

Catch up: Russia packing up in Syria; TikTok's reprieve denied



Satellite images appeared to show **Russian forces** packing up equipment in **Syria** and preparing to leave. The pictures, taken of Hmeimim, Russia's main airbase in Syria, showed several large transporter planes on the runway about to be loaded. The overthrow of Bashar al-Assad is a significant blow to the Kremlin's military ambitions in the region and [beyond](#).

Meanwhile, thousands rallied in Damascus, **Syria's** capital, to celebrate the fall of the **Bashar regime**. The leader of [Hayat Tahrir al-Sham](#), the rebel group largely responsible for [toppling the dictator](#), called on people to join the crowds. America's secretary of state, Antony Blinken, stressed the importance of creating an "inclusive and non-sectarian" [interim government](#) in Syria during talks with Middle Eastern allies.

TikTok failed to win a temporary reprieve from a law requiring it to [divest in America](#). Under a law signed by President Joe Biden, ByteDance, TikTok's Chinese parent company, must sell the video platform to an American buyer by January 19th or be banned. The

firm asked an appeals court in Washington, DC for more time to take its case to the Supreme Court.

[Sam Altman](#), **OpenAI's** boss, will reportedly donate \$1m to **Donald Trump's** inauguration events. He joins a growing list of tech titans contributing to the president-elect's fund; Amazon and Meta have made similar pledges. Technology companies may be hoping to curry favour with Mr Trump, who has talked about clamping down on Big Tech and loosening regulation of AI.

Prince Andrew said he had cut contact with a Chinese businessman and [alleged spy](#) whom Britain's national-security court banned from the country. The man, who has not been publicly identified and who denied ties to China's government, had unsuccessfully petitioned to stay in Britain. The court found that he had "been in a position" to leverage his connections for "political interference purposes".

Nancy Pelosi, America's former speaker of the House of Representatives, was hospitalised during a congressional visit to Luxembourg following an unspecified injury. Ms Pelosi, who is 84, "continues to work" but will not attend remaining events on the trip, her spokesperson said. Ms Pelosi was visiting the country to mark the 80th anniversary of the [Battle of the Bulge](#).

America and **China** agreed a five-year deal to renew co-operation in scientific research. Earlier this year a [long-standing agreement](#) between the two countries expired owing to intellectual-property and security concerns. The renewal restricts co-operation on "critical and emerging" technological research relevant to national security. Some Republicans argue the deal should not have been signed before Mr Trump takes office in January.

Word of the week: *Chuan Jianguo*, a nickname given to Donald Trump by some Chinese nationalists, meaning "Trump the Nation Builder". [Read the full story](#).

South Korea's president faces a reckoning



Yoon Suk Yeol's declaration of martial law on December 3rd revived memories of South Korea's authoritarian past. A survey by Gallup, a pollster, suggests that the president's approval rating has plunged to 11%—his lowest yet—while 75% of respondents believe he should be impeached. But Mr Yoon, known for his stubbornness, is not backing down. This week, in a [raving address](#), he accused the opposition of “parliamentary dictatorship” and promised to “fight until the end”.

Mr Yoon's defiance will be tested on Saturday, when parliament votes for a second time on whether to impeach him. He survived a first attempt last week because his People Power Party boycotted the motion. But the party's lawmakers have since turned against him: seven have publicly backed the opposition's motion; another has anonymously pledged his support. Together, the eight defectors should suffice to push the impeachment vote over the threshold of 200 MPs. Mr Yoon's chances of survival look slim.

A right-wing love-in



[Giorgia Meloni](#), Italy's prime minister, and [Javier Milei](#), Argentina's president, see a lot of each other. Mr Milei's visit to Rome on Saturday will be his third to Italy this year. Ms Meloni visited Buenos Aires in November, too. They have a lot in common. Both cultivate quirky images—Ms Meloni [takes inspiration from J.R.R. Tolkien](#); Mr Milei uses a medium to communicate with his dead pets—and are stars of the international anti-woke scene.

More substantially, both are hard-right populists presiding over debt-ridden economies. Elected on promises to shake things up, they have proved hard-headed in office. Mr Milei has dropped some radical economic ideas while ruthlessly cutting budgets and taming inflation. The once Eurosceptic Ms Meloni has become a power player in the EU. That relationship has paid off for Mr Milei: on December 6th the EU approved a long-stalled agreement with Mercosur, a South American trade bloc. Ms Meloni overlooked her farmers' objections and backed the deal.

Japan's space ambitions



Space One, a Tokyo startup, wants to become the first private Japanese firm to put a satellite into orbit. The ride has been bumpy. In March its KAIROS rocket blew up just five seconds after launch. The company will try again on Saturday after fixing an overactive safety system which it says triggered the explosion. A successful launch would pave the way for Space One's plan to offer frequent, low-cost satellite launches to private- and public-sector clients.

Lift-off matters to [Japan's space ambitions](#). This year the government established a "Space Strategy Fund", which includes a ¥1trn (\$6.5bn) pot to fully subsidise the research and development costs of startups and universities for the next decade. That reflects growing security concerns and a desire to catch up with other countries. America's SpaceX alone launched nearly 100 rockets in 2023. Japan managed just two. The government wants to raise the annual tally to 30 by the 2030s.

