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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

Israel Resumes Military Operations in Gaza, Launches Airstrikes on Lebanon

The fragile ceasefire between Israel and Hamas came to an end last Tuesday, when Israel **began** a series of air strikes on Gaza and restarted ground operations, killing hundreds of Palestinians. The attacks came after weeks of negotiations following the end of phase 1 of the ceasefire deal stalled, with Israel and the U.S. **proposing** that the current pause in fighting be extended in exchange for the release of more hostages, but without formally moving to phase 2 of the ceasefire deal and a more permanent end to the war. As the bombings have continued, the death toll in Gaza has now **exceeded** 50,000, including a senior Hamas **political official.** In addition to further conflict in Gaza, Israel has also **conducted** airstrikes on Lebanon in response to rockets that Israel claims Hezbollah launched at its territory. Elsewhere in the Middle East, the Houthi militant group in Yemen has **launched** multiple missiles at Israel despite being under **heavy bombardment** from U.S. forces. The resurgence in fighting and large-scale demonstration activity in Israel prompted the U.S. Embassy to issue a **security alert,** reminding constituents of the need for "caution and increased personal security awareness."

Türkiye Sees Nationwide Demonstrations Following Arrest of Opposition Leader

Türkiye is witnessing its largest protest movement since 2013's **Gezi Park protests.** Mass demonstrations have taken place in at least 55 of Türkiye's 81 provinces—including the cities of Istanbul, Izmir, and Ankara—following the arrest and imprisonment of Istanbul Mayor Ekrem İmamoğlu on **corruption charges.** Police have **detained** more than 1,100 people since the protests first began on Wednesday as supporters of İmamoğlu defied **bans** **on** **demonstration** **activity** to voice their

disapproval. While most gatherings have been peaceful, there have been **reports** of clashes between police and demonstrators and the use of tear gas, water cannons, and rubber bullets. In addition, Türkiye imposed restrictions on social media and messaging, according to **independent internet monitors**, and X (formerly Twitter) has reportedly **suspended** the accounts of several opposition activists. Istanbul's governor also **said** that those suspected of traveling to a rally would not be allowed to enter or exit the city.

İmamoğlu was widely viewed as the only opposition politician capable of defeating current President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan at the ballot box, leading many to claim his arrest was politically motivated. Despite his arrest on Sunday, the Republican People's Party (CHP) formally nominated İmamoğlu as their presidential candidate. The party has said that they intend to continue demonstrating until İmamoğlu is released from prison.

Multiple Activist Groups Planning Campaigns Expected to Impact Central London in March, April

Several activist groups are planning a series of actions in London from late March through April. Just Stop Oil, Youth Demand, Extinction Rebellion and others focused on the environment, migrant rights, and the ongoing war in the Middle East have indicated that they are planning campaigns that will affect roadways in central London and target organizations in the private sector. Some of the groups planning actions have been involved in vandalism and property damage in the past. The upcoming campaigns are noteworthy not only for the concentrated time frame in which they are set to occur, but also for the level of apparent coordination between activist groups that to date have tended to act independently.

For additional details, review AlertMedia's Situation Report on **upcoming demonstration activity in London.**

Increased Wildfire Activity Disrupting Parts of the Southeast U.S., Chile, South Korea, and Japan

Wildfires in the United States are prompting focused emergency responses across several regions. In North and South Carolina, multiple active fires have impacted numerous areas, with the Table Rock Fire in the Blue Ridge Mountains expanding to over 1,300 acres in recent days. Amid **abnormally dry to moderate-level drought conditions**, the Carolinas' uptick in wildfire activity is likely driven by increased dry fuel, including downed debris from last fall's Hurricane Helene. In South Carolina, officials declared a **state of emergency** and enacted a statewide burn ban to support efforts to battle the Table Rock Fire in

Pickens County. Meanwhile, in North Carolina, **multiple fires in Polk County** have been burning since late last week, prompting significant response efforts and localized evacuations. Further north, crews in New Jersey spent the weekend battling several wildfires in the Wharton State Forest, with much of the activity **considered 100% contained** as of Monday morning.

