



September 30, 2024

Headlining This Week's Brief

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Top Stories

Death Toll Expected to Rise Following Helene, Hundreds Still Missing, Appalachians Hardest Hit

[Over 117 fatalities](#) have been reported, and casualty numbers are likely to rise throughout the week as rescuers struggle to make their way into hard-to-reach and heavily damaged communities within the southern Appalachians. As of this morning, fatalities have been confirmed in North Carolina (46), South Carolina (27), Georgia (25), Florida (13), Tennessee (4), and Virginia (2). Of the 13 deaths in Florida, nine occurred in [Pinellas County](#), with all victims found in flooded homes located in mandatory evacuation (storm surge) zones. Across the interior Southeast U.S., where most casualties have occurred, rainfall, flooding, and downed trees are the primary causes of death.

Over 600 people are still unaccounted for in Buncombe County, the county seat of Asheville, North Carolina. Over two million customers within the eastern United States are still affected by power outages, with the majority located across the Carolinas and Georgia. Nearly 100,000 residents in Asheville may be [without running water](#) for several weeks. Hundreds of roads in western North Carolina, including I-26 and I-40, are [closed indefinitely](#). Authorities advise motorists not to travel to western North Carolina. For a more in-depth examination of Helene's aftermath, review our [situation report](#).

Israel Kills Hezbollah Chief as Ground Incursion Into Lebanon Appears "Imminent"

On Friday, September 27, Israel [killed](#) long-time Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah in an airstrike on the organization's headquarters in Dahiyeh, a southern suburb of Beirut. Nasrallah's death marks the most significant escalation in the fighting between Hezbollah and Israel since October 8, 2023, when the

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militant organization first began launching rockets across the border in solidarity with Hamas in Gaza. The strike also [killed](#) Ali Karaki, commander of Hezbollah's Southern Front, marking the further [eradication](#) of the group's high-level leadership. Meanwhile, Israel has continued to launch airstrikes throughout Lebanon, with most targeting the southern part of the country and the Bekaa Valley in the east. However, Beirut and its surroundings have also been hit. Hezbollah deputy chief Naim Qassem has [vowed](#) that the group will fight on and is prepared for an Israeli ground incursion that U.S. officials have said appears to be ["imminent."](#)

As the conflict intensifies in Lebanon, there are concerns that the situation will escalate further, involving more direct confrontation with Iran and its other proxies throughout the Middle East. The Pentagon has said that it is planning to deploy a "few thousand" troops to the Middle East to [bolster](#) security and [defend](#) Israel from a possible attack from Iran, if necessary. Iran's foreign ministry has [vowed](#) that Israel's "criminal act" will not go unanswered. At the same time, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu [warned](#), in a video message directed to the Iranian people, that there was nowhere in the Middle East that they could not reach. More on the conflict between Israel and Lebanon is available in our [situation report](#).

Potential Strike by U.S. East and Gulf Coast Dockworkers to Disrupt Supply Chains

The International Longshoreman's Association (ILA), representing around 45,000 workers at every major U.S. port between Texas and Maine, is [threatening](#) to strike after their contract expires at midnight tonight if no agreement is reached with the United States Maritime Alliance (USMX). The impacts of such a walkout would be widespread across industries, with those that rely on just-in-time shipping, like automotive and perishables, likely to be most affected.

The eastern and Gulf Coast ports [handle](#) around 43% of all U.S. imports and include [six of the 10](#) busiest ports in the country, managing cargo from Europe, Latin America, and Asia. Freight rates could spike as backlogs increase, and some shippers have [implemented](#) additional fees and surcharges to offset the potential financial impact of a strike. A prolonged strike would also [impact](#) holiday shipments of consumer goods and disrupt industries that rely on imported raw materials.

Negotiations have reportedly reached a standstill in recent days; the ILA is seeking a near -80% increase in wages over six years and far more restrictive language around automation. Industry groups have [implored](#) the White House to invoke the Taft-Hartley Act to prevent a strike, but officials from the Biden administration have said they have no plans. For further information on potential impacts and the outlook for the strike, review our [situation report](#).

