



March 17, 2025

Headlining This Week's Brief

Top Stories

Climate and Natural Hazards
Worldwide
Cyber and Regulatory
Infrastructure and Supply Chain
Health
Demonstrations and Industrial Action
Upcoming Events

Top Stories

Severe Weather Outbreak Couples With Wildfire Claims Over 40 Lives Across U.S.

In Oklahoma, the State Emergency Operations Center remains active as [wildfires](#) continue to impact the state, with a State of Emergency declared for 12 counties. Over 400 homes have been damaged, and four fatalities have been confirmed, along with 142 injuries related to over [130 fires and high winds](#). One of the hardest-hit areas is [Stillwater](#), located in Payne County, where at least 74 homes were lost. Several shelters are open in affected areas, and relief organizations are providing meals to evacuees and responders. In Texas, there are currently 130 counties with burn bans in place. [Governor Greg Abbott](#) announced that FEMA has approved Fire Management Assistance Grants for the [Rest Area Fire](#) in Gray County and the [Crabapple Fire](#) in Gillespie County.

Nationwide, at least [40 people are dead](#), most due to a two-day tornado outbreak that slammed parts of the [Midwest](#) and [Southeast](#). A dynamic storm reports map can be viewed via [NOAA](#) and an [AlertMedia Situation Report](#) was continuously updated throughout the event, documenting over 100 active and archived alerts related to wildfire evacuations and notable tornado touchdowns.

Ukraine-Russia Ceasefire Negotiations Continue as Both Sides Trade Attacks

U.S. President Donald Trump and Russia's President Vladimir Putin are [expected to meet](#) tomorrow to discuss plans for a ceasefire in Ukraine. Putin has [set out](#) preconditions for ceasefire plans, including the surrender of Ukrainian troops in Russia's Kursk region, [prompting](#) criticism from Western countries who believe the Kremlin is delaying a deal. In addition to territorial concessions, Trump and Putin are

Weekly Intelligence Briefing

March 17, 2025



[expected](#) to discuss control of the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant. Ukraine agreed to pursue the U.S.-backed 30-day ceasefire plan last week, prompting the U.S. to [resume](#) intelligence sharing with the country. Meanwhile, European countries and allies of Ukraine will meet in the United Kingdom later this week to prepare peacekeeping plans should the ceasefire come into effect. Military officials from 34 countries met in Paris last week to [discuss](#) a possible international security force for Ukraine.

The ceasefire negotiations come as Ukraine and Russia [continue to trade](#) aerial attacks. Russian authorities [extinguished](#) a fire at the Tuapse oil refinery after Ukrainian drones struck it on Friday. In Ukraine over the weekend, several Russian drone strikes were [reported](#), with one sparking a high-rise building fire in the region of Chernihiv.

Global Measles Cases Continue to Climb

A recent report from the World Health Organization (WHO) found that in 2024, measles cases in Europe [doubled](#) over the previous year, reaching their highest level in 25 years. The report came as cases continue to climb in the United States, with the number of confirmed cases already [surpassing](#) 2024's total.

Western Texas and southeastern New Mexico remain the [epicenter](#), although a total of 15 states have reported cases, including a new cluster in [Oklahoma](#) linked to the Texas outbreak. Health officials are expecting case numbers to continue to grow rapidly, prompting the CDC to issue a [Health Alert Notice](#) ahead of the summer travel season. Thus far, [two deaths](#) have been reported, although one is still under investigation. The current death count has led health experts to conclude that the true number of cases is likely [much higher](#).

Cases are also climbing to both the north and south of the United States. In the Mexican state of Chihuahua, health officials have [discovered](#) at least 15 cases in a Mennonite community, likely connected to the outbreak in West Texas. In Canada, Ontario has seen its [largest number of cases](#) in over a decade, with at least 350 confirmed cases since late October 2024, while Quebec has [reported](#) 36 cases since December.

Climate and Natural Hazards

- **South-Central U.S. to Experience Renewed Fire Weather Conditions:** The [National Weather Service \(NWS\)](#) has highlighted critical fire weather conditions across much of the Central United States over the next few days. Widespread [red flag warnings](#) are in effect. Most significantly, [extremely critical fire weather conditions](#) are possible Tuesday afternoon across eastern New

Weekly Intelligence Briefing

March 17, 2025



Mexico and west Texas. Any wildfires that ignite during this period could spread rapidly and erratically, potentially leading to evacuations on short notice.