Wildfire activity also continues to affect Chile, South Korea, and Japan. In **central Chile**, at least 19 wildfires are affecting the Biobío-Ñuble and La Araucanía regions, displacing about 2,050 people and impacting over 36,000 residents as forecasts call for moderate to very high fire danger. In South Korea—where wildfires commonly occur in the spring due to typically dry conditions—counties such as Sancheong, Euiseong, and Ulju have seen nearly 8,500 hectares burned since March 21, resulting in **four fatalities** and approximately 2,750 evacuations. In southern Japan, fires that began over the weekend have led to injuries and displacements in mutliple areas, including Imabari City, Kumamoto, and Okayama, with evacuations affecting at least 1,500 residents in the aforementioned areas.

Climate and Natural Hazards

- **World Meteorological Organization Releases New Climate Report:** According to a report from the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) released last week, 2024 was likely the first calendar year to be more than 1.5°C above the pre-industrial era, making it the warmest year in the 175-year observational record. The report also showed that each of the past 10 years was individually the 10 warmest years on record, and that each of the past eight years has set a new record for ocean heat content. While long-term warming remains below 1.5°C, the authors warn that leaders must take action immediately to limit long-term global temperature rise as the current sea-level rise and ocean warming are irreversible for hundreds of years.
- **Fewer Balloon Launches from NWS Amid Job Cuts:** Due to hundreds of job cuts at the National Weather Service (NWS), eight northern offices are reducing or even eliminating weather balloon launches. Weather balloons are normally launched twice a day by each NWS office in order to measure temperature, dew point, humidity, pressure, wind speed, and wind direction through the atmosphere. Before high-end weather events, offices launch even more balloons to better sample the atmosphere. The collected data is then analyzed and ingested into weather models to make accurate forecasts. Meteorologists and former agency leaders across the board are warning that this will severely degrade weather forecasting in the U.S. and will lead to less accurate forecasts. The cuts come as severe weather season in the country typically peaks in the months of March, April, and May.
- **Interior Queensland Australia at Risk for Major Flooding This Week:** An area of low pressure embedded within the monsoon trough is expected to produce rounds of extreme rainfall as it

moves from northwest to southeast across interior Queensland. Rainfall totals could reach up to 350-450mm (14- 18in) through Friday. Areas of severe flooding, some potentially life-threatening, is expected. Rural communities may become cut off as major roadways could become impassable.

- **Large Storm to Produce Life-Threatening Flooding in Central Asia:** A major winter storm will strengthen over Central Asia and deliver heavy rain and mountain snow through Thursday. Widespread rainfall totals are expected to range between two to four inches, though localized totals could surpass six inches; over three to four feet of snow will be possible across mountainous areas. Northern Afghanistan, northern Pakistan, far southeastern Uzbekistan, and western and central Tajikistan may be most at risk for life-threatening impacts
- **Other Severe Weather Events:** For a daily look at significant weather events around the world, read AlertMedia's **Daily Severe Weather Report**.

Worldwide

- **Peru Declares State of Emergency Amid Crime Waves, Strikes Looming:** On March 17, Peruvian President Dina Boluarte **declared** a 30-day state of emergency in Lima and Callo, deploying soldiers to address increasing violent crime, including extortion and homicides. The move followed the murder of Paul Flores, a popular singer, who was shot when assailants targeted his tour bus after a concert in Lima. His death fueled public anger over high rates of extortion and violent crime. The state of emergency allows officials to curb rights around assembly and movement and permits police and soldiers to detain civilians without judicial order. Meanwhile, the National Association of Transport Integration (Anitra) Union is **planning** a "march for life" in early April as they push for further action by authorities, followed by a possible strike in Lima and Callao.
- **Ukraine-Russia Ceasefire Negotiations Continue in Saudi Arabia:** U.S. officials **continue** to meet with representatives from Russia and Ukraine regarding a proposed ceasefire. The ongoing negotiations are expected to cover Russia's claim to regions in eastern Ukraine, as well as the addition of a ceasefire in the Black Sea to ensure the safety of commercial shipping. Following **separate** discussions, the U.K. and France indicated their willingness to provide troops to support a ceasefire, and several other countries have stated that they could support operations as well. Despite negotiations, Russian drone strikes **killed** at least seven people and injured dozens across Ukraine, including in Kyiv, over the weekend. Meanwhile, Russian authorities state at least two people were killed following Ukrainian drone strikes.

