest Spark Around Cartel Activity in Mexico:** On Saturday, Ismael “El Mayo” Zambada, leader of the Sinaloa drug cartel, was **arrested** in the U.S. alongside a son of Joaquín “El Chapo” Guzmán after unknowingly boarding a plane destined towards the U.S. In anticipation of a possible wave of violence in the aftermath of Zambada’s arrest, the Mexican government deployed 200 troops to Sinaloa’s capital, Culiacán. In a separate development, the general coordinator of the Strategy, Tactics, and Special Operations Unit of Mexico City, Milton Morales Figueroa, was **assassinated** last week. Morales was key in curbing violence and crime in Mexico’s capital. In the south, hundreds of Mexicans **are fleeing** Chiapas to neighboring Guatemala amid a spike in cartel-related violence in rural areas across the state. In recent weeks, criminal groups have reportedly cut off communications and electricity and blocked roads, and **shootings** and other instances of violence have occurred in several areas.
- **Maduro Declares Win Amid Electoral Fraud Allegations and Protests:** President Nicolás Maduro **declared** victory in Venezuela’s national election despite allegations of fraud. While the National Electoral Council (CNE), accused of being biased towards the ruling party, claims Maduro secured over 51% of the vote, opposition leaders have disputed this, asserting that they won over 70% based on independent electoral monitoring counts. Numerous international leaders have condemned the election results, **citing concerns** over the validity and fairness of voting. Heightened demonstration activity has been reported in Venezuela, resulting in at least one death and various injuries. Protests have also occurred abroad, including in Argentina, where protester demonstrators met with tear gas near the Embassy of Venezuela in Buenos Aires. Further demonstrations are likely throughout Venezuela in the coming days, with Maduro and other leaders of his party calling on supporters to “take to the streets and confront their opponents.”
- **Rise in Shoplifting Challenging U.K. Retailers, New Government:** New official data covering the year ending in March 2024 shows a year-over-year **30% increase** in reported retail shoplifting offenses across the United Kingdom. According to the U.K. retail trade association **British Retail Consortium**, losses from theft have reached nearly £1 billion. The increase in shoplifting has **not resulted in an increase in prosecutions**, with only 17% being charged and more than half of cases being closed without ever identifying a suspect. To address the issue of shoplifting, the new Labour government has pledged to implement a new standalone offense for incidents that involve the assault of retail employees.
- **Violence Against Women at Epidemic Levels in U.K., Labeled a “National Emergency”:** The **National Police Chiefs Council** is calling for action to address violence against women in the U.K., with an estimated **one in every 12 women** becoming victims of various crimes each year. Minister for Safeguarding Jess Phillips has labeled the current levels of violence against women and girls a national emergency and a threat to security and prosperity.

Prime Minister Keir Starmer announced that his government intends to bring forward plans to halve the incidents involving violence against women and girls in the U.K.

- **Protests Against Kenya's Government Continue, Similar Activity Arrives in Uganda, Nigeria:** Five weeks of anti-government **demonstrations in Kenya** have resulted in the firing of most Cabinet members, calls for President William Ruto to step down, and at least 50 deaths. Police have stopped saying how many they've arrested, and a pro-government movement has emerged to counter the youth-led protests. Police banned demonstrations in Nairobi last week, though Kenya's high court **issued an order suspending the ban**. As protesters continue to call for Ruto's resignation, other African countries appear to be drawing inspiration from the movement. Last week in Uganda, security forces **detained over 100 participants** in a banned protest in downtown Kampala. The demonstrators were rallying against corruption, human rights abuses, and **a military crackdown** in the capital. Further demonstrations are planned for this week. In Nigeria, calls for protests from August 1-10 **will be overseen by the military**. The country's military was last deployed to quell protests in October 2020, **leading to bloodshed**.