Climate and Natural Hazards

- **Atlantic Remains Active, Watching Western Caribbean Sea:** Across the North Atlantic, there are three active tropical systems and two areas that the [National Hurricane Center](#) is monitoring. Fortunately, [Tropical Depression Joyce](#), [Tropical Storm Kirk](#), and [Tropical Storm Isaac](#) are not a threat to land; however, there is a medium chance that a [well-organized disturbance](#) will form within the Northwest Caribbean Sea or southern Gulf of Mexico between October 2-4. Forecast guidance has backed away from more aggressive development scenarios over the last two days, but this area will remain a point of monitoring emphasis over the next week.
- **Catastrophic Flooding and Landslides Kill Over 200 in Nepal:** Significant rainfall dating back to Friday has led to extreme flooding and landslides across central and eastern portions of Nepal, including Kathmandu. As of the latest [update](#), 209 people have been killed, 142 have been injured, and 29 remain missing. Dozens of highways have been affected, and numerous roads and bridges have been left impassable. Over [30 schools](#) have also been damaged.
- **Typhoon Krathon Rapidly Intensifies, Extreme Impacts Likely for Taiwan:** As of Monday, [Typhoon Krathon](#) (known as 'Julian' in the Philippines) has strengthened into the equivalent strength of a Category 4 hurricane between the northern Philippines and Taiwan. The Batanes Islands took a direct hit Monday morning, local time, with damaging winds expected through the evening. Krathon is expected to [turn northeastward](#) and likely make a direct landfall over southern Taiwan Wednesday. In addition to severe winds, widespread rainfall totals between 20-30 inches are forecast.
- **Rising Flood Danger in South-Central Europe:** Tuesday night through Friday, a large storm system will generate widespread excessive rainfall across far Southeast France, Switzerland, Austria, Italy, Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, and northern Albania. Localized multi-day rain totals greater than 125-150mm (five to six inches) are possible, particularly across northern and central Italy and the Balkan Peninsula. This area is already saturated from heavy rainfall earlier this month. Scattered flash flooding and landslides, some significant and life-threatening, are probable through mid to late week.

Worldwide

- **Austrian Election Results Prompt Demonstration Activity in Vienna:** Austria's Freedom Party (FPÖ), often [categorized](#) as far-right, won the highest percentage of votes in Sunday's parliamentary election, prompting a protest in Vienna that resulted in [police intervention](#) last night. No party won an outright majority, meaning coalition negotiations will be necessary to

form a working government; however, several parties have made it clear they will not work with FPO, particularly if its party head, Herbert Kickl, pursues the top government role of Chancellor. Kickl **championed** a platform of **stricter immigration policies** and reduced support for Ukraine. Political groups opposed to the FPO are **calling** for another demonstration in Vienna this Thursday evening.

- **Mexico's Senate Approves Placing National Guard Under Military, Protests Continue** : Last Wednesday, Mexico's Senate **approved** placing the National Guard under military command, marking a second major win for outgoing President Andrés Manuel López Obrador and fellow party member and President-elect Claudia Sheinbaum. The move has drawn concerns from social, civic, and human rights organizations over the possible "militarization" of the country. The passage comes just two weeks after the government **approved** a controversial judicial reform, which sparked protests across the country. Demonstrations against the reforms are expected to continue, and activists are planning to hold a day of action tomorrow, coinciding with Sheinbaum's inauguration.
- **China Launches Rare ICBM Test Amid Regional Tensions**: China **test-fired** an intercontinental ballistic missile into the Pacific Ocean as part of routine military training, marking the first such test in over 40 years. The launch comes amid rising tensions with the U.S. and other regional powers. Japan **sent** its first Maritime Self-Defense Force warship through the Taiwan Strait, prompting a stern warning from China, which views the area as sensitive due to its territorial claims over Taiwan. In another patch of disputed waters, the U.S. and the Philippines have **agreed** to keep the U.S. Typhon missile system in northern Philippines indefinitely, despite China's objections, as part of strengthening their defense cooperation. Philippine Defense Secretary Gilberto Teodoro rejected China's concerns as interference, asserting the need for the missile system to bolster the country's defensive capabilities amidst tensions in the South China Sea.
- **Ukrainian Leader Presents "Victory Plan" at UNGA as War With Russia Grinds On**: While attending the U.N. General Assembly, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy **presented** a "victory plan" to Western officials in an effort to convince them to provide additional support in Ukraine's war against Russia. Meanwhile, on the front, the conflict continues to take a **toll**, with over 70,000 Russian soldiers now confirmed dead. Moscow has also **intensified** aerial strikes, particularly on Kyiv and critical infrastructure, exacerbating Ukraine's energy crisis ahead of winter. As Ukraine seeks permission to use more long-range Western missiles, Russian President Vladimir Putin **proposed** changes to Russia's nuclear doctrine, outlining conditions under which the country would use nuclear weapons. He warned that any aggression by a non-nuclear state, supported by a nuclear-armed nation, would be treated as a joint attack on Russia.
- **Sudan's Army Launches Attack on Khartoum**: Fighting broke out in Sudan's capital in the now 17- month-long conflict between Sudan's army and a paramilitary group known as the Rapid Support Forces (RSF). Casualties were reported by the health ministry when the army launched

artillery and air strikes. This marks the largest operation to regain ground in the capital since the army lost control of most of it at the start of the conflict. The RSF has made advances in other parts of Sudan. For months, the worst fighting has been in the city of al Fashir in North Darfur. The U.N. says 25 million people are in need of aid as famine looms.

