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Russia's war with Ukraine

One year on and no end in sight

On the 24 February 2022 President Vladimir Putin committed the crime of aggression by invading Ukraine, and a quick Russian victory was anticipated. One year later, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky declared victory for his own country to be inevitable in a national [address](#) to mark the anniversary of the invasion, adding that Ukrainians had been proven invincible over “a year of pain, sorrow, faith and unity”. The reality, however, is of a protracted war with ever higher human costs. The war has disrupted global food security, humanitarian aid and increased political instability. There is currently no clear pathway towards peace, and no apparent political will to seek one.

It is a war between two armed forces, with their respective proxy supporters, but also an economic war and increasingly a conflict between [competing systems of values](#): democracy and autocracy. But Western pleas for practical assistance from the Global South have largely been rebuffed, with some states like India and South Africa justifying their refusal to explicitly condemn Russia in UN votes (see below) by pointing to the West's own chequered history of prioritizing interests over values.

The war has brought incalculable agonies on the civilian population of Ukraine resulting in an exodus of more than 8 million refugees across Europe and further afield. At least 8,000 Ukrainian civilians have been killed, according to the United Nations, but the true death toll is believed to be much higher. But the war has

also been a story of heroic resistance that has inspired widespread admiration and solidarity. Because most of Europe has now abandoned any idea of developing stable, predictable and productive relations with Russia, at least while Putin remains in power, the focus of that solidarity has been on supplying Ukraine with increasingly lethal weapons.

Beyond the ongoing terror towards Ukraine, the war has also revealed the hollow nature of the Russian military threat to the rest of Europe. Despite a decade-long military modernization programme and superior firepower and troop numbers, Moscow has been barely able to advance beyond the Donbas and has instead resorted to indiscriminate targeting of civilian infrastructure and the Ukrainian economy. Outside of the nuclear threat, it is hard to see Russia mounting a serious military challenge to NATO, which has circled the wagons around member states in renewed displays of unity and strength.

How will the war in Ukraine end?

It is hard to say. There are broadly four paths forward from the current stalemate in which Russia controls about 18% per cent of Ukraine. First, with both Moscow and Kyiv appearing on the verge of launching opposing spring offensives, either side could potentially achieve a breakthrough leading to a declaration of victory. However, neither side appears capable of amassing a force strong enough to punch through defensive lines. Second, the war could drag on for years at a low ebb. Third, the war could escalate in

several ways, including (a) by Ukraine taking the fight inside Russia (which may already be happening with recent [reports](#) of cross-border sabotage and drone attacks); (b) by drawing in additional states - [Belarus](#) (directly with troops and weapons in support of Russia), [China](#) (indirectly via weapon supplies to Russia) or the US, [NATO](#) or some of its [member states](#) moving beyond proxy support for Ukraine to direct involvement in combat; (c) by Russia's use of [nuclear weapons](#); or (d) following a coup by right-wing "[ultra-patriots](#)" frustrated by the Russian army's failures in Ukraine.

Fourth, a peace deal could bring an end to the hostilities, although the current outlook for a negotiated deal would likely involve Ukraine ceding some territory to Russia. While the second outcome currently seems the most likely, none of the other pathways can be ruled out. The option of a negotiated peace (see below) remains the most desirable outcome—a view seemingly shared by both the UN Secretary-General António Guterres and Gen Mark Milley, chair of the US joint chiefs of staff. Speaking to the UN General Assembly Emergency Special Session on Ukraine on 22 February Guterres [said](#), "War is not the solution. War is the problem.... And while prospects may look bleak today, we must all work knowing that genuine, lasting peace must be based on the UN Charter and international law. The longer the fighting continues, the more difficult this work will be. We don't have a moment to lose". And in an [interview](#) with the Financial Times on 16 February, Milley said neither Russia nor Ukraine is likely to achieve their military aims, and he believed the war would end at the negotiating table.

The frontlines in the war

In February Russia continued its campaign of missile strikes on Ukrainian infrastructure, albeit at a decreased frequency and intensity since January. Intense fighting between Ukrainian and Russian forces around the eastern city of Bakhmut in Donetsk has continued. Russia is [reportedly](#) deploying the most experienced units of the Wagner group and its army in an attempt to seize the besieged city, which has been under constant

attack from Russian troops for months. Russia says seizing Bakhmut would open the way to fully controlling the rest of the strategic Donbas industrial region bordering Russia. However, Russian forces appear to be suffering an unsustainably high rate of attrition and Bakhmut's Deputy Mayor Oleksandr Marchenko [told](#) the BBC on 4 March that Russian forces still hadn't taken control of the city

Ukraine has ordered a mandatory evacuation of families and vulnerable residents from the [frontline city of Kupiansk](#) and adjacent north-eastern territories. The evacuation order was due to the "unstable security situation" caused by Russia's constant shelling of the town and its surroundings. Russian troops retreated from key cities in the north-eastern Kharkiv region, including Kupiansk, and Ukraine recaptured it in September last year. Finally, as [reported](#) in the New York Times, Russia lost at least 130 tanks and armoured personnel carriers in a three-week battle at the town of Vuhledar in southern Ukraine, according to Ukrainian officials. They said the "epic" fight on a plain near Vuhledar produced the biggest tank battle of the war so far and a further setback for Russia.

Stalled diplomacy

Despite repeated calls from the UN Secretary General for the war to end, few other voices seem to share this view. Both President Zelensky and President Putin have previously expressed a willingness to negotiate an end to the war, but their positions remain so far apart that there are no real hopes of peace talks soon. There have been some negotiations on key issues, such as the Zaporizhzhia nuclear plant, getting grain out of Ukraine and in organising prisoner swaps, but no Ukrainian-Russian negotiations since March 2022 on the big issues. In an [interview](#) with the BBC on 16 February, for example, President Zelensky ruled out giving up any Ukrainian territory in a potential peace deal with Russia. He said that conceding land would mean Russia could "keep coming back". For its part, Russia shows no signs of being ready to respect Ukraine's sovereignty and pre-war borders. For example,

the Kremlin's spokesperson, Dmitry Peskov, [said](#) on 28 February that Russia is open to negotiations to end the conflict in Ukraine, but he insisted Moscow would "never compromise" on what he described as new "territorial realities", meaning Moscow would not renounce its claims to four Ukrainian regions that Putin annexed in September 2022.

The future of Ukraine's NATO membership bid is also a complicating issue. Speaking at a joint press conference with Finland's prime minister, Sanna Marin, in Helsinki on 28 February, the NATO Secretary General [said](#) Ukraine will become a NATO member in the "long term", while stressing that the immediate priority was Ukraine remaining an independent country in the face of the Russian invasion. Ukraine's Defence Minister Oleksii Reznikov has [argued](#) it is already a de facto member.

In recent weeks, there have been three main opportunities to develop a new diplomatic track – within the G20 and the UN General Assembly, and as a result of a new political intervention by China – but none appear to have resulted in a new breakthrough. China's move might dramatically expand Beijing's role in the conflict, although opinion remained divided as to whether this might be as an honest peace broker or as a new source of weapon supplies to Russia (see below).