Cyber and Regulatory

- **Bangladesh Slowly Coming Back Online Following Curfew, Internet Blackout:** After more than a week of government-induced outages following widespread, violent protests by university students, mobile internet access in Bangladesh was **restored** yesterday afternoon. However, several popular social media sites, including Facebook, **remain** restricted. The extended outage **impacted** many businesses and **hampered** the country's rapidly growing tech industry. The curfew, combined with the internet disruptions, also severely **disrupted** the country's crucial apparel sector.
- **Google to Retain Cookies in Popular Chrome Browser:** In a major about-face, Google said that it was **halting** plans to remove cookies from its Chrome browser. The decision comes after years of fights with advertisers, who **worried** that the phase-out would hinder future advertising campaigns and limit the insight they could glean into consumer habits. Regulators were also reportedly concerned that the move away from cookies could be anti-competitive, forcing companies to become more reliant on Google's digital ad products. While Google has not specifically said what it plans to do next, it did **tease plans** to "introduce a new experience in Chrome that lets people make an informed choice that applies across their web browsing."
- **U.S. Warns Tech Startups of Threat Posed by Foreign Investors:** The National Counterintelligence and Security Center (NCSC) and several other U.S. government agencies issued a **press release** last week **warning** technology startups of the dangers posed by accepting investments from "foreign threat actors." In the bulletin, the NCSC cautions that such actors may use private equity and venture capital to exploit early-stage companies and extract sensitive information. Investors could seek access to proprietary

data under the guise of performing due diligence. The memo noted that Chinese venture capital firms have focused on emerging sectors like artificial intelligence.

- **U.S. Foreign Investment Watchdog Reports Uptick in Penalties:** The Committee on Foreign Investment in the U.S. (Cfius), a government panel that reviews foreign purchases of real estate and investments in U.S. companies, told Congress that it assessed four civil penalties in 2023, the most in its history. The entities receiving the penalties were unnamed, but the country that filed the most requests for Cfius review in 2023 was China, with 33. The increase in penalties comes after the Trump and Biden administrations **indicated** they would use the committee more aggressively to target potential threats from Chinese investment.
- **Largest Cybercrime Alliance to Date Announces Intention to Target NATO:** Around 70 hacker groups claim to have joined forces to **form** the world's largest cybercrime alliance with the express purpose of targeting NATO, Europe, Ukraine, and Israel. Dubbed the "Holy League," the new collective is made up of members of the High Society hacker coalition and the 7 October Union. The involved groups are pro- Russian and recently issued a call to other like-minded groups to target Spain's national police for **detaining** members of hacktivist group NoName(057).

Infrastructure and Supply Chain

- **Companies Recuperate Following CrowdStrike Outage; Insurers Fear Billions in Losses:** Companies continue to **reel** from the CrowdStrike outage, which resulted in widespread flight cancellations and business disruptions. Insurers are **bracing** for potential losses that could reach the billions following the outage. A recent analysis revealed that around 25% of Fortune 500 companies suffered "direct financial losses and operational delays" and emphasized the critical role of cybersecurity in maintaining business continuity. CrowdStrike is now **warning** of new phishing scams targeting German customers as a result of the outage, which involves "unattributed spear-phishing" attempts that include malicious download attachments.
- **Backlash Against Tourism Continues in Europe:** In recent months, residents in Spain, Europe's second most visited country, expressed **outrage** over rising housing costs, overcrowding, and other issues due to over-tourism. This has prompted **protests** in places oversaturated with tourism, such as Barcelona. Policymakers are trying to strike a balance between addressing the concerns of residents while continuing to derive economic benefits. In Italy, Venice **implemented** a five-euro entrance fee in April to deter tourists from visiting during peak times and ease pressure on residents. The results yielded €2.43 million for the local economy; however, overtourism remains an issue.
- **Cargo Theft on the Rise in Mexico, Most Use GPS Jammers:** In the first half of 2024, at least 203 cases of cargo theft were **reported** in Mexico. The states of Mexico, Puebla, Jalisco, and Guanajuato reported the highest number of thefts, with groceries, steel, and tires among the top goods stolen. Officials found that the majority of thefts targeted

tractor-trailers. Peak hours of cargo theft were between 5 am and 9 am. Over 80% of cargo thefts were conducted using GPS **jammers**, which are used to conceal locations. Despite a **law** prohibiting jamming devices, the Mexican Association of Private Security and Satellite Industry Companies (AMESIS) **argues** that authorities have not adequately enforced the law, leading to the rise in cargo theft.