The World Test Championship heats up



The International Cricket Council, the sport's governing body, created the World Test Championship in 2019 as a way to spice up the five-day format of the game. For decades, teams would play [Test cricket](#) in standalone bilateral series. Now these matches are used to generate a league table over a two-year cycle. The top two teams play in the grand finale.

The qualification race for the marquee match in 2025 is intensifying. South Africa are in pole position and can confirm their spot by winning one of their two forthcoming home Tests against Pakistan. India and Australia are hoping to join them. They are currently playing a series in Australia and are locked at 1-1. The third game of five, in Brisbane, begins on Saturday.

The prospect of South Africa reaching the final is a cheering one. In recent years the Proteas test team has been starved of matches and struggled to get its best players on the field. For them to lift the trophy would give Test cricket worldwide a boost.

Weekend profile: Tulsi Gabbard, the provocative pick to run America's spy agencies



It is hard to know precisely what to make of Tulsi Gabbard, except that she dislikes foreign wars and delights in confounding expectations. So much so that on occasion she sounds like a conspiracy theorist. She prefers the term “free-thinker”. Donald Trump has nominated her to be his director of national intelligence. If confirmed, she will have his ear every day at his intelligence briefing.

Democrats have taken to calling Ms Gabbard, aged 43, a Russian asset. There is no evidence for this, yet the charge underlines their discomfort with her nomination. Ms Gabbard, disillusioned by her service in the Iraq war, distrusts American entanglements abroad.

Yet her isolationism often veers into Russophilia. She has excused Russia's invasion of Ukraine as a justified response to NATO's expansion. In 2017 she flew to Damascus to meet [Bashar al-Assad](#), Syria's now-deposed dictator, and said she was “sceptical” that he

had used chemical weapons against his own people (despite evidence that he had). Russian television presenters call her “comrade” and “our girlfriend”.

Before Ms Gabbard started calling the Democratic Party an “elitist cabal of warmongers”, she belonged to it. Born in American Samoa, Ms Gabbard moved to Hawaii as a child, where she was largely homeschooled. At 21 she dropped out of community college and won a seat in Hawaii’s state legislature. Then came deployments with the National Guard in Iraq and Kuwait, where she served in the medical and police units. In 2012 she won election to Congress, becoming its first Hindu member. The Democratic National Committee gave her a leadership post.

Her disaffection with the party crystallised during the presidential primary in 2016. Ms Gabbard supported Bernie Sanders, deriding Hillary Clinton as a military interventionist. She quit the DNC; donors started to keep their distance. Then in 2020 she left Congress to seek the Democratic presidential nomination as a longshot anti-establishment candidate.

Mr Trump’s win in 2016 piqued her curiosity about the other side. She found common cause with Steve Bannon and Tucker Carlson, Mr Trump’s cheerleaders and fellow isolationists. Fox News hired her as a talking head.

Ms Gabbard’s designs for America’s spooks should become clearer during her confirmation hearings; some fear a [spy purge](#) is in the offing. Her lack of experience managing bureaucracies may mean her bark is bigger than her bite. There is also the question of the boss’s willingness to listen. Though Mr Trump shares her isolationist instincts, in his first term he ordered strikes on Syria and nearly embroiled America in a war with Iran when he had [Qassem Suleimani](#), a leading general, assassinated. If Ms Gabbard has her way, however, America’s foreign policy is heading for a giant shake-up.

Weekly crossword



Our crossword has two sets of clues, one for seasoned cruciverbalists and the other for less experienced solvers. Both give the same answers, all of which feature in articles in this week's edition of *The Economist*:

Cryptic clues

1 down Russian ruler's pet hate—regret, unfortunately (5,3,5)

1 across Vegetable dish comes with irregular caution (6)

2 across Murmur a little nonsense for someone like you (5)

3 across Reversing track critical for country (6)

Factual clues

1 down One of the leaders under which the Russian Orthodox Church flourished (5,3,5)

1 across Main ingredient of pancakes popular in Poland (6)

2 across Species for whom tracing a migration pattern is tricky (5)

3 across One of the three countries that bombed targets in Syria the day after Bashar al-Assad fled (6)

Email all four answers, along with your home city and country, by 9am GMT on Monday to crossword@economist.com. We will pick randomly from those with the right answers and crown three winners in next week's edition.

The winners of this week's quiz



The Economist

Thank you to everyone who took part in this week's quiz. The winners, chosen at random, were:

Jeannette Duplessis, Calgary, Canada

Emilio J. Ferreira, Buenos Aires, Argentina

Ksenia Lenina, Lewes, Britain

They all gave the correct answers of Alsace and Lorraine, What's up, doc?, Boy George, Marty and the DeLorean Motor Company. The theme is the film Back to the Future; Marty McFly, his parents Lorraine and George, his scientist friend Doc Brown and a time-travelling DeLorean.

The questions were:

Monday: Which two provinces suffered repeated transfers of power between France and Germany from 1871 to 1945?

Tuesday: What was the catchphrase of Bugs Bunny?

Wednesday: Who was the lead singer of the band Culture Club?

Thursday: Which movie starring Ernest Borgnine won the Oscar for best picture in 1956?

Friday: Which short-lived motor company produced a sports car in the early 1980s with gull-wing doors?

Chuan Jianguo

A nickname given to Donald Trump by some Chinese nationalists, meaning “Trump the Nation Builder”.

Read the full story.

Where all think alike, no one thinks very much.

Walter Lippmann