

US would lead Ukraine ceasefire monitoring

Back multinational force: draft statement

● There would be US participation in the force

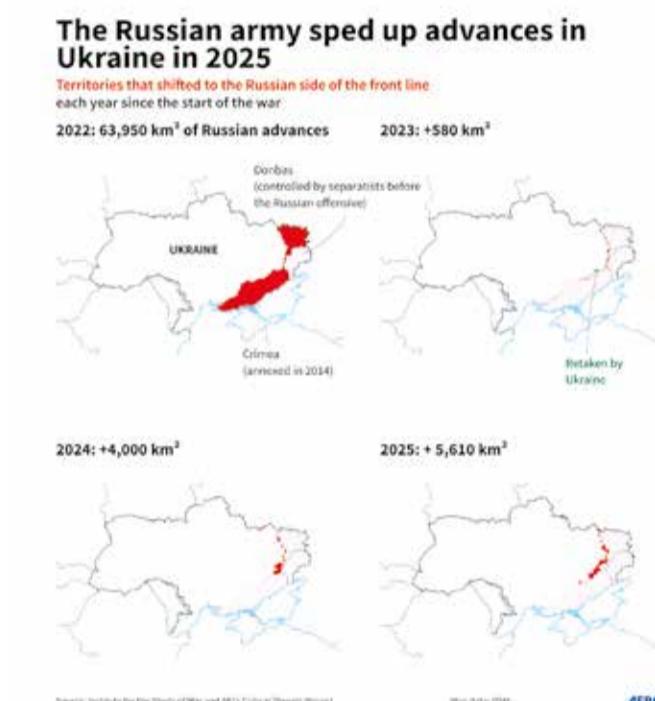
● President Emmanuel Macron is hosting a meeting

AFP | Paris, France

The United States would lead a "ceasefire monitoring and verification mechanism" with European participation if a peace deal is agreed in the Russia-Ukraine war, Kyiv's allies said in a draft statement seen by AFP ahead of a Paris summit yesterday.

Washington would also commit to "support" a European-led multinational force -- deployed in Ukraine after any ceasefire -- "in case of" a new attack by Russia, it added.

President Emmanuel Macron is hosting a meeting of the so-called Coalition of the Willing allies of Ukraine on Tuesday, including European leaders, Ukrainian President Volodymyr



Zelensky and American envoys. The meeting is focused on the security guarantees Ukraine

requires in the event of a ceasefire to deter further Russian aggression.

"There will be a continuous, reliable ceasefire monitoring system. This will be led by the US with international participation," the draft statement said.

The multinational force to be deployed after a ceasefire would provide "reassurance measures in the air, at sea and on land" for Ukraine and ensure the "regeneration of the armed forces of Ukraine", it added.

"These elements will be European-led," it said.

There would be US participation in the force "including US capabilities such as intelligence and logistics", and "a US commitment to support the force in case of attack" by Russia, it said.

The draft statement said there would be "binding commitments to support Ukraine in the case of a future armed attack by Russia in order to restore peace".

These commitments "may include the use of military capabilities, intelligence and logistical support, diplomatic initiatives, adoption of additional sanctions," it said.

TV makers tout AI upgrades at CES, as smartphone threat looms

AFP | Las Vegas, United States

A century after Scottish inventor John Logie Baird demonstrated the first mechanical television system, TVs face mounting competition from a much more recent invention: smartphones.

But with a suite of new models boasting massive screens, richer imagery and artificial intelligence enhancements -- on display this week at the Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas -- manufacturers don't plan on TVs being relegated to the dustbin of history.

The proportion of daily viewing on TV sets declined from 61 percent at the start of 2017 to 48 percent late last year, according to market tracker Ampere Analysis. Smartphone viewing, meanwhile, nearly doubled over that same period to 21 percent.

"This is the battle between big screens, which are traditionally for older people who grew up around televisions, and younger people who have either a phone, tablet, or laptop on which they're doing their consumption," said Patrick Horner, leader of TV research at Omdia.

He said that in China, seen as a trendsetter in the global market, young consumers are shunning large-screen televisions in favor of smartphones or tablets.

Around the world, television ownership is constant or declining, with average selling prices also holding steady or dropping, according to Horner.

One way for TV makers to protect or increase revenue when unit sales don't rise is to get people to buy ever larger and smarter screens, at a higher price.



The Agibot X2 humanoid robot dances as it is demonstrated during Pepcom ahead of the annual Consumer Electronics Show (CES) in Las Vegas, Nevada



The Afeela Prototype 2026 is displayed during a Sony Honda Mobility news conference ahead of the annual Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas

TVs get personal

Those massive screens once again starred at CES, with producers touting AI to personalize experiences and sharpen picture quality.

Also in the spotlight was "Micro RGB" technology that dramatically ramps up picture quality using ultra-precise control of colors in LED displays.