- **Blizzard Conditions Possible Across the Central U.S. Mid-Week:** Forecast confidence is increasing regarding a [significant winter storm](#) between Tuesday night and Wednesday. Current forecast data suggests that portions of Kansas, Nebraska, Iowa, southern Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Upper Michigan will be at risk for moderate to major winter storm impacts as four to eight inches of snow (locally 12+) and wind gusts over 40-50mph will be possible. High snowfall rates and strong winds could lead to blizzard conditions, making travel extremely difficult and dangerous at times. The Weather Prediction Center is already warning travelers to alter plans between Tuesday night and early Thursday.
- **Active Weather Pattern to Drive Flood Risk for Portugal, Spain:** [Storm Laurence](#) is expected to track east across Portugal and Spain through Tuesday, leading to periods of heavy rain. Another system will then reach the western Iberian Peninsula on Wednesday and will produce rounds of heavy rain and thunderstorms through the weekend. The highest totals and greatest risk for flash flooding lies over coastal Portugal and southwestern Spain, including Seville and Malaga.

Worldwide

- **Pakistan Experiences Wave of Militant Attacks:** On March 11, the Baloch Liberation Army (BLA) [hijacked](#) the Jaffar Express in a remote mountain passage in Balochistan, taking hundreds of hostages and blowing up train tracks. At least 64 people died during the ensuing rescue operation, including 33 insurgents and 23 Pakistani soldiers. Following the train attack, a [mosque bombing](#) by unidentified militants took place in northwestern Pakistan, and a roadside blast in Balochistan [killed](#) at least five military personnel. The attacks come as Pakistan [records](#) its fifth consecutive year of increasing terrorism-related deaths, driven primarily by militants in Balochistan and the Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan. The Institute for Economics and Peace ranked Pakistan second in its recent [2025 Global Terrorism Index](#).
- **Discovery of Mexico Mass Grave Sparks Protests:** Protesters gathered [across](#) Mexico on Saturday to demand justice following the discovery of an apparent mass killing [site](#) at a suspected cartel training ground in the western state of Jalisco. Families of the missing, including the "Guerreros Buscadores" collective, called it an "extermination center." Demonstrators held vigils nationwide, including in Mexico City, Tijuana, Veracruz, and San Luis Potosi. [Clashes](#) with police were reported in Zócalo in Mexico City. Meanwhile, Mexico's attorney general [pledged](#) to conduct a full investigation into the incident. The United Nations Human Rights Office [described](#) the finding as "deeply disturbing."

Weekly Intelligence Briefing

March 17, 2025



- **Duterte Arrested on ICC Charges Amid Rising Political Tensions in the Philippines:** Former Philippines President Rodrigo Duterte [appeared](#) before the International Criminal Court (ICC) at The Hague on Friday following his arrest earlier in the week. Duterte will face trial in late September for charges of crimes against humanity committed during his time as mayor of Davao City and as president. The arrest was [facilitated](#) by current President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. ahead of the country's midterm elections and at a time of heightened tensions between the Duterte and Marcos families. Current Vice President (and daughter of the former president) Sara Duterte was [impeached](#) in February over an alleged assassination plot. Peaceful demonstrations both for and against Duterte's arrest have been held across the Philippines, and the Philippines National Police are on heightened alert for any potential unrest.
- **Ecuador Gang Shootout Kills 22, State of Emergency Extended:** On March 6, at least 22 people were [killed](#) and three others injured following gun battles that broke out in a neighborhood in Guayaquil during infighting between rival factions of the "Los Tiguerones" gang. Recently, Ecuadorian President Daniel Noboa [extended](#) the state of emergency for an additional 30 days in seven provinces and two cantons. The extension follows [continued](#) internal unrest and high levels of violence. The affected provinces include Guayas, Los Ríos, Manabí, Orellana, Santa Elena, El Oro, and Sucumbíos, along with the Metropolitan District of Quito and the canton of Camilo Ponce Enriquez. It also comes ahead of a presidential runoff [election](#) on April 13.
- **U.S. Launches Strikes on Yemen After Houthis Vow to Resume Attacks on Shipping:** At least 53 people have been [killed](#) and around 100 wounded during a series of U.S. air strikes on [Houthi targets](#) in Yemen. U.S. Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth has said that the campaign is about "freedom of navigation and restoring deterrence" in the Red Sea region. The attacks came after the Houthis [warned](#) that they would resume attacks on "any Israeli vessel" traveling through the Red Sea, the Gulf of Aden, the Bab el- Mandeb Strait, and the Arabian Sea until Israel [allowed aid shipments](#) into Gaza. While it's unclear what the targets of the strikes were, the U.S. claims to have killed several "key leaders." The Houthis have [vowed](#) retaliation for the attacks.