The G20 meeting in India

A [meeting](#) of senior diplomats from the Group of 20 industrialised and developing nations in New Delhi on 2 March ended with no consensus on the war in Ukraine. Most G20 members strongly condemned the Ukraine war, with Russia and China disagreeing, said the G20 president, India. (the same [outcome](#) occurred at the G20 meeting of finance chiefs on 25 February). The US Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Russia's Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov spoke for less than 10 minutes on the margins of the G20 meeting, [according](#) to a US State Department official. Blinken reiterated to Lavrov that Washington was prepared to support Ukraine's defence for as long as it took, the official said, in what is believed to be their first one-on-one

conversation in person since Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. Blinken said he told Lavrov that Washington would push for the war in Ukraine to end through diplomatic terms that Kyiv agreed to. Blinken said he had also urged Moscow to reconsider its "irresponsible decision" and return to participation in the New Start nuclear treaty.

The EU's foreign policy chief Josep Borrell [said](#) he saw a "small improvement" in diplomacy with Russia after the meeting. Russia's Foreign Minister apparently remained in the room when western countries criticised Russia – unlike at the last G20 foreign ministers' meeting in Bali last year, when he stormed out. Meanwhile, two days later, Lavrov's description of the Russian invasion as "the war, which we are trying to stop, and which was launched against us using the Ukrainian people" was [met with laughter](#) at an event in New Delhi, India.

UN General Assembly vote

On 23 February 2023 the UN General Assembly overwhelmingly [voted](#) to stand firm in its support of Ukraine. 141 Member States voted in favour of the 11-paragraph [resolution](#) calling for peace "as soon as possible" and for Russia to withdraw immediately. Seven states voted against the resolution - Belarus, North Korea, Eritrea, Mali, Nicaragua, Russia and Syria, while among the 32 abstentions were China, India and Pakistan. The support for the resolution entitled "Principles of the Charter of the United Nations underlying a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in Ukraine" demonstrated that large parts of the mainly Western-aligned international community continues to support Ukraine and condemns Russia's actions. President Putin's clear breach of international law and the UN Charter has been consistently condemned by the General Assembly over the last 12 months. However, the vote on 23 February largely fell along the same lines as last year's [vote](#) on 2 March 2022 to condemn Russia's invasion, with both earning 141 votes in favour; 32 countries abstained. Nicaragua and Mali, which had abstained on last year's measure, opted to vote against the latest motion.

China's peace 'plan'

China released a [position paper](#) on Ukraine on 24 February, which was widely (and [incorrectly](#)) reported as a peace plan for Ukraine in a move that might dramatically expand Beijing's role in the conflict. The paper calls for a ceasefire and the resumption of peace talks, and also includes provisions calling for countries to respect the sovereignty of other states while noting that the "legitimate security interests and concerns of all countries must be taken seriously and addressed properly".

President Zelensky cautiously [welcomed](#) China's proposal but said it would be acceptable only if it led to Putin pulling his troops out from all occupied Ukrainian territory. "We hope they also urge Russia to stop the war and withdraw its troops," [said](#) Ukraine's chargé d'affaires in China. Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba said on 21 February that Kyiv intends to "carefully study it and draw conclusions." Kuleba also noted that Ukraine's top priority is its own 10-point [peace plan](#) that Ukraine's President Zelenskyy announced in November 2022 (which called for the restoration of Ukraine's territorial integrity, the withdrawal of Russian troops, the release of all prisoners, a tribunal for those responsible for the aggression and security guarantees for Ukraine). Kuleba's careful reaction indicated that Ukraine might be willing to consider China as a credible mediator despite the country's close relationship with Russia. (Others think [India](#) may be better placed to take a mediation role).

However, the proposal earned a [lukewarm reaction](#) from Russia and some Western leaders. Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov [said](#) "Any attempt to formulate theses for reaching a peaceful settlement of the problem is welcome, but, of course, the nuances are important". US President Biden [said](#) in an interview that the prospect of China negotiating peace between Ukraine and Russia is "just not rational", while the US Department of State spokesperson Ned Price said at a [news briefing](#) on 27 February that China had "very clearly" taken Russia's side and had been

"anything but an honest broker" in efforts to bring peace to Ukraine. China had provided Russia with "diplomatic support, political support, with economic support, with rhetorical support", Price added.

In contrast, the French President Emmanuel Macron [said](#) China's engagement in peace in Ukraine is a "good thing", adding that he would visit China in early April, in part to seek Beijing's help with ending the war. "China must help us put pressure on Russia so that it never uses chemical or nuclear weapons", he said. Similarly, the EU ambassador to China [said](#) "If the position paper is a positive sign for Ukraine then it's a positive sign for the [European Union], although we are studying the paper closely", adding that the proposal should not be viewed as a full peace plan. The German foreign minister also welcomed the plan, [noting](#) that China's place on the UN Security Council means that it "has an obligation to use its influence to secure world peace".

The leaders of China and Belarus – Xi Jinping and Alexander Lukashenko – issued a joint [statement](#) on 1 March calling for a ceasefire in Ukraine and negotiations to bring about a political settlement. The joint call amounted to an endorsement of Beijing's position paper.

For options of what a possible settlement for Ukraine might look like, see Cambridge University's [Ukraine Peace Settlement Project](#).

Military and financial assistance to Ukraine and Russia

Ukraine continues to rely heavily on international military and financial support from Western states. Most of the military assistance has come in the form of bilateral arms transfers, training and other support, which is being coordinated by the US-led Ukraine Defence Contact Group, which meets on an ad hoc basis and involves Ministers of Defence and senior military officials from Western-aligned states from around the world. The most recent meeting [took place](#) on 14 February during the NATO Defence Ministers meeting in Brussels. In addition, NATO agreed

at its June [Madrid Summit](#) to strengthen a 2016 [Comprehensive Assistance Package](#) for Ukraine. The additional elements to the package include both short-term assistance (ranging from fuel, protective equipment to portable anti-drone systems and secure communications) and longer-term support (to help modernize the Ukrainian armed forces to NATO interoperability standards and strengthen its defence and security institutions).

The United States is the [largest](#) provider of military assistance to Ukraine, having committed roughly \$31.7 billion since February 2022. In comparison, the top recipient in other years, Israel, received between \$3 and \$4 billion. European and other partners have [pledged](#) about \$12-15 billion in military support to Ukraine, with more to come. [The EU](#) is also providing non-lethal and lethal arms through its European Peace Facility (EPF). This is the first time the EU has approved the supply of lethal weapons to a third country. To date, the EU has committed €3.1 billion in assistance, and in October 2022, the EU also approved a new training mission for the Ukrainian armed forces.

Recent US announcements

The US President Joe Biden, and the German Chancellor Olaf Scholz [met](#) at the White House on 3 March, where both leaders praised each other's country's support towards Ukraine. "As NATO allies, we're making the alliance stronger and more capable," Biden said. Scholz told Biden that it was important that the US and Germany organised in "lockstep" since the Russian invasion of Ukraine last February. In a [statement](#) on 3 March the US announced a further military aid package of ammunition and other support for Ukraine worth \$400 million. The package will be funded using presidential drawdown authority, which authorises the president to transfer articles and services from US stocks without congressional approval during an emergency. The US has also been [hosting](#) war planning exercises in Germany for Ukrainian military officers to help them think through battlefield

decisions in the next phase of the conflict, officials have said on 2 March,

Earlier, on 20 February President Biden had made a surprise visit to Ukraine and [announced](#) another \$500 million in military aid to Ukraine and more sanctions on Russia. The visit underlined what Biden called his "unwavering support" for Ukrainian independence. "Together, we've committed nearly 700 tanks and thousands of armoured vehicles. 1,000 artillery systems, more than 2 million rounds of artillery ammunition, more than 50 advanced launch rocket systems, anti-ship and air defence systems, all to defend Ukraine," Biden said. The current announcement, Biden said, included artillery ammunition for long-range weapons like Howitzers and HIMARS, more anti-tank javelins, more anti-armour systems and air surveillance radars to protect against aerial attacks.