- **South Korea's Constitutional Court Reinstates Impeached Prime Minister:** As South Korea waits to see whether President Yoon Suk Yeol will be officially removed from office, the Constitutional Court **reinstated** Prime Minister Han Duck Soo, who was also impeached by the National Assembly. The Assembly had **accused** Han of collaborating with Yoon when he briefly declared martial law and of refusing to appoint three judges to the Constitutional Court. The ruling took effect immediately, allowing Han to resume his role as acting president while the country awaits the outcome of Yoon's case. The court still has not said when it plans to give its verdict on Yoon, and today's ruling appears to offer few clues as to which way the justices are leaning.
- **European Countries Issue Travel Advisories for U.S. Over Increasingly Strict Border Policies:** Several European countries have issued travel advisories alerting citizens traveling to the United States of stricter immigration enforcement under the Trump administration. The United Kingdom and Germany have **emphasized** that holding a valid visa or ESTA does not guarantee entry into the U.S. and travelers are warned of the possibility of arrest, detainment, or the denial of entry at U.S. borders, with border officials having the final say on entry. Denmark and Finland have also **issued** warnings to transgender and nonbinary travelers, saying that travelers with non-binary gender markers may be denied entry due to U.S. policies that only recognize male or female gender designations.
- **Other Stories the Global Intelligence Team Is Monitoring:** Tensions are once again rising in Ethiopia's Tigray region after a **dissident faction** within the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) took control of Adigrat and key offices in Tigray's capital, Mekelle. The incidents have sparked concerns of renewed fighting in the region, which is still recovering from a civil war that ended in 2022. It also comes as Ethiopia **appears** set on regaining access to the Eritrean port of Assab, potentially risking war. Elsewhere in Africa, the Sudanese army has **retaken** the Presidential Palace and central bank in Khartoum, marking a possible turning point in that country's civil war. Across the Atlantic, gangs in Haiti have intensified their attacks, leading some of those coordinating humanitarian efforts to warn that the capital, Port-au- Prince, faced possible **collapse**.

Cyber and Regulatory

- **U.S. to Require Reporting of Small Cash Transactions Along Mexico Border:** The U.S. Treasury Department has **announced** new regulations targeting small cash transactions near the Mexican border as part of what it says is an effort to combat money laundering by drug cartels. Money service businesses in 30 ZIP codes across California and Texas must now report cash

transactions over $200, down from the previous $10,000 threshold. In addition to reporting, more stringent identification requirements are being put in place as well. A **report** from the Center for Strategic and International Studies notes that Mexico is the world's second-largest recipient of remittances, which will be impacted by the new regulations. The **rule** will go into effect on April 14.

