

Putin Announces Easter Ceasefire

# Trump: U.S. Will Soon ‘Take a Pass’ If No Ukraine Deal



Ukrainian servicemen prepare to fire an MRLS BM-21 ‘Grad’ towards Russian army positions near Chasiv Yar, Donetsk region, Ukraine.

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) – President Donald Trump says the United States will “take a pass” on brokering further Ukraine war talks unless there is quick progress from Moscow and Kyiv.

Trump was speaking after Secretary of State Marco Rubio commented -- following talks with European allies -- that Washington would “move on” if a truce did not seem “doable” within days.

“Yeah very shortly,” Trump told reporters in the Oval Office when asked to confirm what Rubio had said. “No specific number of days, but quickly. We want to get it done.”

Trump refused to cast blame on either Russian President Vladimir Putin, who ordered the February 2022 full-scale war on pro-Western Ukraine, or Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky.

But he insisted both sides had to make progress.

“Now if for some reason one of the two parties makes it very difficult, we’re just going to say: ‘You’re foolish. You’re fools. You’re horrible people’ -- and we’re going to just take a pass,” Trump said.

“But hopefully we won’t have to do that.”

In another development, Bloomberg reported early Saturday morning that the U.S. could recognize Crimea as Russian territory as part of a potential peace deal between Moscow and Kiev, citing people familiar with the matter.

The region voted to secede from Ukraine and rejoin Russia in 2014 shortly after the U.S.-backed coup in Kiev.

Ukrainian authorities have refused to

recognize Moscow’s sovereignty over the peninsula, which is predominantly ethnically Russian, and have long insisted on restoring their country’s 1991 borders.

Bloomberg cited its sources as saying that the White House has not yet made a final decision on the matter.

The top U.S. negotiator, Steve Witkoff, said after a meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin last week that the talks hinged on the status of Crimea and four other Russian regions claimed by Kiev.

According to Bloomberg, the U.S. presented its European allies on Thursday with a plan to freeze the fighting along the current front line and ease sanctions on Moscow as part of a ceasefire.

Meanwhile, Russian President Vladimir Putin on Saturday announced an Easter truce in the conflict in Ukraine starting this evening and lasting till midnight on Sunday.

“Today from 1800 (1500 GMT) to midnight Sunday (2100 GMT Sunday), the Russian side announces an Easter truce,” Putin said in televised comments, while meeting Russian chief of staff Valery Gerasimov.

Easter, a major holiday for Christians, is celebrated on Sunday.

“I order for this period to stop all military action,” Putin said.

“We are going on the basis that the Ukrainian side will follow our example, while our troops must be ready to resist possible breaches of the truce and provocations by the enemy, any aggressive actions,” Putin said.

## Tunisia Hands Lengthy Prison Terms to Opposition Leaders on Conspiracy Charges

TUNIS (Reuters) – A Tunisian court on Saturday handed jail terms of 13 to 66 years to opposition leaders, businessmen and lawyers on charges of conspiring, a case the opposition says is fabricated and a symbol of President Kais Saied’s authoritarian rule.

Rights groups say Saied has had full control over the judiciary since he dissolved parliament in 2021 and began ruling by decree. He dissolved the independent Supreme Judicial Council and sacked dozens of judges in 2022.

A lawyer for the defendants, Abdessatar Massoudi, told Reuters that the maximum sentence was 66 years for businessman Kamel Ltaif, while opposition politician Khyam Turki received a 48-year sentence.

The court also sentenced prominent opposition figures including Ghazi Chaouachi, Issam Chebbi, Jawahar Ben Mbrak and Ridha Belhaj to 18 years in prison. They have been in custody since being detained in 2023.

“We are not surprised by these unjust and vengeful verdicts that seek to silence the voices of these opposition figures,” Chaouachi’s son Youssef told Reuters.



Tunisian demonstrators attend a rally against the policies adopted by President Kais Saied’s government, Tunis, on April 9, 2023.

Forty people were being prosecuted in the trial that started in March. More than 20 have fled abroad since being charged.

“I have never witnessed a trial like this. It’s a farce, the rulings are ready, and what is happening is scandalous and shameful,” said lawyer Ahmed Souab, who also represents the defendants, on Friday before the ruling was handed down.

Authorities say the defendants, who also include former officials and for-

mer head of intelligence Kamel Guizani, tried to destabilize the country and overthrow Saied.

“The authorities want to criminalize the opposition,” said the leader of the main National Salvation Front opposition coalition, Nejib Chebbi, on Friday. Chebbi was also among the defendants.

Saied said in 2023 the politicians were “traitors and terrorists” and that judges who would acquit them were their accomplices.

## Report Warns of Rise in Misogyny, Racism in UK Schools

LONDON (The Guardian) – A rise in misogyny and racism is flooding UK schools as pupils ape the behavior of figures such as U.S. President Donald Trump and Andrew Tate after exposure through social media and online gaming, teachers warned.