The US announced in January that it would supply Ukraine with 31 advanced M1 Abrams tanks worth \$400m in a matter of months, but a US army official [said](#) on 23 February that it could take up to two years for M1 Abrams tanks to be delivered to Ukraine. Meanwhile, on 4 March, Marjorie Taylor Greene, an influential far-right Republican in Congress, [called](#) for the US to stop aid to Ukraine, saying President Joe Biden was "putting the entire world at risk of world war three".

Recent European announcements

Germany will increase ammunition production as well as ensure it has enough replacement parts and repairs capacity in its military industry to better support Ukraine, the chancellor, Olaf Scholz, [said](#) on 1 March. Earlier the German Defence Minister Boris Pistorius had [said](#) he expected the contracts for the backfilling of howitzers that Berlin rushed to Ukraine last year to be signed by the end of March – months earlier than originally planned – "if everything works out". Talking to German public broadcaster ARD on 26 February, he did not specify the number of weapons to be reordered.

On the anniversary of the start of the war, several new supplies of military equipment were announced. The first four Polish Leopard tanks [arrived](#) in Ukraine, while Sweden [announced](#) that it will send up to 10 Leopard tanks and anti-aircraft systems to Ukraine. Canada will [provide](#) additional military support, including four additional Leopard tanks (doubling the number promised by Canada to eight). Spain [confirmed](#) that it will send Ukraine six Leopard tanks and is willing to increase that number to 10 if necessary; Australia will [send](#) drones to Ukraine; Finland will [send](#) three Leopard tanks; and the Czech Government [announced](#) a further military aid shipment to Ukraine.

During the Munich Security Conference Ursula von der Leyen the head of the European Commission said the EU would take “extraordinary measures” to ramp up the production, purchase and supply of weapons to Ukraine. Also speaking at the same conference on 19 February, the EU’s high representative for foreign affairs, Josep Borrell, [said](#) the war could be over “in weeks” if the EU cannot increase its supply of ammunition to Ukraine. “We are in urgent war mode,” he said. “This shortage of ammunition has to be solved quickly.” Borrell backed a call for the bloc’s members to buy arms jointly to help Ukraine but warned it would not solve Kyiv’s urgent need for more ammunition now. EU foreign ministers [discussed](#) jointly procuring ammunition to provide to Ukraine during a meeting in Brussels the next day.

Serbia has [denied](#) that it has supplied weapons to Ukraine, its Foreign Minister Ivica Dačić said. Following Moscow’s demand on 2 March to know whether Serbia provided thousands of rockets to Ukraine in its fight against Russia, Dačić said that zero weapons have been exported from the country to any parties involved in the conflict.

Meanwhile, thousands of people took part in a [demonstration](#) in central Berlin on 25 February to protest against giving more weapons to Ukraine, urging the German government to instead pave the way for negotiations with Russia. In London, Marina Litvinenko – the

widow of a defector poisoned in London – led [calls](#) for a Ukrainian victory in the war at a demonstration of several hundred outside the Russian embassy.

Combat aircraft

During visits to London, Paris and Brussels in early February (see NATO Watch [update 43](#)) (President Zelensky urged EU leaders and Britain to supply Ukraine with combat aircraft. Since then, the lobbying has continued. In an [interview](#) with the German newspaper Bild on 3 March, Ukraine’s Defence Minister Oleksii Reznikov said that he was confident that western countries would supply “two to three different types” combat aircraft to Kyiv, and that he was optimistic that the war will end this year. He believed that the supply of aircraft would be “done through a kind of coalition again”, referring to the “tank coalition” of Leopard 2 tanks from western allies. However, US President Biden [told](#) ABC News on 24 February that he has ruled out “for now” sending US F-16s to Ukraine.

Former UK prime minister’s Boris Johnson and Liz Truss urged Rishi Sunak to send combat aircraft to Ukraine during a [debate](#) in the House of Commons on 20 February. Truss said she “could not wait to see fighter jets over Ukraine” while Johnson urged the government to “cut to the chase” and “give them the planes”. The Polish Prime Minister, Mateusz Morawiecki, [said](#) on 18 February that Poland is ready to support Ukraine with its MiG jets, but only if a broader coalition is formed with the United States as a leader.

Military assistance to Russia

External military support to Russia so far has been limited to a handful of states, principally Belarus, [Iran](#) and [North Korea](#). Reports [revealed](#) that Iran smuggled drones into Russia using boats and the state airline. At least 18 of the new types of advanced long-range armed drones were delivered to Russia’s navy after Russian officers and technicians made a special visit to Tehran in November, where they were shown a full range of Iran’s technologies. However, Russia appears to have run out of its current stock of Iranian-made drones and will

seek to resupply, the UK Ministry of Defence [said](#).

Allegations that China may supply Russia with weapons

Several senior US officials have [warned](#) that China is considering providing Russia with drones and ammunition. In an [interview](#) on 26 February, for example, the CIA director, William Burns said that the US is “confident” that China is considering providing lethal equipment to support Russia in Ukraine, but noted “we also don’t see that a final decision has been made yet, and we don’t see evidence of actual shipments of lethal equipment”. On the 28 February, the US Secretary of State Antony Blinken [reiterated](#) the point. Speaking after a meeting with leaders in the Kazakh capital, Astana, Blinken warned that Beijing would face “implications and consequences” if it decided to provide such support. He had made similar [comments](#) on 19 February during a meeting with Beijing’s top diplomat, Wang Yi, at the Munich Security conference. “It is the US, not China, that has been pouring weapons into the battlefield,” [retorted](#) Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin the following day. “The US is in no position to tell China what to do”.

The NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg [echoed](#) Blinken’s claims on 23 February and warned Beijing against taking any such step. Stoltenberg said potential Chinese assistance would amount to providing direct “support to a blatant violation of international law, and of course [as] a member of the UN Security Council China should not in any way support violation of the UN charter or international law”.

China’s deputy UN ambassador, Dai Bing, [said](#) “brutal facts offer ample proof that sending weapons will not bring peace”. Dai, speaking during the UN General Assembly debate on a draft resolution urging Russia to leave Ukraine (see above), said Beijing’s “top priority is to facilitate ceasefire and cessation of hostilities without delay”, adding that it was ready to “continue playing a constructive role” in resolving the crisis in Ukraine. Germany’s

Foreign Minister, Annalena Baerbock strongly [rejected](#) Dai’s claim that the west was adding fuel to the fire by arming Ukraine. So far, China has maintained communication with all sides in the Russia-Ukraine conflict, including Kyiv (see below).

For further details on arms transfers to Ukraine, see, the [Forum on the Arms Trade](#). For a timeline of every US arms shipment to Ukraine that has been announced since the war began, see [here](#). And for a list of the total military support from Germany, see [here](#).