Cyber and Regulatory

- **Microsoft Identifies Group Deploying Ransomware in Hybrid Cloud Environments:** Microsoft's threat intelligence team has [warned](#) of a financially motivated threat actor known as Storm-0501 that conducts ransomware operations across multiple sectors. Utilizing weak credentials and over-privileged accounts, the threat actor moves from an organization's on-premises to cloud infrastructure before deploying a ransomware payload like Embargo. The group began operations in 2021, deploying ransomware against schools in the U.S. Storm-0501 now operates as a ransomware-as-a-service (RaaS) affiliate, using commodity and open-source tools to target hybrid cloud environments across numerous government and commercial sectors in the U.S.
- **Cyber Espionage Campaign Targeting U.S. ISPs:** Investigators have identified a threat actor named Salt Typhoon, responsible for numerous internet-service provider (ISP) intrusions in the United States. Researchers [believe](#) Salt Typhoon is linked to APT40, a group affiliated with China's Ministry of State Security, based on the "targeting activity and the nature of the operation." This campaign focused on intelligence collection, while other intrusions publicly identified this year, Flax Typhoon and Volt Typhoon, provided entry points into U.S. networks and prepared for infrastructure-crippling cyberattacks, respectively. Officials fear there are numerous other intrusion campaigns that have not been identified due to the sophistication shown in the discovered operations. Researchers are working to identify if Cisco Systems routers were accessed during the campaign, though the company states they were not.
- **California Governor Blocks AI Safety Bill:** California Governor Gavin Newsom [vetoed a landmark artificial intelligence safety bill](#), saying that the bill could stifle innovation and prompt AI developers to move out of the state. The bill would have required developers to ensure their technology included a "kill switch" to allow organizations to isolate and switch off an AI system if it became a threat. It would have also made official oversight compulsory. California's role as a hub for many of the world's largest tech firms means that any bill regulating the sector would have major impacts on the industry. OpenAI, Google, and Meta voiced opposition to the bill and warned it would hinder development.
- **Telegram to Provide User Data to Law Enforcement Upon Request:** Following the [arrest](#) of Telegram's CEO Pavel Durov, the messaging platform [agreed](#) to divulge user information to authorities when solicited and when accompanied by warrants or valid legal requests. Durov, who was arrested in France over charges of "enabling criminal activity on the platform," said the

policy change was to “discourage criminals” and curb illicit activity on the application. Telegram also reportedly [changed](#) its search feature to remove “problematic content” from search results. The company’s privacy policy has already been seen as weak by cybersecurity experts, and law enforcement has speculated that policy expansion is insufficient.

Infrastructure and Supply Chain

- **China Seeks to Bolster Economic Growth With New Stimulus:** Last week, China announced a [significant stimulus package](#) that included interest rate cuts and measures to reduce the cost of mortgages. The move is meant to boost the nation’s [flagging economy](#); however, some analysts [suggest](#) the new measures miss the mark, as they don’t substantially address problems with consumer demand. Earlier this month, multiple banks [reduced](#) their annual growth forecasts for China, citing trouble in the nation’s [real estate market](#). “tepid consumer confidence,” and [slowing](#) manufacturing growth.
- **U.S. Egg Prices Rising Again as Bird Flu Spread Continues:** Egg prices are on the rise again in the U.S., jumping 28% in August compared to the same month last year, according to the [latest update](#) from the Bureau of Labor Statistics. The increase comes as bird flu continues to impact farms in the country. Prices are not where they were in late 2022; however, they’re still around [twice](#) what they were before the pandemic. Over 100 million birds have been [affected](#) by avian influenza in the U.S. since 2022. Dairy herds also remain impacted, with California seeing [notable outbreaks](#) recently.
- **U.S. Port Strike to Arrive Amid Existing Cross-Border Rail Disruptions:** The looming port strike in the U.S. is set to add to existing freight transit challenges for the country, which is already facing grain transportation problems with its neighbor to the south. Last week, [reports](#) noted that Union Pacific and BNSF Railway had “stopped issuing permits for grain shuttle trains to Mexico because of congestion and a growing backlog of loaded trains.” Around [two-thirds](#) of U.S. grain exports to Mexico move by rail, and disruptions in transportation borne from capacity issues could [reportedly](#) threaten trade competitiveness during the fall harvest.
- **Mexico Seizes Land Containing Port Owned by U.S. Entity:** U.S. lawmakers are [calling for action](#) after Mexico’s government declared a portion of land that contains a deep-water port held by a U.S. entity, a naturally protected area, [halting](#) the firm’s ability to operate at the site. The move comes amid already heightened tensions between Washington and the outgoing administration of President Andrés Manuel López Obrador (AMLO), who has pushed through a series of controversial reforms referenced above in the Worldwide section. The area impacted by the nature preserve declaration [runs from](#) Playa del Carmen to Tulum.
- **Restoration of Key Austrian Rail Route to Take Months:** In [comments](#) made last week, Austrian officials indicated that the nation’s [busiest rail line](#) would take months to repair after being impacted by extreme weather. The Western Railway, or Westbahn, was hit by significant