Cyber and Regulatory

- **U.S. Agencies Warn Against Medusa Ransomware Group:** The FBI and CISA [issued](#) an advisory warning about the Medusa ransomware group, which has impacted more than 300 organizations across the medical, education, and technology industries. The group targets potential victims using phishing campaigns through email services, like Gmail and Outlook, and unpatched software vulnerabilities to encrypt user data. The group then [threatens](#) to publicly release the data if the ransom isn't paid. Medusa uses legitimate tools to avoid detection on infected devices and custom malicious software to disable security software. The advisory recommends the use of

Weekly Intelligence Briefing

March 17, 2025



multi-factor authentication, VPNs, and complex, unique passwords for users with access to critical systems.

- **Microsoft Releases Patches for Six Zero-Day Vulnerabilities:** Microsoft has [released](#) patches for six actively exploited zero-day vulnerabilities and over 50 other bugs across the company's suite of products. The vulnerabilities [allow](#) malicious actors to execute arbitrary code or read potentially sensitive information on Windows machines. While the number of patches released is similar to previous months, researchers are concerned about the number that are being exploited. This has led the U.S. Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) to [issue](#) a warning to users to update their systems by April 1 or "discontinue use of the product."
- **EU Plans to Increase Deportations Amid Changes to Last Year's Migration Pact:** The European Union is proposing new migration regulations to increase deportations and standardize deportation procedures across the bloc. Part of the proposal, which was announced last week, would establish "[return hubs](#)" in countries outside the EU, with critics [warning](#) that the plan comes with a heightened risk of rights violations. According to the European Commission, approximately 20% of people with deportation orders leave the EU. Inside the bloc, Austria's newly formed coalition government is [temporarily stopping](#) family reunions for migrants to reportedly prevent "further overloading" the country's services.
- **U.S. EPA Targets Environmental Rules Amid Deregulation Push:** The new EPA administrator plans to [roll back](#) 31 environmental rules, including the agency's 2009 finding that greenhouse gases endanger public health. The 2009 finding under the Clean Air Act is the "[legal underpinning](#)" of regulations on motor vehicle emissions and other pollution sources. The deregulatory action also [targets](#) air quality standards, pollution limits for coal plants, and mandatory emissions reporting by oil and gas companies.
- **U.S. Considering Travel Bans, Restrictions for Over 40 Countries:** A draft list of countries to be potentially [targeted](#) by travel restrictions is circulating inside the Trump administration. The draft list has 43 countries grouped into three tiers, with 11 countries facing full travel bans: Afghanistan, Bhutan, Cuba, Iran, Libya, North Korea, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, Venezuela, and Yemen. Reporting from [Reuters](#) in early March had flagged Afghanistan and Pakistan as targets for travel restrictions. The proposed travel bans would build on bans on travelers from seven Muslim-majority countries during Trump's first presidency and come ahead of this week's deadline for cabinet members to identify countries from which travel should be partly or fully suspended.

Infrastructure and Supply Chain

- **Canada, Europe Target U.S. With Retaliatory Tariffs:** After U.S. President Donald Trump imposed increased tariffs on aluminum and steel imports to the U.S., some of the U.S.' major allies and trading partners **levied** retaliatory tariffs on American goods. Canada **imposed** 25% tariffs on steel products as well as a variety of other goods, while the European Union (EU) slapped levies on key U.S. goods, including meat, bourbon, and jeans, among other items. The move has drawn **concern** from several industries, such as U.S. whiskey makers whose exports to Europe account for around \$699 million in sales. Late last week, Trump **floated** a 200% tariff on alcohol imports from Europe.
- **India Boosts Domestic Oil Exploration, Turning Away From Russian Sources:** Last week, India **passed** legislation aimed at boosting its domestic oil and gas exploration by providing policy stability, allowing international arbitration, and extending lease periods. The legislation may curb the nation's heavy reliance on imported crude oil, which accounted for nearly 90% of consumption from April to December 2024. Meanwhile, recent data shows that **China** and India—the **largest importers** of Russian oil—have begun **turning to** alternative sources from African and Latin American countries amid fears of potential Russian supply losses as a result of the U.S.' recently imposed strict **sanctions** on Russian oil.
- **Shippers Face Challenges Navigating Tariffs:** Recent shifts in the global tariffs landscape have created challenges for retailers and shippers as they attempt to navigate a shifting supply chain. Prior to a March 4 deadline for U.S. tariffs on Canada and Mexico, cross-border trucking companies **observed** a surge in freight volumes, causing a **spike** in cross-border trucking rates. Additionally, shipping companies have noted "longer delays at border crossings," among other complications. The difficulties have prompted some companies to attempt to circumvent the restrictions, including by "breaking down shipments into separate components to only pay duties on tariff-affected materials." Meanwhile, retail groups **anticipate** cargo volumes will "remain elevated" for the next few months, and experts are watching for the possibility of related measures, such as **additional levies** on Chinese-built vessels docking at U.S. ports.
- **Registrations for U.S. Meat Exporters to China Lapse:** On March 16, export registrations for over 1,000 U.S. meat plants, including facilities owned by Tyson Foods, Cargill Meat Solutions, and Smithfield Packaged Meats, **expired** under the U.S.-China 2020 trade deal, as listed on China's General Administration of Customs website. The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) stated that China did not respond to requests to renew the registrations, which could potentially be a violation of the "Phase 1" trade agreement between the two countries. The expiration of the registered meat facilities could restrict U.S. market access to China, and lead to trade losses of