Humanitarian consequences of the war

Exact figures for the number of war fatalities, both military and civilian, are difficult to verify and confirm. [Undercounting and manipulation](#) of the data is common in war. According to the Supreme Commander of the Joint NATO Forces in Europe and Commander of the US Armed Forces in Europe, General Christopher Cavoli, over [200,000 Russian soldiers](#) and more than 1,800 officers have been “killed or wounded” in the war. Ukraine [claims](#) to have killed more than 153,000 Russian soldiers in the war to date. Speaking on Ukrainian tv on 2 December, Kyiv’s presidential adviser Mykhailo Podolyak [said](#) up to 13,000 Ukrainian soldiers have been killed since Russia invaded in February, apparently based on official figures from Ukraine’s general staff. However, at certain points in the war, Ukraine [said](#) that between 100 and 200 of its forces were dying each day on the battlefield, making Podolyak’s estimate seem conservative.

According to [data](#) collected by the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), as at 27 February, 6,101 civilians have died since Russia invaded Ukraine in February, including 488 children. The actual civilian casualty figures are likely to be considerably higher, as the receipt of information from some locations where intense hostilities have been going on has been delayed and many reports are still pending corroboration. According to [Action on Armed Violence](#) (AOAV) the number of civilian

casualties from explosive violence in the Ukrainian conflict reached 11, 648 people by 3 March. From this number, 4,020 were killed and 7,628 were injured. Ninety-four per cent (10,984) of civilian casualties have occurred in populated areas.

According to the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED), a disaggregated data collection, analysis and crisis mapping project, there were a total of 28,357 conflict-related fatalities in Ukraine in 2022 (see table).

Table: ACLED conflict-related fatalities data for Ukraine 2018-22

Event type	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Battles	703	265	40	57	12163
Explosions/Remote violence	155	97	68	88	15025
Protests, riots and strategic developments	12	15	0	0	4
Violence against civilians	19	26	5	4	1165
Total	889	403	113	149	28357

Source: [ACLED dashboard](#); accessed 18 January 2023

The number of refugees from the conflict have now surpassed 8 million. As of 28 February, there were 8,104,606 [refugees](#) from Ukraine recorded across Europe, 4,881,590 of whom were registered for Temporary Protection or similar national protection schemes in Europe. This gives them the right to live and work in any EU country and benefit from housing and schooling assistance.

On 17 February the World Health Organization [appealed](#) for more funds to support Ukraine’s health sector, which has been severely damaged by the war. Ukraine needed more funds to ensure mental health, rehabilitation and community access to health services, said the WHO regional director for Europe, Hans Kluge, in a briefing in the Ukrainian city of Zhytomyr.

Continuing concerns about nuclear facilities

A new team of nuclear experts from the International Atomic Energy Agency have

taken up their post at the Russian-occupied Zaporizhzhia nuclear power station in southern Ukraine after a delay of almost a month, the IAEA chief, Rafael Grossi said. In a [statement](#) on 2 March, Grossi said the presence of IAEA monitors at the station was indispensable to help reduce the risk of a nuclear accident”. There have been ongoing fears Russia’s relentless targeting of Ukraine’s electricity grid will threaten the safety of the country’s nuclear power plants. Most international concern has focused on the Zaporizhzhia plant, which is in Russian hands but operated by Ukrainian workers. It is Europe’s largest, provided about a fifth of Ukraine’s electricity before Russia’s invasion, was shut down in September due to fighting in and around it, and has been forced to operate on backup generators several times since. These events raised concerns about the potential for a [nuclear accident](#). A 14-member IAEA [expert mission](#) carried out an inspection of the plant in early September. For further details see NATO Watch updates [23](#) through to [27](#). The IAEA now has a permanent presence at all five of Ukraine’s nuclear facilities.

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On the risk of nuclear war

There have been [concerns](#) for many months that the war in Ukraine might escalate to the use of nuclear, chemical or biological weapons. Russia's former president Dmitry Medvedev said in [remarks](#) published on 27 February, for example, that the continued arms supply to Kyiv risks a global nuclear catastrophe, reiterating his threat of nuclear war over Ukraine. Medvedev's apocalyptic rhetoric has been seen as an attempt to deter Kyiv's western allies from getting even more involved in the war.

Meanwhile, President Putin announced on 21 February that Moscow would suspend its participation in the New START treaty, threatening the end of the last remaining nuclear arms control agreement between the United States and Russia. Putin made the pledge during his annual State of the Nation [address](#), when he accused Western nations of provoking the conflict in Ukraine. The treaty limits the US and Russian strategic nuclear weapon stockpiles and gives each country opportunities to inspect the other's nuclear sites. Russia says it will continue to respect the caps established by the treaty, but that it will no longer allow inspections.

In his speech, Putin justified the suspension in the following terms: "In early February, the North Atlantic alliance made a statement with actual demand to Russia, as they put it, to

return to the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty, including admission of inspections to our nuclear defence facilities. I don't even know what to call this. It is a kind of theatre of the absurd," he said. "We know the West is directly involved in the Kyiv regime's attempt to strike at our strategic aviation bases. The drones used for this purpose were equipped and updated with the assistance of NATO specialists. And now they want to inspect our defence facilities? In the current conditions of confrontation, it simply sounds insane". NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg said 21 February that Russia's decision to suspend participation in the treaty made the world a more dangerous place, and he urged Moscow to reconsider.

Rose Gottemoeller and Marshall L. Brown, Jr., [Legal aspects of Russia's New START suspension provide opportunities for US policy makers](#), Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, 2 March 2023

Jon Wolfsthal, [Understanding Putin's Announcement Suspending New START](#), Blog, 27 February 2023

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John Mecklin, [Interview: Steve Fetter on the meaning of Putin's New START announcement](#), Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, 21 February 2023

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Carl Conetta, [Tempting Armageddon: The Likelihood of Russian Nuclear Use is Misconstrued in Western Policy](#), Project on Defense Alternatives, 1 February 2023

On investigations of war crimes in Ukraine

The UN Secretary General António Guterres [warned](#) on 27 February that respect for human rights has gone into reverse, and called for a renewal of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 75 years after its signing. Pointing to the war in Ukraine, and threats to rights from soaring poverty, hunger and climate disasters, he said the declaration was "under assault from all sides". He said the "Russian invasion of Ukraine has triggered the most massive violations of human rights" being witnessed in the world today. "It has unleashed widespread death, destruction and displacement," he said.

For example, evidence collected from Kherson in southern Ukraine shows Russian torture centres were not "random" but instead planned and directly financed by the Russian state, a team of Ukrainian and international lawyers headed by a UK barrister [said](#) on 2 March. Similarly, at the Munich Security Conference on 18 February, US Vice President Kamala Harris [announced](#) that the United States had formally determined Russia committed crimes against humanity in Ukraine. US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken followed up by saying in a [statement](#), "We reserve crimes against humanity determinations for the most egregious crimes. These acts are not random or spontaneous, they are part of the Kremlin's widespread and systematic attack against Ukraine's civilian population".

International fact-finding missions and investigations have identified clear patterns of violation of international humanitarian law and international human rights law in Ukraine since the Russian invasion in February 2022. The violations are wide-ranging, including the conduct of fighting as well as treatment of prisoners of war, forced abductions, torture, restriction of civil and human rights, and denial of essential services. The United Nations, the International Court of Justice, the Organization

for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), the European Court of Human Rights, the ICC and Ukrainian national courts have all been active in attempting to hold criminals accountable.