flooding in recent weeks, with St. Pölten, a critical node for the transportation of goods within Austria and to and from Central and Eastern Europe, experiencing [double](#) the amount of rain in September than is usually experienced during the month. Only around 150 passenger and freight trains are traveling the route between Vienna and St. Pölten daily; the normal flow is approximately 550.

Health

- **Rwandan Officials Call for Enhanced Preventative Measures Amid Marburg Outbreak:** Health officials in Rwanda [confirmed](#) eight deaths from Marburg Virus Disease (MVD) on Sunday, with the majority of cases [reported](#) among healthcare workers. Marburg is a [highly infectious virus](#) that causes a severe hemorrhagic fever with a high mortality rate, [similar to Ebola](#). Marburg, though rare, typically infects humans via bats, and then human-to-human transmission spreads via direct contact. Marburg virus disease usually presents with a sudden fever, severe headache, muscle pain, vomiting, diarrhea, and bleeding, potentially leading to organ failure. In response to the outbreak, the U.S. Embassy in Kigali [suspended](#) in-person services through the end of this week.
- **India Reports First Imported Clade 1B Mpox Infection, Cases Continue to Rise in Africa:** India [confirmed](#) its first case of the deadlier clade 1b mpox strain last week in Kerala state. Health officials are now [testing another patient](#) to see if they also have the more severe variant. In its [latest situation report on mpox](#), the World Health Organization (WHO) found that all affected countries in Africa reported new cases in the last six weeks, bringing the total reported confirmed cases up to 6,603 since the start of the year. The Democratic Republic of the Congo reported 1,268 confirmed cases in the past six-week period, and Guinea reported its first mpox case in the past month. Last Tuesday, U.S. President Joe Biden [pledged](#) to donate one million mpox vaccine doses and at least \$500 million to help African countries respond to the mpox outbreak.
- **New York Declares EEE an “Imminent Threat” as Cases of Mosquito-Borne Illnesses Rise:** The Ulster County Department of Health in New York is [investigating](#) the second U.S. death from Eastern equine encephalitis (EEE) this year. In response, New York [issued](#) a Declaration of an Imminent Threat to Public Health over EEE, allowing for additional resources and agency coordination to prevent further cases. The death is the first reported fatal case of EEE in New York since 2015 and comes as Maine’s CDC [issues a warning](#) over increased mosquito-borne illnesses across New England. EEE is a rare yet often fatal infection that leads to brain inflammation and is transmitted through the bite of an infected mosquito.
- **Los Angeles Reports Fourth Local Dengue Case, First Death From West Nile Virus:** Health officials in Los Angeles County [reported](#) that a resident of the San Fernando Valley died from West Nile Virus last week. West Nile Virus disease is caused by the bites of infected mosquitoes

and is Los Angeles County's most common mosquito-borne illness. Los Angeles County has also [recorded](#) one more case of locally acquired dengue, bringing the total infections for this year to four. Health officials stated this fourth case is unrelated to the previous cluster of three cases reported earlier in September.

- **U.S. Restarts Free COVID Test Orders, At-Home Flu Vaccines Gain FDA Approval:** The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) [approved](#) FluMist, a nasal spray flu vaccine, for at-home administration for individuals ages two to 49. Initially approved in 2003, FluMist is now the first flu vaccine that does not need a healthcare provider for administration and does not involve a needle, broadening access to influenza prevention. Though its approval comes as this year's flu season is beginning, the at-home administration option [will not be available](#) until next year. Meanwhile, the Biden administration has [revived](#) its program offering free rapid coronavirus tests by mail ahead of another expected winter surge in cases.