- **U.S. Categorizes South Korea as "Sensitive Country":** The U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) has **classified** South Korea as a "sensitive country," a move that restricts cooperation in advanced technology areas like nuclear power and artificial intelligence. The decision was **reportedly** in response to South Korea's mishandling of sensitive information in its laboratories. Effective April 15, this decision marks the first time South Korea has received this classification, which places it on par with countries like China, Iran, Russia, and North Korea. The designation will limit collaboration with the U.S. in critical fields, potentially hindering South Korean research efforts in critical scientific fields like AI and quantum computers.
- **AI-Assisted Cyber Attacks and ChatGPT Vulnerability Highlight Security Risks From AI Use:** Two security companies, Symantec and Cato Networks, **documented** AI-assisted attacks to show how they can use AI to develop a malicious phishing expedition and malware. In Cato Networks' research, a user created a fictitious narrative that bypassed what normally would be prohibited activity and used that to apply malware and steal credentials from Google Chrome's Password Manager. In other AI cybersecurity news, malicious cyber actors have **exploited** a ChatGPT flaw to redirect users to malicious URLs. DarkReading **reported** that a single malicious IP address made more than 10,000 attempts using the ChatGPT flaw in one week.
- **CISA Warns of Exploited Vulnerabilities from Fortinet, GitHub Action Attack:** A GitHub action that helps users track all changed files was the target of an attack this March and resulted in the exposure of more than 23,000 repositories. A cyber attacker was able to access and leak companies' private information, including credentials, via public build logs. Security experts warn the incident could be exploited in further supply chain attacks. The GitHub vulnerability is one of two that the U.S. Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) recently **added** to its Known Exploited Vulnerabilities catalog. The second vulnerability is related to ransomware activity exploiting a Fortinet authentication bypass flaw to target the cybersecurity company's users.
- **SEC Expected to Drop Case Against XRP, Launches Crypto Task Force:** The CEO of Ripple said the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) is **withdrawing** its case over the company's cryptocurrency asset XRP. Ripple's CEO **called** the decision a "resounding victory" for both the company and the cryptocurrency industry, and the move aligns with a pattern of the SEC **retreating** from cases against crypto companies in recent months. The SEC's new crypto task

force **discussed** how securities laws might apply to digital assets at its first public meeting last week, signifying a new approach to crypto legislation.

Infrastructure and Supply Chain

- **Countries Prepare for Further U.S. Tariffs**: Countries are **bracing** for another round of **tariffs** by the U.S. expected to be announced on April 2, the details of which remain unclear. The tariffs, which follow a **series** of other levies threatened or imposed by the Trump administration, are intended to balance out the duties placed on U.S. goods by other countries. In a related development, the European Union will **delay** its retaliatory tariffs on certain U.S. goods until April 13. The measures are meant to counter the U.S.' 25% tariff on steel and aluminum imports, and will include key export items like certain alcohol, soybeans, and beef, which amount to an estimated value of $28 billion. Meanwhile, the EU **announced** it will reduce steel import quotas by an additional 15% starting April 1 in hopes of curbing a potential flood of cheap steel following Trump's metal tariffs.
- **UPS Hikes Fuel Surcharge, Fees on Chinese Shipments**: The United Postal Service (UPS) **recently increased** its calculation rates on its weekly fuel surcharges and updated certain fee structures, potentially resulting in higher shipping costs. Effective March 24, UPS will roll out **revisions** to its shipping zones and newly applied **fuel surcharges** to its weekly scheduled pickup fees. Additionally, UPS increased its processing fees, including on things like printed invoice copies, check and wire transfers, and late fees. UPS also **implemented** a temporary "surge fee" on all shipments from China, Hong Kong, and Macau destined for the U.S., looking to meet Asia's increasing export demands.
- **H-1B Visa Program Undergoes Changes**: Last week, the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) and Department of Homeland Security (DHS) **introduced** new changes to the **H-1B visa program**, which allows employers to temporarily hire foreign workers in specialty positions. The changes took effect on **March 20**. Under the changes, records older than five years, including applications from the Foreign Labor Access Gateway (FLAG) system, will be deleted. Additionally, DHS also **made changes** to its lottery system, allowing each H-1B beneficiary to be selected only once, regardless of the number of registrations submitted on their behalf. The registration fee for applicants will also be raised from $10 to $215.
- **Supply Chains Recovering Following Heathrow Airport Closure:** Airlines are **continuing** to work through disruptions caused by an extended closure of London Heathrow Airport (LHR) on Friday, March 21. The closure was **caused** by a fire in a substation in West London which knocked out power to the facility, leading to the cancellation of thousands of flights and a **disruption** in the flow of air freight from products like perishables and critical pharmaceuticals. Operations

resumed after 18 hours, though delays have lingered. British authorities have **ordered** an investigation into the incident and why a fire in a single substation was able to shutter such a vital piece of infrastructure.