A survey by the NASUWT union found most teachers identified social media as “the number one cause” of pupil misbehavior, with female staff bearing the brunt. Teachers also raised concerns about parents who refuse to accept school rules or take responsibility for their children’s behavior.

One teacher told the union, “A lot of the students are influenced by Tate and Trump, they spout racist, and sexist comments in every conversation and don’t believe there will be consequences.”

The NASUWT’s general secretary, Patrick Roach, told the union’s annual conference on Friday, “Two in three teachers tell us that social media is now a critical factor con-

tributing to bullying and poor pupil behavior.

“Pupils who believe it is their inalienable right to access their mobile phones throughout the school day – and use them to interrupt lessons, bully others, act out, or to garner respect from their peers,” Roach added.

One primary teacher said, “I have had boys refuse to speak to me, and speak to a male teaching assistant instead, because I am a woman and they follow Andrew Tate and think he is amazing with all his cars and women and how women should be treated. These were 10-year-olds.”

Others reported instances of boys “barking at female staff and blocking doorways ... as a direct result of Andrew Tate videos”. Another teacher said, “Pupils watch violent and extreme pornographic material. Their attention spans have dropped. They read lots of fake news and sensationalized stories that make them feel empowered and that they know better than the teacher.”

Roach said the union had “positive discussions” with ministers about tackling the problem but warned that restricting access to mobile phones during the school day did not go far enough. “We now need a plan to tackle what has become a national emergency,” he said.

A Department for Education spokesperson said, “We know the rise of dangerous influencers is having a damaging impact on our children, which is why we are supporting the sector in their crucial role building young people’s resilience to extremism as part of our plan for change.”

“That’s why we provide a range of resources to support teachers to navigate these challenging issues, and why our curriculum review will look at the skills children need to thrive in a fast-changing online world,” the spokesperson added.

“This is on top of wider protections being brought in for children with the Online Safety Act, to ensure children have an age-appropriate experience online,” the spokesperson said.

## ‘Complete Meltdown’ Report: Pentagon Turmoil Deepens as More Top Officials Purged



An aerial view of the Pentagon

NEW YORK (Politico) – Joe Kasper, Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth’s chief of staff will leave his role in the coming days for a new position at the agency, according to a senior administration official, amid a week of turmoil for the Pentagon.

Senior adviser Dan Caldwell, Hegseth deputy chief of staff Darin Selnick and Colin Carroll, the chief of staff to Deputy Defense Secretary Stephen Feinberg, were placed on leave this week in an ongoing leak probe. All three were terminated on Friday, according to three people familiar with the matter, who, like others, were granted anonymity to discuss a sensitive issue.

The latest incidents add to the Pentagon’s broader upheaval in recent months, including fallout from Hegseth’s release of sensitive information in a Signal chat with other national security leaders and a controversial department visit by Elon Musk.

Caldwell, Carroll, Selnick and Kasper declined to comment. Two of the people said Carroll and Selnick plan to sue for wrongful termination. The Pentagon did not respond to a request of comment.

Kasper had requested an investigation into Pentagon leaks in March, which included military operational plans for the Panama Canal, a second carrier headed to the Red Sea, Musk’s visit and a pause in the collection of intelligence for Ukraine.

But some at the Pentagon also started to notice a rivalry between Kasper and the fired advisers.

“Joe didn’t like those guys,” said one defense official. “They all have different styles. They just didn’t get along. It was a personality clash.”

“There is a complete meltdown in the building, and this is really reflecting on the secretary’s leadership,” said a senior defense official. “Pete Hegseth has surrounded himself with some people who don’t have his interests at heart.”

This week’s terminations follow a purge of top military officers in February, including former Joint Chiefs Chair Gen. C.Q. Brown and Chief of Naval Operations Adm. Lisa Franchetti.

“There probably will be more chaos,” said a third defense official. “It certainly reinforces the fear factor, awareness that no one’s job is safe.”

Other officials wondered what this would mean for Hegseth, a still inexperienced Pentagon leader who has just lost many of his top advisers.

“The front office has some really first-rate uniformed military staff, but there’s only so much they can pick up in an organization that big,” said a former Trump administration official. “That kind of dysfunction compounds.”

Democrats pointed to the firings as another example of Hegseth’s inability to lead the agency.

## At Least 148 People Die After Boat Catches Fire in Congo

KINSHASA (AP) – The death toll from a boat fire and capsizing in Congo rose to 148 with more than 100 people still missing, officials said Friday. About 500 passengers were on board.

The wooden boat capsized after catching fire on the Congo River in the country’s northwest, leaving at least 148 people dead and dozens missing, officials said.

The catastrophe began when a fire started as a woman was cooking on board the vessel, Compétent Loyoko, the river commissioner, told The Associated Press. Several passengers, including women and children, died after jumping into the water without being able to swim.

Dozens were saved, with many of the survivors badly burned. The search for the missing included rescue teams supported by the Red Cross and provincial authorities.

The motorized wooden boat caught fire near the town of Mbandaka, Loyoko said. The boat, HB Kongola, had left the port of Matankumu for the Bolomba territory.