about \$5 billion, adding to the challenge posed by the \$21 billion of retaliatory tariffs that China imposed on American agricultural products in March.

- **Nationwide Blackout in Panama Impacts Drinking Water Supplies:** On Saturday, an explosion at the Pan-Am thermoelectric plant in La Chorrera, near Panama City, caused a [nationwide blackout](#). The nation's drinking water supply was also suspended during the blackout, and traffic signals across the country were reportedly affected. Approximately two hours after the blackout, government officials reported that the supply was being gradually re-established, and by Sunday morning, almost 70% of the national electricity supply was recovered. The National Authority for Public Services has launched an investigation into the circumstances of the blackout, but the government of Panama has not yet announced any specific mitigation measures to prevent future blackouts to the county's power grid.

Health

- **RFK Jr. Tells U.S. Food Companies to Remove Artificial Dyes:** U.S. Health Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr has [urged](#) major food companies to remove artificial dyes from their products. In a [meeting](#) with top food executives, including representatives of PepsiCo, Kraft Heinz, and other major food manufacturers, Kennedy emphasized that eliminating artificial dyes is a top priority of the Trump administration and warned of regulatory action if companies fail to act. The FDA under Kennedy plans to collaborate with the industry to establish a federal framework on food dyes. In January, the FDA [banned](#) Red Dye No.3 in food and pharmaceuticals after two studies linked the additive to cancer in lab animals.
- **Kerala Raising Awareness of Nipah as Bangladesh Reports Three Deaths in 2025:** This year, Bangladesh has reported [three](#) Nipah virus fatalities among individuals under 40 in Pabna, Barisal, and Faridpur. Meanwhile, Kerala's Health Department is [actively](#) raising awareness in at least five high-risk districts ahead of bat breeding season, which spread the virus, although human-to-human transmission is also possible. With no available vaccine and a high fatality rate, the World Health Organization (WHO) advises avoiding contaminated fruit, limiting contact with infected individuals, and avoiding pigs and bats. Symptoms of the virus include fever, headaches, and encephalitis. Last year, Bangladesh [recorded](#) five cases with a 100% fatality rate.
- **Dengue Cases Rising in Philippines, Tonga:** The Philippines reported a 73% [increase](#) in dengue cases during the first two months of 2025. According to the Department of Health (DOH), cases [increased](#) to 62,313; however, the fatality rate decreased to 0.35% from 0.42% in 2024. The DOH also reported that dengue cases may [rise](#) nationwide during the rainy season. In Tonga, the Ministry of Health [reports](#) 215 dengue fever cases, with 12 hospitalizations and no deaths. Vava'u accounts for 113 cases, Tongatapu 71, and 'Eua 31. The ministry reports there is an ongoing

Weekly Intelligence Briefing

March 17, 2025



investigation and vector control efforts in hotspots and high-risk areas, as well as cleanup operations in Vava'u.

- **Report Shows Global Air Quality Worsening:** IQAir's 2024 World Air Quality Report [reveals](#) worsening global air pollution, with just 17% of cities meeting WHO's air quality standards. Chad, Bangladesh, Pakistan, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and India ranked as the most polluted countries, while nearly all of the 20 most polluted cities were in Central and South Asia. In related news, the United States has stopped [sharing](#) air quality data collected from its embassies and consulates worldwide due to reported funding constraints. The decision has raised concerns among scientists and environmental experts, who view the data as crucial for monitoring global air quality.
- **Conflict in DRC Hampers Efforts Against Mpox as New Cases Reported in Tanzania, Brazil:** The Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) is facing significant challenges in its efforts to combat its mpox outbreak amid [ongoing](#) conflict between the M23 rebel group and Congolese troops in the east. More than 600 mpox patients have fled following attacks on hospitals. Medical supplies, including vaccines and medications, are also in [short supply](#). Elsewhere in Africa, Tanzania [issued](#) a travel advisory and will implement health screenings at border crossings following the confirmation of its first two mpox cases. And in the Americas, Brazil recently reported its first case of the more contagious [clade 1b variant](#).