The ICC, for example, opened an [investigation](#) into possible war crimes in Ukraine just days after Moscow's forces invaded and it dispatched dozens of investigators to the country to gather evidence. A substantial ICC investigative team [appears](#) to be working in Ukraine on a near permanent basis. Similarly, within the OSCE the Moscow Mechanism was activated to establish two expert missions to investigate violations and abuses committed in the war (see the subsequent [April](#) and [June](#) reports). On 14 July, 45 countries [agreed](#) at a conference in the Hague to coordinate investigations into suspected war crimes in Ukraine. In October, a [report](#) published by the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine found reasonable grounds to conclude that an array of war crimes, violations of human rights and international humanitarian law have been committed in Ukraine. Russian armed forces are responsible for the vast majority of the violations identified. Finally, a [report](#) published on 7 December by OHCHR said Russian forces killed at least 441 civilians in the early days of Moscow's invasion of Ukraine. The report documents attacks in dozens of towns and summary executions that it said might be war crimes. The actual number of victims in the Kyiv, Chernihiv and Sumy regions was likely to be much higher, the UN human rights office added. The report covers the period from the invasion's start on 24 February until early April, when Russian forces withdrew from those three areas.

On 24 February a "people's court" [endorsed](#) an indictment against President Putin for the crime of aggression and called for his arrest. After a week of hearings in The Hague, a panel of three international legal experts issued the order and called on the international community "to take every step necessary to ensure that a court with legal powers issues an indictment against Putin and takes appropriate measures to arrest the perpetrator and put

him on trial in an official Ukraine tribunal as soon as possible". Meanwhile, at least 6,000 children from Ukraine have attended Russian "re-education" camps in the past year, according to a [report](#) published by the Yale Humanitarian Research Lab on 14 February. Russia has also unnecessarily expedited the adoption and fostering of children from Ukraine in what could constitute a war crime, it said.

Charli Carpenter, [The West Can Help Ukraine Keep the Moral High Ground on Human Rights](#), World Politics Review, 28 February 2023 (paywall)

Iuliia Osmolovska, [Special Tribunal for the political leadership of Russia: Just Punishment for War Crimes](#), Globesec Policy Brief, 16 February 2023

Jeremy Scahill, [U.S. Hypocrisy on War Crimes Is a Gift to Putin](#), The Intercept, 10 February 2023

On sanctions against Russia and post-war reconstruction in Ukraine

On the anniversary of the invasion of Ukraine, more sanctions against Russia were announced. The G7 [announced](#) a range of further economic, military and financial sanctions against Russia, including against Russian diamond exports. The G7 is understood to be setting up an "enforcement coordination mechanism" to stop evasion of its sanctions already imposed. The UK [said](#) it was banning the export of every item Russia has been found using on the battlefield to date, a list covering hundreds of goods, including aircraft parts, radio equipment and electronic components. The British government also imposed sanctions on senior executives at Russia's state-owned nuclear power company Rosatom, who Ukraine says are complicit in the seizure and forced nationality change of the staff of the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant and their children. Australia will [expand](#) sanctions against the Russian government, military and media figures, including travel bans and asset freezes for a further 90 Russian individuals and 40 Russian entities, including the state-owned media outlet Sputnik. Finally, the EU [agreed](#) to impose a 10th package of

sanctions on Russia in response to its invasion of Ukraine. The latest round of sanctions tackled the banking sector, advanced technologies and Russia's access to technology that could be used for civilian and military purposes.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine galvanized the US, UK and EU, and a handful of other Western-aligned countries, to unleash a series of [sanctions](#) meant to punish Vladimir Putin's government and pressure him to pull his forces back. While the sanctions lists are sometimes difficult to interpret, the EU has [sanctioned](#) 1,236 individuals and 115 entities—an approximate doubling of its entire sanctions portfolio across the dozens of sanctions regimes it implements; the UK Government has [frozen](#) more than £18bn of assets belonging to oligarchs and other Russians and UK [sanctions](#) have been imposed on 1,271 people according to [the annual review](#) of the Office of Financial Sanctions Implementation (OFSI), published on 10 November; and the US has [sanctioned](#) more than 1,000 individuals or organizations since the invasion. The numbers, and the pace of the rollout, dwarf the sanctions lists for the likes of Iran, North Korea, Libya, the thematic counterterrorism lists, and all others.

A group of ministers from 35 countries met online on 10 February to coordinate their [demand](#) for a ban on Russian and Belarusian athletes at the 2024 Paris Olympics. However, the head of the International Olympic Committee Thomas Bach [rejected](#) the call to ban Russian athletes. Speaking at the World Ski Championships in France on 12 February, Bach said that while he shared the “grief and human suffering” of Ukrainian athletes, national governments should not decide who takes part in international sporting events. The International Olympic Committee had recently moved away from having an outright ban on athletes from Russia and Belarus and is investigating ways they can qualify for the Olympics under a neutral flag.

Yaroslav Zhalilo, [The Revival of Bank Crediting in the Wartime Economy of Ukraine](#), Globesec Policy Brief, 28 February 2023

Yaroslav Zhalilo, [The promotion of business resilience in wartime and post-war recovery](#), Globesec Policy Brief, 27 February 2023

Zoriana Mishchuk, [The Green Recovery of Ukraine: a Challenging but Non-Negotiable Way to Succeed in the World of Tomorrow](#), Globesec Policy Brief, 16 February 2023

On global food security

Russia [said](#) on 1 March that it would only agree to extend the Black Sea grain deal if the interests of its agricultural producers were taken into account. The deal, brokered by the UN and Turkey in 2022, allows safe exports from Ukrainian ports and is up for renewal on 18 March. The war in Ukraine has not only led to a [significant spike](#) in food insecurity in Ukraine, it has also had a major impact on global supply chains and international trade in food and fertilizers. This has partly led to 50 million more people—the majority of them outside Ukraine—having potentially become severely food insecure since the invasion.

Caroline Delgado, Marie Riquier and Kristina Tschunkert, [War in the breadbasket: One year in](#), SIPRI Commentary, 24 February 2023

On energy security in Europe

Europe is striving to diversify its energy supply sources to curb its dependence on Russia. Gas shortages have been occurring across Europe and governments have been pushing to develop alternative supplies. For example, Poland's largest oil company, PKN Orlen, has stopped receiving oil via the Druzhba pipeline from Russia, its CEO, Daniel Obajtek, [said](#) on 25 February. Orlen said it could fully supply its refineries via sea and that consumers would not be affected by the halt. Russian oil accounts for about 10% of Polish supply. The West accuses Russia of restricting energy supplies to boost prices in retaliation for sanctions imposed after Moscow's invasion of Ukraine. Russia denies it is to blame, and instead attributes responsibility to Western sanctions and various technical problems.