Samsung Electronics, the top TV seller for 20 consecutive

years, unveiled what it billed as the world's first 130-inch Micro RGB TV and spoke of packing AI into its products.

"We will embed AI across every area, every product, and every service," Samsung device experience division chief executive TM Roh said during a media event.

Hisense, LG, Samsung, Sony, and TCL were also at CES.

AI is being used to improve

picture and sound quality, as well as help people find shows they want or ask questions about what they're seeing.

"I am really curious to see if most brands at CES can actually prove their new AI devices live up to their claims," said Forrester principal analyst Thomas Husson.

Amazon vs Walmart

Behind the scenes, e-commerce titans Amazon and Walmart are shaping the future of television as they vie for dominance -- not in selling TVs, but in advertising and e-commerce.

"This is really a knockdown, drag-out fight between Amazon.com and Walmart," Horner told AFP.

Walmart closed a \$2.3 billion deal to buy TV maker Vizio in late 2024, as a strategic response to Amazon boosting sales through advertising on its Fire smart TVs and devices, often through its Prime Video streaming service.

"Amazon was putting advertisements on television programming for things that Amazon sold," Horner said. "So now Walmart is going to be putting advertisements on your television for things that Walmart sells."

And the profit margin on selling ads dwarfs the markup on selling TV hardware.

Walmart is expected to sell more than a million of its "Onn" brand TVs monthly and use an operating system it acquired with Vizio to pump advertising to viewers.

"Televisions are no longer about making profit from TV hardware," Horner said. "They're an ad delivery device being inserted into your living room to boost e-commerce sales."

Maduro lawyer previously defended WikiLeaks' Julian Assange



Barry Pollack

AFP | New York, United States

The lawyer defending deposed Venezuelan leader Nicolas Maduro is a veteran trial attorney who previously represented WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange.

Barry Pollack, 61, appeared beside Maduro during his arraignment in a New York courtroom on Monday on drug trafficking and other charges.

Maduro pleaded not guilty and it will be up to Pollack to try to convince a federal jury to render that verdict when the case eventually goes to trial.

The next hearing has been set for March 17.

A graduate of Georgetown University law school, Pollack is a partner in Harris St. Laurent & Wechsler LLP, a boutique New York law firm, and a former president of the National Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers.

Law firm research guide Chambers USA describes him as a "thorough and deep-thinking lawyer" who by the US military.

92-year-old US judge presiding over Maduro case

AFP | New York, United States

Alvin Hellerstein, the 92-year-old US judge handling the case against deposed Venezuelan leader Nicolas Maduro, has presided over a number of notable trials during his decades on the bench.

Maduro and his wife, Cilia Flores, made their first appearance in Hellerstein's Manhattan courtroom on Monday, pleading not guilty to narco-terrorism and other charges.

Maduro was indicted in 2020 in a sprawling drug trafficking case that has been before Hellerstein for nearly 15 years and has already seen the conviction of Venezuela's former intelligence chief, Hugo Armando Carvajal.

A graduate of Columbia University law school, Hellerstein served as a lawyer in the US Army from 1957 to 1960 before entering private practice.

He was nominated by former president Bill Clinton in 1998 to be a district court judge for the Southern District of New York.

During his lengthy career, Hellerstein has presided over several civil cases stemming from the September 11, 2001 Al-Qaeda attacks on New York and Washington.

He has also tangled at times with Donald Trump, rejecting

"lives, breathes and sleeps trials, and has such a natural way in front of juries."

In 2024, Pollack secured the release of Assange from a British prison after negotiating a plea deal with the US Justice Department that saw the Australian plead guilty to violating the Espionage Act by unlawfully disclosing national defense material.

In another high-profile case, Pollack obtained the acquittal of a former Enron accountant who was facing criminal fraud charges stemming from the collapse of the energy giant.

Another prominent case involved a New York man who was wrongfully convicted of murdering his parents when he was a teenager and spent 17 years in prison.

Pollack managed to get the charges dismissed and secured his freedom.

Pollack gave a hint of his defense strategy during Monday's brief arraignment of Maduro before District Judge Alvin Hellerstein, questioning the "legality of his abduction" by the US military.



a request by the president to have his New York hush money case moved to federal court. Hellerstein also blocked the Trump administration last year from deporting alleged Venezuelan gang members without a court hearing.

In September, he sentenced tech start-up highflyer Charlie Javice to more than seven years in prison after she was convicted of defrauding JP Morgan Chase on a \$175 million deal.

In another high-profile fraud case, Hellerstein sentenced Bill Hwang, the founder of US investment firm Archegos Capital Management, to 18 years in prison.

He also presided over the trial last year in which a jury found French banking giant BNP Paribas's work in Sudan had helped prop up the regime of former ruler Omar al-Bashir, awarding \$20.75 million in damages to three plaintiffs from Sudan.