- **Fears of Major Oil Spill After Tanker Sinks in Manila Bay:** The tanker Terra Nova encountered huge waves and sank late Thursday evening in Manila Bay, resulting in at least one crewman's death. The Philippine Coast Guard said Saturday that the cargo of industrial fuel oil onboard has **started to leak in small amounts**. The sunken vessel has remained intact, though authorities are scrambling to begin a delicate undersea operation and stave off a major environmental crisis. An aerial inspection showed a 12-14-kilometer oil slick, though it is not highly viscous and not deeply black, indicating no major leak. Crews must now work to siphon the remaining cargo from intact tanks. The operation could take at least a week. Philippine Coast Guard Rear Admiral Armando Balilo compared the magnitude of the possible spill to one caused by another sinking oil tanker, the MT Princess Empress. That spill **took about three months to contain** and affected thousands of fishermen and beach resorts.
- **U.S. Retailers Rushing Imports Amid Rising Costs, Global Instability:** Ports in the U.S. are seeing a **surge in goods** ahead of **new tariffs** on Chinese goods set to take effect on August 1 and meant to counter the circumvention of previous tariffs. Ports in Seattle, Tacoma, and Los Angeles have all seen a rise in container imports despite rising costs **amid limitations** in shipping through the Panama Canal and Red Sea and the threat of dockworker strikes. Ocean carriers have responded to the disruptions by sending more vessels to Asia-Europe routes to maintain schedules, triggering price increases. Short-term contract rates for shipping a container from Asia to the U.S. West Coast have seen a four-fold increase over the same period last year.

Health

- **CDC Warns of Blood Culture Bottle Shortage:** Last week, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) issued an **advisory** over a "critical shortage" of blood culture media bottles that has the potential to "disrupt patient care by leading to delays in diagnosis, misdiagnosis, or other challenges in the clinical management of patients with certain infectious diseases." The specific bottles in question, marketed by **BD Life Sciences**, play a crucial role in U.S. hospitals' ability to diagnose infections, as a significant portion of labs in the country use BD blood culture systems that are only compatible with the impacted bottles. The shortage has **reportedly** been impacting health facilities "for weeks" and could extend into September.
- **U.K. National Health Service Issues Alert Over Blood Shortage:** Health officials in the U.K. **issued** an "Amber Alert" to hospitals nationwide last week, asking them to restrict type O blood to only essential cases due to a significant bloodstock shortage. The National

Health Service (NHS) said blood stocks are at “unprecedentedly low levels” due to a confluence of issues, including increased demand and a June **cyberattack** that continues to impact London hospitals. The NHS is soliciting more donations, particularly of type O blood.

- **U.S. Listeria Outbreak Leads to Further Illness, Hospitalization:** The CDC is **advising** that citizens at higher risk for listeriosis—pregnant people, those 65 or older, and individuals with weakened immune systems—avoid eating meats sliced at delis as an ongoing outbreak of **listeria** continues to result in sickness and hospitalization. At least 34 people across 13 U.S. states have been infected with the current outbreak strain, which health officials suspect is tied to tainted deli meat. After a sample of its liverwurst product tested positive for listeria, Boar’s Head recalled all such products currently available and any other meat products produced on the same line. The Food and Drug Administration has a **full list** of recalled items.
- **Whooping Cough Infections Rising in Americas, Elsewhere:** The Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) has issued an **alert** about rising **pertussis (whooping cough)** cases in certain countries amid a decline in vaccination coverage. Pertussis infections decreased globally during the pandemic but have since recovered, with multiple countries in the Americas reporting significant upticks in the first half of 2024, including the U.S., Mexico, Brazil, and Peru. Europe has seen a notable increase in cases outside the Americas, with **total infections** through the first quarter of 2024 outstripping the number seen in all of 2023. Surges have also been reported this year in **China, South Korea, Australia, New Zealand**, and other nations globally.
- **Zika Cases Continue to Rise in India’s Maharashtra State:** On Sunday, nine new cases of Zika virus were **reported** in Maharashtra, bringing the state’s total to 54 this year, the highest annual total on record. Pune district has been the most affected by the uptick in cases, logging 48 infections since June 20. Earlier this month, following the first reported cases, the Indian government issued a **nationwide advisory** urging state governments to strengthen surveillance for the virus. While many cases of **Zika** are asymptomatic or result in minor symptoms, infections during pregnancy can cause significant birth defects, including microcephaly and **long-term immunity issues**.

Demonstrations and Industrial Action

- **Farmers in India to Restart Protests Calling for Financial Support for Crops:** Farmers in India’s Haryana state are set to **resume widespread demonstrations** in August, raising concerns that this protest wave will bring with it the same security measures and **police response** that the country saw in March. The Samyukt Kisan Morcha (SKM) and Kisan Mazdoor Morcha (KMM) farmers’ coalitions are organizing demonstrations across the country on August 1, followed by tractor marches on August 15. They are calling on farmers to travel to the Khanauri and Shambhu crossings on the Punjab state border. As with the

previous protests, farmers are **urging** the government to implement a law to guarantee minimum support prices (MSPs) for various crops.