Demonstrations and Industrial Action

- **European Demonstrations to Mark International Day Against Racism:** Disruptions are likely in certain urban areas across Europe this weekend during demonstrations marking the United Nations' [International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination](#). Dozens of demonstrations are planned across France on Saturday, March 22, including in major cities like Paris (Place de la République at 2 pm), Marseille (Porte d'Aix at 2 pm), and Lyon (Place Bellecour at 2:30 pm). Elsewhere, gatherings are planned in Amsterdam (Dam Square at 2 pm) and Thessaloniki (Statue of Venizelos at 12 pm) on Saturday and in Brussels (PI Albertine at 1 pm) on Sunday. The groups Stand Up to Racism and the Trades Union Congress have called for regional and local demonstrations across the United Kingdom.
- **Berlin to See Transportation Disruptions as Public Sector Labor Dispute Continues:** Transportation disruptions are likely across Berlin on Wednesday and Thursday, March 19 and 20, due to a warning strike by workers of the Verdi Union at Berlin's public transport company (BVG). The strike is likely to have a [substantial impact](#) on buses, trams, and underground trains. This is the fourth industrial action held during this round of collective bargaining with BVG. The Verdi union has said that if an agreement is not reached during the next round of negotiations

Weekly Intelligence Briefing

March 17, 2025



on March 21, they will [call](#) for an indefinite strike. Verdi and government employers have reportedly [made progress](#) during the latest round of negotiations but have still not reached an agreement.

- **CGT Announces Date for Next General Strike in Argentina:** The General Confederation of Labor (CGT), Argentina's largest trade union federation, announced that it would launch a [general strike](#) on April 8 to protest the policies of President Javier Milei. CGT's strike call [follows](#) a protest march by retirees that resulted in violent clashes with police. The State Workers' Association (ATE) issued its own [strike call](#) for this Wednesday, beginning at 12 pm, when they will join another march by retirees to the National Congress. In addition, the CGT said that they would take part in an opposition march alongside several other groups on March 24, a national holiday held to remember the coup of 1976.
- **Petro Calls for Demonstrations Across Colombia on Tuesday:** Colombian President Gustavo Petro has [declared](#) Tuesday to be a Civic Day as he looks to build popular support for labor and health reforms. As part of the initiative, he is [calling](#) for marches and demonstrations across the country to show the popular support for his initiatives. [Several mayors](#) have said that they do not intend to shut down city operations to observe the Civic Day, but they will also not impede any groups that want to demonstrate. The main demonstration will take place in Bogota at the Parque Nacional and Plaza de Bolivar beginning at 9 am. A full list of locations is available from [regional media](#).
- **National Strike Called in Panama to Protest Social Security Reforms:** Labor groups have said that they plan to march from Parque Porras to the National Assembly on Tuesday beginning at 4 pm as part of an ongoing campaign against a recently passed [social security](#) reform bill. In addition to tomorrow's march, the Pueblo Unido alliance, which includes construction union SUNTRACS and numerous other civil society groups, has [announced](#) a national warning strike for this Friday. Teachers' unions have also [joined](#) the call.

Upcoming Events

- February 28-March 29: Ramadan (Global) *dates approximate and vary by location*
- March 21: International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (Global)
- March 21: General Elections (Curaçao)
- March 26: Independence Day (Bangladesh)
- March 28: Parliamentary Elections (Tajikistan)
- March 29: Day of the Young Combatant (Chile)
- March 29-April 1: Eid al-Fitr (Global) *dates approximate and vary by location*
- March 30: Land Day (Israel, the West Bank, and Gaza)

Weekly Intelligence Briefing

March 17, 2025



- April 2: U.S. to Impose “Reciprocal” Tariffs (Global)
- April 6: Ram Navami (India)
- April 9: Constitution Day (Kosovo)
- April 12: Presidential Election (Gabon)
- April 12-April 20: Passover (Global)
- April 13: Presidential Election Run-Off (Ecuador)
- April 17: Maundy Thursday (Global)
- April 18: Good Friday (Global)
- April 20: Easter (Global)
- May 1: Labor Day/May Day (Global)
- May 4: Presidential Election (Romania)