“The death toll among the 500 passengers on board was extremely high,” said Sen. Jean-Paul Boketsu Bofili of Equateur province Friday. “As we speak, more than 150 survivors suffering from third-degree burns are without humanitarian assistance.”

Deadly boat accidents are common in the central African country, where late-night travels and overcrowded vessels are often blamed. Authorities have struggled to enforce maritime regulations.

Congo’s rivers are a major means of transport for its more than 100 million people, especially in remote areas where infrastructure is poor or nonexistent. Hundreds have been killed in boat accidents in recent years as more people abandon the few available roads for wooden vessels packed with passengers and their goods.

“Our magnificent Congo River and the lakes our country abounds in have become huge cemeteries for the Congolese people. This is unacceptable,” said Bofili.

## News in Brief

MONGO, Chad (AFP) – More than 100 inmates escaped a Chad prison during a shootout that left three people dead, and wounded a state governor visiting the facility, officials told AFP on Saturday. The break-out occurred late Friday when an uprising happened in the high-security penitentiary five kilometers from the town of Mongo, in the center of the country. “There are around 100 who escaped, three dead and three wounded,” Hassan Souleymane Adam, secretary general of the Guera province in which Mongo is located, said. A local Mongo official, speaking to AFP on condition of anonymity, said prisoners broke into a manager’s office to steal guns. “A shootout with guards ensued, at the same time the governor arrived. He was wounded,” he said. The Mongo official confirmed there were three dead, and put the total number of escaped prisoners at 132.

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WASHINGTON (Dispatches) – U.S. Supreme Court has blocked the deportation of Venezuelan immigrants held in northern Texas under an antique wartime law dating back to the 18th century. The top court blocked early on Saturday the Donald Trump administration’s deportations of alleged Venezuelan gang members held under the Alien Enemies Act of 1798 in the Bluebonnet Detention Center “until further order of this court.” “The government is directed not to remove any member of the putative class of detainees from the United States until further order of this court,” the brief order said. The court also ordered the U.S. administration to respond to the emergency appeal once a federal appeals court in Louisiana takes action in the case. Having filed an emergency appeal at the high court on Friday, attorneys for the Venezuelans stated that they were at immediate risk of being removed from the United States and had not been provided sufficient notice to challenge their deportation.

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LAGOS (Reuters) – At least 17 people were killed when suspected cattle herders attacked communities in central Nigeria’s Benue State, police said, amid a resurgence of deadly clashes between farmers and herders. Years of clashes have disrupted food supplies from north-central Nigeria, a significant agricultural area. The latest attacks came two days after 11 people were killed in the Otukpo area of Benue and barely a week after gunmen attacked villages and killed more than 50 people in neighboring Plateau State. Since 2019, the clashes have claimed more than 500 lives in the region and forced 2.2 million to leave their homes, according to research firm SBM Intelligence. A separate group of suspected herdsmen shot and killed five farmers around Gbagir in Benue’s Ukum Local Government Area, early on Friday, police said. The attackers opened fire as police were moving in to confront them, police spokesperson Sewuese Anene said in a statement. While officers were engaging the attackers at Ukum, another 12 people were killed in another attack in Logo local council area, about 70 km away, police said.

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QUITO (AFP) – Ecuador is on maximum alert over an alleged assassination plot against recently reelected President Daniel Noboa, the government said on Saturday. Noboa won the race in an April 13 runoff vote, but his main rival Luisa Gonzalez has accused him of committing “grotesque electoral fraud.” A military intelligence report saying that assassins entering Ecuador from Mexico and other countries planned to carry out “terrorist attacks” against Noboa was leaked on social media this week. “We strongly condemn and repudiate any intention against the life of the president of the Republic, state authorities or public officials,” Ecuador’s Ministry of Government said in a statement early Saturday. “The state is on maximum alert,” it added. The government accused “criminal structures in complicity with political sectors defeated at the polls” of hatching the plot, though it did not offer any specific names.

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BANGKOK (AP) – Basic services have yet to be restored to the areas of Myanmar worst hit by a huge earthquake three weeks ago, and emergency workers recovering bodies and clearing debris are contending with regular aftershocks and lack of resources, humanitarian services say. A situation report issued late Friday by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, or OCHA, said frequent strong aftershocks continue to shake central Myanmar almost daily, increasing fear and uncertainty among affected residents, disrupting response efforts and exacerbating the pressure on already limited resources and services. “Three weeks after catastrophic twin earthquakes hit Myanmar on 28 March, the worst-affected communities are still without safe shelter, clean water and sanitation, stable electricity, health care and essential services,” the report said.

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GENEVA (DPA) – At least three people have been killed in northern Italy after heavy rains, authorities say, as snow caused disruption in neighboring Switzerland. Northern Italian regions have been hit hard by severe rainfall, with Piedmont, South Tyrol and Lombardy heavily affected. A father and son died when their car was carried off by floodwaters near Valdagno, between Venice and Lake Garda. A 92-year-old man was separately found dead in his house near Turin on Thursday.