Investigations by Denmark, Germany and Sweden into explosions on the Nord Stream

gas pipelines have not yet concluded, the three countries [said](#) on 21 February as the UN Security Council met to discuss the September 2022 incident. Russia, which called for the meeting, wants the Council to ask for an independent inquiry into the blasts on the pipelines connecting Russia and Germany. NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg [announced](#) on 15 February 2023 the creation of a Critical Undersea Infrastructure Coordination Cell at NATO Headquarters. “The centre will facilitate engagement with industry and bring key military and civilian stakeholders together”, Stoltenberg said, adding that the centre will also share best practices, leverage innovate technologies and boost the security of allied undersea infrastructure”. The sabotage of the Nord Stream pipelines highlighted the vulnerability of undersea energy pipelines and communication cables. In response, NATO member states increased their military presence around key infrastructure, including with ships and patrol aircraft. In January 2023, NATO and the EU also set up a joint task force to protect critical infrastructure.

On 8 February, Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Seymour Hersh [published](#) an article claiming that a covert US military operation in June 2022 was responsible for the destruction of the Nord Stream pipelines. The claim has been met with [scepticism](#) by other journalists and denials from US government officials. The claims appear to be largely based on an anonymous single source.

According to the Dutch intelligence agency MIVD, Russia has been [trying](#) to gain intelligence to sabotage critical infrastructure in the Dutch part of the North Sea. A Russian ship was detected at an offshore windfarm in the North Sea as it tried to map out energy infrastructure, before being escorted by Dutch marine and coast guard ships before any sabotage effort could become successful, MIVD head, Gen Jan Swillens, said on 20 February.

Kelley Beaucar Vlahos, [The Sy Hersh effect: killing the messenger, ignoring the message](#), Responsible Statecraft, 16 February 2023

[NATO stands up undersea infrastructure coordination cell](#), NATO News Release, 15 February 2023

Seymour Hersh, [How America Took Out The Nord Stream Pipeline](#), Substack, 8 February 2023

On China’s position on the war

Despite widespread Western criticism of China’s position on the war in Ukraine, and the claim in NATO’s new [Strategic Concept](#) of a “deepening strategic partnership” between China and Russia, there is no evidence that China has been giving material support for Russia’s war in Ukraine. However, China’s Foreign Minister Wang Yi [indicated](#) in a video address on 25 December that Beijing will deepen ties with Moscow in the coming year. Yi [met](#) Vladimir Putin in Moscow on 23 February, as China and Russia reaffirmed their close bilateral relationship. Wang told Putin that Beijing will play a “constructive” role in reaching a political settlement of the crisis in Ukraine, Russian state-owned Tass news agency reported. Earlier Yi met Sergei Lavrov, Russia’s Foreign Minister, where he [said](#) he expected to reach a “new consensus” on advancing the relationship between the two countries. Xi Jinping, China’s president, is expected to visit Putin in Russia in the coming months.

As noted above, China is now being touted both as a potential mediator in the conflict and a supplier of lethal aid to Russia. Foreign Minister Qi Gang said on 21 February that Beijing would seek to provide “[Chinese wisdom](#)” to bring about peace talks, but Western leaders claim that China is seriously considering [delivering weapons to Russia](#), while warning China sternly against doing so. The United States is also [reportedly](#) sounding out close allies about the possibility of imposing new sanctions on China if Beijing provides military support to Russia. The consultations, which are still at a preliminary stage, are intended to gain support from a range of countries, especially those in the G7, to coordinate support for any possible restrictions.

[In about a hundred words on China considering delivering arms to Russia](#), Globesec Commentary, 3 March 2023

Marie-Anne Brouillon, [What is China playing at? Beijing's Difficult Navigation of Neutrality and Rivalry](#), Globesec Commentary, 28 February 2023

Dan Smith, [Ukraine, 1 year on: China's peace plan is not a plan](#), Blog, 26 February 2023

[West reacts with skepticism to Chinese ceasefire proposal for Ukraine](#), Reuters, 24 February 2023

Connor Echols, [Diplomacy Watch: China's peace plan draws mixed reactions](#), Responsible Statecraft, 24 February 2023

[NATO Secretary General casts doubt over China's peace plan](#), Kyiv Independent, 24 February 2023

[NATO chief warns China against supplying arms to Russia](#), Al Jazeera, 23 February 2023

[NATO chief warns on growing Russia, China ties](#), Alarabiya News, 17 February 2023

On developments within Ukraine

Ukrainians survived the past winter thanks to government efforts to ensure energy and heat, but Russia still poses a threat to the generating system, President Zelensky [said](#) on 1 March. "Winter is over. It was a very difficult one and every Ukrainian, without exaggeration, felt the difficulties" he said in a video [message](#) delivered after a meeting on energy issues. "But we managed to provide Ukraine with energy and heat. The threat to the energy system remains".

Women in Ukraine are increasingly vulnerable to sexual violence 12 months after Russia invaded the country, with [reports](#) of abuse on the rise, according to a leading humanitarian organisation in the country. Women fleeing from bombed houses and their home towns are reporting attacks occurring in the home and in communal shelters, said Marysia Zapasnik, Ukraine country director for the International Rescue Committee.

The president of the European parliament, Roberta Metsola, called for Ukraine to be allowed to begin EU membership negotiations this year, during a visit to the country on 4 March. She was "hopeful" the talks could start

this year, she [said](#). The Ukrainian authorities have dismissed dozens of officials in recent months and opened investigations as part of a widespread drive against corruption. The EU says addressing corruption is a requirement for membership.

Oleksandr V Danylyuk, [How Ukraine's Defence Industry Can Reduce Russian Geopolitical Influence](#), RUSI Commentary, 23 February 2023

Andrew Wilson, [In the Shadow of War, Ukraine's New Political Order Is Taking Shape](#), World Politics Review, 22 February 2023 (paywall)

Dmytro Tuzhanskyi, [How Ukraine must develop its minority policy to avoid the "ethnic trap" during EU accession negotiations, and how international partners could help](#), Globesec Policy Brief, 16 February 2023

On developments within Russia

President Putin [praised](#) soldiers who are "fighting heroically, courageously, bravely" to "defend the fatherland" in a speech at a rally in Moscow to mark a year of war in Ukraine. Thousands gathered at Luzhniki stadium in Moscow to attend a concert marking the "Defenders of the Fatherland" Day. Meanwhile, in an interview with the state TV channel Rossiya on 27 February, President Putin [accused](#) the west of seeking to "dismember" Russia and to turn the vast country into a series of weak mini-states. He claimed that the US and NATO wanted to "inflict a strategic defeat on us", and the aim, he said, was to "make our people suffer".

The Kremlin [claimed](#) Russia had been attacked by "terrorists" after conflicting reports of firefights emerged from the Bryansk and Kursk regions, which Russian media blamed on Ukrainian "sabotage groups". The reports of fighting in Russia near the Ukrainian border began on 2 March. The head of the Bryansk region claimed that a "sabotage group opened fire on a moving automobile. As a result, one resident was killed; a 10-year-old child was injured". In Ukraine, the reports were quickly [interpreted](#) as a "false flag" attack launched by Russia to discredit the Ukrainian armed forces. There was no immediate video or photo of the fighting to confirm the reports of deaths.

Earlier on 28 February in a [speech](#) to FSB officials President Putin had instructed the agency to strengthen its activity to counter what he described as growing espionage and sabotage operations against Russia by Ukraine and its western allies. He also admitted that FSB members had been killed in Ukraine.