- **Trump Signs Executive Order to Increase Domestic Production of Critical Minerals:** Last week, U.S. President Donald Trump **signed** an executive order to increase the U.S. production of critical minerals like uranium, copper, gold, and potash, a potassium-rich fertilizer, by invoking the Defense Production Act. The move aims to reduce the country's reliance on imports, particularly from China, and grants officials the authority to expedite domestic mineral production through leasing and development on federal lands. The Trump administration also **announced** plans to sell oil leases across a large portion of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (ANWR), reversing Biden administration environmental protections in the area, as part of a broader strategy to expand oil development in Alaska's National Petroleum Reserve.

Health

- **European Commission Proposes Critical Medicines Act**: The European Commission has proposed the Critical Medicines Act, aimed at strengthening the security of supply and availability of critical medicines in the European Union. This **initiative** is designed to address severe shortages of essential medicines, including antibiotics, insulin, and painkillers, particularly those that are difficult to source or depend on limited manufacturers. The act **prioritizes** "Buy European" procurement rules, which favor suppliers manufacturing critical medicine within the EU. The proposed budget of €83 million for 2026–2027 primarily covers coordination efforts rather than large-scale production shifts. Some critics argue that the plan falls short, with some advocating for expanded defense funding or state aid.
- **France Urges Meningitis Vaccination Amid High Number of Cases:** France's health authorities are **urging** meningitis vaccinations following a sharp increase in cases, with 95 reported in January and 89 in February, exceeding previous years' figures. Public Health France is recommending immunization for infants, adolescents, and young adults, particularly against serogroups B, A, C, W, and Y. Recent outbreaks have been reported at a university in Lyon and among a family and students in Rennes. Officials suggest the surge may be **linked** to a severe flu season, which heightens meningitis risk. The European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control **warns** that the infection progresses rapidly and carries an 8-15% fatality rate.
- **UnitedHealth Group's Optum Rx to Eliminate Up to 25% Prescription Drug Authorization Requirements:** Optum Rx, UnitedHealth Group's pharmacy benefit manager, will **remove** prior authorization requirements for about 80 drugs treating chronic conditions like cystic fibrosis and asthma, starting May 1. The change, eliminating up to 25% of reauthorizations, aims to ease

administrative burdens and improve patient access. Optum CEO Patrick Conway **called** the move "responsive to customers and the environment." Though separate from UnitedHealthcare, Optum's decision comes amid growing scrutiny of prior authorizations. UnitedHealthcare plans to cut 10% of prior authorization requirements this year.

- **South Korea Bill to Mandate Government Affiliated Body to Review Medical School Quotas:** South Korea's parliamentary committee **passed** a bill requiring an independent advisory body under the health minister to review medical school quotas starting in 2027. The body will assess workforce supply and demand across all medical fields, with members recommended by medical groups, patient advocacy organizations, and academic experts. Medical groups, including the Korean Medical Association, will hold a majority. The bill is meant to ensure transparency by mandating public disclosure of records and marks a shift from the government's earlier plan to increase medical school admissions by 2,000 students in 2025, which sparked an ongoing strike by junior doctors that has constrained the Korean health system.
- **Measles Outbreak Continues to Spread in U.S., Vietnam Commended for Swift Response Efforts:** The Public Health Director in Lubbock, TX, near the epicenter of the current U.S. measles outbreak,recently **stated** that the outbreak could last up to a year, citing the highly-contagious nature of the virus, the multistate outbreak, and the challenge of controlling it in non-isolated populations. As of March 20, the U.S. has seen at least **378 cases**, exceeding the 285 cases reported in all of 2024, and marking the third major outbreak since 2000. In related news, the WHO and UNICEF **commended** Vietnam's swift response to the ongoing measles outbreak there, specifically highlighting expanded vaccination efforts and strengthening of the vaccine supply.