- **Shippers Switch to U.S. Ports as Canada Rail Strike Looms:** The Canadian National Railway transport company **lowered** its financial outlook as companies prepare for a potential rail strike. Approximately 10,000 railway workers represented by the Teamsters Canada Rail Conference (TCRC) voted earlier this year to authorize a strike. Still, government concerns over the transportation of essential goods have left stakeholders in a state of uncertainty. Canada's Industrial Relations Board is expected to rule on minimum shipment requirements by August 9. The earliest a potential work stoppage could take effect would be 72 hours after the mandatory filing period.
- **Protest Activity Expected to Spike as Israel-Hamas Conflict Approaches 300-Day Mark:** Activist groups are organizing widespread demonstrations ahead of this weekend, with Saturday marking 300 days of the conflict between Israel and Hamas. Ismail Haniyeh, the head of Hamas' political bureau, has **called** for Saturday to be a global day of action in support of Gaza and Palestinian prisoners, while the Palestinian Youth Movement is seeking three straight days of activism starting Thursday. Notable demonstrations have already been planned for Saturday in Montreal at Dorchester Square and in London, where pro-Palestine groups will hold a National March for Palestine from Park Lane to Whitehall. In Israel, thousands continue to take to the streets in weekly demonstrations calling for the release of hostages in Gaza. Activists also **held protests** at three IKEA furniture stores.
- **Travel Disruptions Reported as Climate Activists Target European Airports:** A coalition of climate activist groups has targeted the aviation industry as part of a new campaign called "Oil Kills," with **multiple actions** taking place since last week. On Monday, police **arrested** eight demonstrators who blocked departure gates at London's Heathrow Airport. Elsewhere, activists have deployed a range of tactics, from peaceful **sit-ins** in the Netherlands to more disruptive actions like those in Germany, where demonstrators **glued** themselves to the tarmac at the Cologne-Bonn airport and **forced** the cancellation of 270 flights at Frankfurt Airport after breaching security fences. Demonstrations have also been reported in **Vienna, Oslo, Zurich, and Geneva**.
- **Demonstrations Over Migration Continue in Communities Across Ireland:** Police in Ireland have been responding to multiple protest hotspots in recent weeks as demonstrators spar over accommodation plans for asylum seekers and refugees. Protesters and authorities **clashed** earlier this month in the suburban area of Coolock, north of Dublin, and several arson incidents have targeted the former Crown Paints factory. Outside Dublin, crowds opposed to using building sites for asylum-seeker housing have also gathered in **Dundalk and Kilkenny**. While activity in Coolock has tapered off, social media posts about asylum seekers' arrivals or renovation plans at sites earmarked for refugee housing, whether true or unsubstantiated, are likely to incite further calls to action and spikes in protest activity. Irish politician **Fergus Power** posted on social media calling for a national demonstration outside Garda Headquarters in Dublin on August 5.

Upcoming Events

- July 26-September 8: Paris Olympic and Paralympic Games (France)
- August 1: Swiss National Day (Switzerland)
- August 1: Emancipation Day (Barbados, Bermuda, Belize, Guyana, Jamaica, Saint Lucia, Turks and Caicos Islands, St Vincent and the Grenadines, Trinidad and Tobago)
- August 1: Independence Day (Benin)
- August 4: Anniversary of 2020 Port of Beirut Explosion (Lebanon)
- August 4: Founders' Day (Ghana)
- August 5: Civic Holiday (Canada)
- August 5: Emancipation Day (The Bahamas, Dominica, Grenada, St Kitts and Nevis, Montserrat)
- August 5: Victory Day (Croatia)
- August 9: National Day (Singapore)
- August 10: Independence Day (Ecuador)
- August 12-18: Tour de France Femmes (France)
- August 13: Defence Forces Day (Zimbabwe)
- August 15: Independence Day (India)
- August 15: Assumption of Mary (Global)
- August 17: Independence Day/Inauguration of New Capital (Indonesia)
- August 19-22: Democratic Party National Convention (Chicago, IL)
- August 26-September 8: U.S. Open Tennis Tournament (New York City, NY)
- August 26: Janmashtami (India)
- August 31: Independence Day (Malaysia)