Meanwhile, a military drone targeted a gas facility in the Moscow region on 28 February, [according](#) to a senior Russian official, and photos of the wreckage suggested it was Ukrainian-made, indicating a rare attempted strike hundreds of miles behind Russian lines. The alleged attack was one of several reports of successful or attempted unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) strikes in at least four regions of Russia. Russia's airport in St Petersburg temporarily suspended all flights amid [reports](#) of an unidentified object such as a drone being seen nearby. Some flights were diverted back to Moscow while the airport was shut for about an hour. Russia's defence ministry later announced there had been a training exercise between air defences and civilian aviation authorities. The Russian defence ministry [said](#) it stopped two attempted Ukrainian attacks on Russian soil using drones, while emergency services put out a fire at an oil depot in southern Russia after a drone was spotted flying overhead, the RIA news agency [said](#).

A hacking attack caused some Russian regional broadcasters to put out a false warning on 28 February urging people to take shelter from an incoming missile attack, the emergencies ministry [said](#). "As a result of the hacking of servers of radio stations and TV channels, in some regions of the country information about the announcement of an air alert was broadcast. This information is false and does not correspond to reality". A similar attack caused commercial radio stations in some Russian regions to send air alarm messages on 22 February.

Russia brought [new legal amendments](#) to parliament on 1 March that further strengthen the country's [censorship laws](#), envisaging up to 15 years in jail for discrediting the armed forces or voluntary military organisations such as the Wagner group. Meanwhile, on 15 February,

the Russian journalist Maria Ponomarenko was [sentenced](#) to six years in prison in Russia for "distributing false information about the Russian army" after she posted on social media about the attack on the drama theatre in Mariupol. She was also banned from journalism for five years.

Jade McGlynn, [Russians Are Buying Into Putin's Ukraine War Propaganda—for Now](#), World Politics Review, 24 February 2023 (paywall)

Anonymous Author, [Letter from St. Petersburg, a year in: Russia is still not at war](#), Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, 24 February 2023

Francis Lee-Saunders, [Ukraine War: Will Russia Declare another Round of Mobilization?](#) Geopolitical Monitor, 23 February 2023

Emily Ferris, [Russia and Putin's Latest Speech: A Series of Unfortunate Events](#), RUSI Commentary, 23 February 2023

Frida Ghitis, [Russia's Brain Drain Is Helping Putin](#), World Politics Review, 16 February 2023 (paywall)

Darya Dolzikova, [Atoms for Sale: Developments in Russian Nuclear Energy Exports](#), RUSI Special Report, 14 February 2023

On developments within Belarus

Belarusian anti-war partisans [claimed](#) to have severely damaged a Russian military aircraft in what an opposition leader called the "most successful diversion" since the beginning of the war. BYPOL, the Belarusian partisan organisation, said it had used drones to strike the Machulishchy airfield 12km from Minsk, severely damaging a Beriev A-50 airborne early warning and control aircraft (Awacs). The damage to the aircraft has not been independently confirmed, although both Russian and Belarusian military bloggers reported explosions on 26 February at the airfield. One also confirmed "damage to a Russian military transport plane". Meanwhile, the US-based thinktank the Institute for the Study of War [warned](#) on 21 February 2023 that NATO must "seriously plan" for the likely future reality of a Russian-controlled Belarus. And on 16 February President Alexander Lukashenko [warned](#) that Belarus would fight

alongside ally Russia if another country launched an attack against it.

On developments within NATO

NATO Defence Ministers meeting

The two-day NATO Defence Ministerial meeting in Brussels on 14-15 February discussed three main issues: (a)Stepping up support to Ukraine – this included a meeting of the Ukraine Defence Contact Group; Progress on strengthening NATO’s defence and deterrence, including discussions on increasing military production and the protection of critical undersea infrastructure; and NATO’s commitments to “other partners at risk”, including Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia and Moldova. The key activities and decisions taken were as follows:

- NATO member states agreed to step up support for Ukraine, including through more heavy weapons and military training. The Ministers also agreed to step up support to “other partners at risk”, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia and Moldova.
- New Political Guidance for Defence Planning was agreed. The guidance document was not made publicly available, despite setting out NATO’s overall aims and objectives that will largely determine capability requirements in the next four years.
- Ministers addressed ways to boost industrial capacity and replenish stockpiles of armaments and munitions, and agreed to work “hand-in-hand” with the defence industry to increase industrial capacity. NATO capability targets for munition stockpiles are already under review.
- The NATO Secretary General announced the establishment of a Critical Undersea Infrastructure Coordination Cell at NATO Headquarters.
- Ministers also discussed the importance of increasing military spending and building on the existing ‘defence investment pledge’ and future commitments beyond 2024.
- Twenty-five member states, plus Finland and Sweden, agreed six new major commitments to jointly develop and procure systems securing NATO’s access to

cutting edge technology (including Ground-based Air Defence, Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear Defence, and Mobility/ Counter Mobility).

- Sixteen member states, plus Finland and Sweden, launched the “largest space project in NATO’s history”: a new initiative called ‘Alliance Persistent Surveillance from Space’ - a virtual constellation of both national and commercial satellites providing data collection, sharing and analysis within NATO.
- Denmark and Sweden joined the European Sky Shield Initiative, now a 17-member initiative to strengthen NATO’s European Integrated Air and Missile Defence.

For further details, see [NATO Watch briefing No.103](#), dated 25 February 2023

The Bucharest Nine

Ahead of a meeting on 22 February of the leaders of the [Bucharest Nine](#) (B9), a collection of member states on the most eastern parts of NATO and closest to Russia, President Biden [vowed](#) that the US will defend “literally every inch of NATO” territory. All members of the B9 condemned Russia’s war in Ukraine in a [joint statement](#). Washington is also [reportedly](#) in talks with Berlin and Warsaw to hold joint military manoeuvres in Poland in response to Russia’s threat to the eastern border of NATO.

A new Secretary General

There are [no plans](#) to extend Jens Stoltenberg’s mandate for a fourth time, NATO said on 12 February. "The mandate of Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg has been extended three times, and he has served for a total of almost nine years", spokeswoman Oana Lungescu said. "The Secretary-General's term comes to an end in October of this year, and he has no intention to seek another extension of his mandate". It follows a report by the German newspaper, Welt am Sonntag, that reported member states wanted him to stay on while the war in Ukraine continues. This announcement generated a new round of speculation about his successor. UK Defence Minister [Ben Wallace](#) is one of a number of potential candidates. There has also been

speculation that it could be woman for the first time, or someone from Eastern Europe. France also prefers an EU candidate. Diplomats in Brussels say there is no consensus as to who the replacement should be.

NATO engagement with China

On 23rd February 2023, under the auspices of the NATO Cooperative Security Division, NATO hosted the seventh iteration of its military staff talks with China, at NATO HQ in Brussels. According to the NATO [news release](#), Topics raised at the meeting included: the global security situation, with special emphasis on Russia's illegal war in Ukraine, maritime security; NATO's new Strategic Concept and China's military modernisation.