Demonstrations and Industrial Action

- **Global Demonstrations Planned Ahead of Palestinian Land Day, Against Trump Administration:** There has been an uptick in pro-Palestine demonstrations across the globe after the Israel Defense Forces restarted military operations in Gaza last week. Demonstrations this coming weekend will coincide with Palestinian Land Day, with a large gathering expected in Manhattan's Union Square on Sunday. Meanwhile, the U.S. administration is **seeking to deport** a second university student, accusing him of having ties to Hamas, although the evidence supporting this claim is unclear. The students' arrests come as several higher education institutions are **warning** international students against traveling outside the U.S. for spring break over a heightened risk of deportation. Demonstrations against the Trump administration and Tesla CEO Elon Musk are also continuing, with a global campaign dubbed "Tesla Takedown" planned for March 29.

- **Belgium's Largest Trade Unions Call for General Transportation Strike:** Two of Belgium's largest trade unions, the General Labor Federation of Belgium (FGTB/ABVV) and the Confederation of Christian Trade Unions (CSC/ACV), are calling for a large-scale general **strike action** of public services across the country on Monday, March 31. The CGSP Cheminots union has joined in the action with an additional **rail strike** set to take place on the same day, following failed negotiations over raising the pension age. Brussels Airlines has alerted passengers of potential disruptions at Brussel's international airport due to handling companies participating in the strike.
- **Day of the Young Combatant in Chile:** Heightened security and road disruptions are likely across Chile on Saturday during demonstrations related to the **Day of the Young Combatant**. Previous actions commemorating the day have included "the destruction of public transportation, throwing rocks at businesses, vehicles, and bystanders, and the barricading of streets," according to the **U.S. Embassy in Chile**. Last year's demonstrations, however, saw a significant **reduction** in incidents compared to 2023, with 49% fewer "conflict" events and 52% fewer arrests, and no injuries were reported among police or civilians.
- **Indian Farmers Announce Nationwide Demonstrations After Authorities Clear Blockades:** Following the **forcible clearance** of farmers' protest camps at the Shambhu and Khanauri interstate border crossings and the arrest of several of the movement's leaders, the Sanyukt Kisan Morcha (SKM), a coalition of farmers' organizations, has **called** for nationwide protests on Friday. The SKM is also urging fellow farmers' organizations—the Kisan Mazdoor Morcha and the SKM (Non-Political)—to put aside their differences and unite. Demonstration activity is expected to be especially intense in **Punjab**, where farmers have repeatedly clashed with authorities over the past several weeks.
- **Demonstration Activity Continues in Indonesia Against Passage of Military Law Revisions:** Demonstrations, some violent, have taken place across Indonesia following the passage of revisions to the country's military law that **allows** military personnel to serve in more government positions without having to retire or resign from the armed forces. The amendment has been strenuously opposed by students and other civil society groups who fear that it could erode the country's democracy. During the ensuing protests, there have been **numerous** **reports** of clashes with police and the use of incendiary devices such as Molotov cocktails. Further demonstrations were held today in Surabaya, Batam, and Sukabumi, with additional actions expected over the coming days as demonstrators push for the law to be repealed.

Upcoming Events

- February 28-March 29: Ramadan (Global) *dates approximate, vary by location*
- 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, vary by location*
- March 29: Nyepi (Indonesia)
- March 30: Land Day (Israel, the West Bank, and Gaza)
- April 2: U.S. to Impose “Reciprocal” Tariffs (Global)
- April 6: Ram Navami (India)
- April 9: Constitution Day (Kosovo)
- April 12: General Election (Gabon)
- April 12-April 20: Passover (Global)
- April 13: Presidential Election Run-Off (Ecuador)
- April 13: EU Tariffs on U.S. Goods to Take Effect (Global)
- April 17: Maundy Thursday (Global)
- April 18: Good Friday (Global)
- April 20: Easter (Global)
- April 28: Federal Election (Canada)
- April 28: General Election (Trinidad and Tobago)
- April 30: General Election (Cayman Islands)
- May 1: Labor Day/May Day (Global)
- May 4: Presidential Election (Romania)