Demonstrations and Industrial Action

- **Widespread Demonstrations to Mark Hamas Attack, War in Gaza Anniversary:** October 7 is approaching, and gatherings are anticipated across the globe both to honor the victims of Hamas' attack on Israel and to call for an end to the war in Gaza. Actions in the latter camp are expected to be widespread and will likely result in disruptions in major Western urban centers. In North America, the Palestinian Youth Movement is organizing an "International Day of Action" on Saturday, with protests announced in New York City, Washington DC, Toronto, and elsewhere. At the same time, in the U.K., the Palestine Solidarity Campaign hopes to gather tens of thousands of people in central London. Actions will continue through the weekend, with protests in Melbourne, Sydney, Seoul, and elsewhere set for Sunday. Additional actions are planned in New York City on Monday, October 7, when Within Our Lifetime is instructing supporters to boycott work and school and gather at several points in Manhattan throughout the afternoon. Additionally, the National Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP) has called for students around the world to participate in a "week of rage" from October 7-11, beginning with a school walkout on Monday.
- **Argentina to See Nationwide Demonstrations by University Groups:** Disruptions are likely in cities across Argentina on Wednesday during nationwide demonstrations by university groups. Various university teaching unions, including the National Interuniversity Council (CIN), as well as university staff and students, are marching to demand salary increases and [improved working conditions](#). The main [march](#) is expected to take place near the Plaza del Congreso in Buenos Aires at 5 pm, with several others expected to take place throughout the country. Tens of thousands are expected to take part.
- **Nationwide Demonstrations Planned in Nigeria Over Bad Governance:** Several civil society groups are planning demonstrations across Nigeria beginning tomorrow. Activists are calling for

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rallies in cities throughout the country to protest economic hardship and poor governance. Calls to action shared online state that protests will continue "until we win" and instruct supporters to take part in daily gatherings. Notable locations include Abuja (Eagle Square at 7 am), Lagos (Ikeja Underbridge at 7:30 am), and Port Harcourt (Pleasure Park at 7 am). The demonstrations are being billed as a continuation of widespread protests that took place in early August and resulted in [extensive clashes](#) with police, the implementation of curfews in several areas, and over 20 deaths.

- **France to See Mass Demonstrations, Strikes Tomorrow:** The CGT, FSU, and Solidaires unions, which represent workers from a range of sectors including transportation, education, and public services, are calling for a strike against retirement reforms, France's [new government](#), and austerity measures. Railway workers with the CGT and SUD-Rail unions are [expected to strike](#) between this evening and Wednesday morning. The CGT union is calling on port workers to strike for four hours tomorrow, and disruptions to schools can be expected due to strikes by unionized teachers. The EDF power group [indicated](#) that some workers may strike beginning this evening. However, one of France's largest unions, the CFDT, has not called on its members to join. In addition to the strikes, over 170 demonstrations are planned, headlined by Paris (Place Denfert-Rochereau at 2 pm).
- **Junior Doctors in West Bengal, India Threaten to Cease Work:** The West Bengal Junior Doctors' Front (WBJDF), a coalition of groups representing physicians at government hospitals across West Bengal state, is threatening to completely withdraw their services after relatives of a patient [attacked](#) doctors and nurses at Sagore Dutta Hospital in North 24 Parganas district. WBJDF leaders said that they would make a final determination on whether to halt essential duties (they are already refusing to perform non-essential tasks) if the government did not present evidence that they had taken steps to improve hospital safety during a Supreme Court proceeding that took place earlier today. A rally is also [planned](#) for Wednesday from College Square to Esplanade in Kolkata. Doctors had initially gone on a 41-day strike following the rape and murder of a trainee physician in Kolkata.

Upcoming Events

- September 30: East Coast Dockworkers' Labor Contract Expires (United States)
- October 1-7: Golden Week Holiday (China)
- October 1: Pchum Ben (Cambodia)
- October 1: General Strike (France)
- October 1: Airport Security Staff Strike (Belgium)
- October 1: Vice Presidential Debate (New York City, NY)
- October 1: Defender of Ukraine Day (Ukraine)
- October 1: Mexico Presidential Inauguration (Mexico City, Mexico)
- October 6: Municipal Elections (Brazil)
- October 6: Presidential Election (Tunisia)
- October 6-11: ASEAN Summit (Laos)