[Russia says US, NATO undermining security in Asia-Pacific](#), Anadolu Agency, 4 March 2023

Liam Hoare, [Austria — it's time to join NATO](#), Politico, 3 March 2023

[Alarm Raised Over NATO Airpower Weaknesses: 'Real Threats Were Ignored'](#), Newsweek, 27 February 2023

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Paul Mcleary and Lili Bayer, [NATO on the precipice](#), Politico, 24 February 2023

[NATO hosts 7th military staff talks with China](#), NATO News Release, 23 February 2023

[Biden reassures eastern NATO allies on security after Putin's nuclear warning](#), Reuters, 22 February 2023

[In Poland, Biden says 'NATO is stronger than it's ever been'](#), Politico, 21 February 2023

[US to host NATO members for 2024 summit, Biden says](#), The Hill, 21 February 2023

[NATO Secretary General welcomes Ukraine Foreign Minister Kuleba and EU High Representative Borrell to NATO Headquarters](#), NATO News Release, 21 February 2023

[Earthquake relief: NATO temporary housing containers depart for Türkiye](#), NATO News Release, 19 February 2023

[NATO chief to Europe: Time to talk China](#), Politico, 18 February 2023

[Opening remarks](#) by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg at the Munich Security Conference session "Beyond the Alliance: Partnering up for European Security", 18 February 2023

[Beijing is 'watching closely' if Russia succeeds in Ukraine, NATO says, flagging rising China challenge](#), CNBC News, 18 February 2023

[Ukraine war: NATO's focus is on heavy weapons and training - not sending fighter jets](#), Sky News, 17 February 2023

[Moldova to Receive NATO Aid Amid Russia's 'Hybrid Warfare'](#), Newsweek, 17 February 2023

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[Press conference](#) with Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg and the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu, 16 February 2023

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[European Sky Shield Initiative gains two more participants](#), NATO News Release, 15 February 2023

[Norwegian "flying ambulance" is helping earthquake victims in Türkiye](#), NATO News Release, 15 February 2023

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[Polish president calls on NATO to act fast if Russia attacks](#), Anadolu Agency, 15 February 2023

[NATO Defence Ministers step up support for Ukraine, strengthen deterrence and defence](#), NATO News Release, 15 February 2023

[German defence minister backs raising NATO spending goal](#), Reuters, 15 February 2023

[Doorstep statement](#) by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg ahead of the meetings of NATO Defence Ministers in Brussels, 14 February 2023

[Nato chief says 'no signs' Putin wants peace as he issues ammunition call](#), The Guardian, 14 February 2023

[NATO to increase targets for ammunition stockpiles as war depletes reserves](#), Reuters, 14 February 2023

[Secretary General calls for more support to Ukraine as NATO Defence Ministers meet](#), NATO News Release, 14 February 2023

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[NATO Chief's Departure Plan Relaunches Succession Race](#), VoA, 12 February 2023

[NATO chief has 'no intention' of extending tenure](#), Deutsche Welle, 12 February 2023

[Summit prepares ground for 'NATOisation of Europe' and continues collision course with China and high levels of military spending](#), NATO Watch Briefing No.96, 6 July 2022

On Finland and Sweden joining NATO

Finland and Sweden were invited to join NATO, after a [trilateral memorandum](#) with Turkey agreed on the eve of the NATO Madrid Summit assuaged Ankara's previous objections. The two Nordic countries will become NATO members after the Accession Protocol is ratified by all 30 member states. The invitation to Finland and Sweden represents a major geopolitical shift in Europe as the two countries move away from neutrality. To date, 28 NATO member states have ratified the decision. Hungary and Turkey are the two member states where parliaments have not yet been asked to vote on the issue.

NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg has made several remarks on the issue. Meeting defence ministers in Brussels on 14 February, he [told](#) reporters, "The main question is not whether Finland and Sweden are ratified together. The main question is that they are both ratified as full members as soon as possible". Speaking at a joint news conference in Ankara with Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu on 16 February he [said](#) that the "time is now" for Turkey to ratify the applications. Speaking at a joint press conference with Finland's prime minister, Sanna Marin, in Helsinki on 28 February, he [said](#) Finland and Sweden joining was a "top priority" and that the Nordic countries have had the "quickest accession process in NATO's modern history".

The assumption is that Turkey is likely to wait until after a general election in June 2023, but ratification by Turkey is still by no means certain. Turkey has made its approval conditional on Stockholm cracking down on exiled Kurdish militants and other groups that Ankara considers a threat to its national security. Turkey's Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu said on 27 February that talks with Sweden and Finland would resume on 9 March, after a delay in January in the wake of a Quran-burning [protest](#) (see [NATO Watch update 40](#)), which it later transpired was [funded](#) by a far-right journalist with links to Kremlin-backed media. The meeting will take place in Brussels and will include discussion on the implementation of the memorandum signed between the countries. Cavusoglu also [said](#) Sweden had still not fulfilled its obligations under the memorandum.

Meanwhile, Finland's parliament on 1 March ratified NATO's founding treaties. Approval of the NATO accession passed with 184 members of the 200-seat parliament voting in favour, seven against and one abstaining. The vote increases the chances of it becoming a member before its neighbour Sweden. Both had previously said they want to join "[hand in hand](#)". Hungary's President Katalin Novák [urged](#) parliamentarians on 1 March to ratify Finland and Sweden's NATO entry "as soon as possible". "It is a complex decision, with

serious consequences, so careful consideration is necessary,” Novák said.

Luke McGee, [Turkey is blocking NATO's expansion. It could backfire and hand Putin a propaganda coup](#), CNN, 5 March 2023

[“Sweden and Finland’s Accession to NATO Fundamentally Changes How We Think About the Defense of Norway”](#), High North News, 3 March 2023

[Hungary further delays vote on Sweden, Finland joining NATO](#), Associated Press, 2 March 2023

[Finland’s MPs approve legislation paving way for country to join Nato](#), The Guardian, 1 March 2023

[Finnish parliament passes NATO bill with large majority](#), Reuters, 1 March 2023

[Hungary’s Viktor Orbán plays spoilsport on NATO accession for Finland](#), Sweden, Politico, 28 February 2023

[Secretary General in Helsinki: time to welcome Finland and Sweden as NATO members](#), NATO News Release, 28 February 2023

[Statement](#) by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg with the Prime Minister of Finland, Sanna Marin, 28 February 2023

[Türkiye can't approve Sweden's NATO bid if Stockholm doesn't fulfill pledges](#), Anadolu Agency, 27 February 2023

[Turkey's NATO talks with Sweden and Finland to resume on March 9](#), Reuters, 27 February 2023

[Hungarian parliament faces dispute over Sweden, Finland’s NATO membership](#), Anadolu Agency, 24 February 2023

Marja Heinonen, [Finland wants to join NATO. But it may have to ditch an old friend to do so](#), CNN, 24 February 2023

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[Sweden warns against decoupling its Nato bid from Finland’s](#), Financial Times, 19 February 2023

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[Finland and Sweden’s plans to join NATO could be delayed after Turkey’s devastating earthquake](#), CNBC, 17 February 2023

[Finland's NATO membership is now in "Turkey's hands", Finnish president says](#), Reuters, 17 February 2023

Eugene Kogan, [Turkey Holds the Nordic Countries at Gunpoint: Implications for NATO](#), RUSI Commentary, 16 February 2023

[NATO chief says 'time is now' for Turkey to ratify Finland and Sweden membership bids](#), Reuters, 16 February 2023

For further details see:

[Murky trilateral agreement results in Turkey lifting objections to Finland and Sweden’s NATO application](#), NATO Watch News Brief, 29 June 2022

[Should Finland and Sweden hold a referendum on NATO membership?](#) NATO Watch Briefing no. 93, 6 May 2022

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