



# News Brief Update 48

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## Russia's war with Ukraine

(Update covering the period 15 May – 8 July 2023)

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### Overview

Five hundred days after Russia's full-scale invasion, its attacks on Ukrainian cities continue, while Ukraine's much anticipated [counteroffensive](#) slowly advances. Ukrainian troops went on the attack at multiple points along the frontline in the Donetsk region on 5 June, driving back Russian forces in at least two areas in what appeared to be the [preliminary stages](#) of Ukraine's counteroffensive. Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba [said](#) Ukraine has enough weapons to begin its counteroffensive, and the operation will give the country the victory it needs to join NATO. However, membership of NATO remains unlikely until after the end of active hostilities (see below). The Chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff, Army General Mark Milley, [said](#) on 1 July that Ukraine's counteroffensive "is going to take six, eight, 10 weeks, it's going to be very difficult. It's going to be very long, and it's going to be very, very bloody. And no one should have any illusions about any of that". Ukrainian forces are advancing "slowly but surely" on the frontlines in the east and south-east of the country as well as around the longstanding flashpoint of Bakhmut, senior military officials have [said](#).

So far, only modest territorial gains appear to have been made by the Ukrainian forces, which is in keeping with leaked Pentagon documents (see NATO Watch [Update 47](#)) that [predicted](#) "enduring Ukrainian deficiencies in training and munitions supplies probably will strain progress and exacerbate casualties during the offensive". According to Western [assessments](#),

Ukraine is taking significant casualties, although heavy casualties were being [reported](#) by both Ukrainian and Russian forces. NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg [said](#) on 14 June that alliance members must ensure Ukraine keeps getting enough arms to pursue its counteroffensive, but warned, “It is still early days and we do not know if this will be a turning point”. President Putin [claimed](#) on 13 June that Ukrainian losses are near “catastrophic” and that the counterattack had not been successful in any area. The commander of Ukraine’s ground forces, Col Gen Oleksandr Syrskiy [said](#) on 23 June that the main force of his offensive reserve was yet to be committed into battle with Russia, while President Zelensky [said](#) in a TV interview broadcast on 5 July that slow weapons deliveries to Ukraine delayed Kyiv’s planned counteroffensive, allowing Russia to bolster its defences.

Despite growing calls for an end to the war, diplomacy remains stalled (see below). Several recent developments indicate the war could instead be expanding beyond Ukraine’s borders. Russia has begun deploying tactical nuclear weapons to Belarus (see below), while pro-Ukrainian fighters from Russia have attacked sites in the Russian region of Belgorod. In addition to these cross-border raids drone attacks inside Russia have increased, although Ukraine almost never publicly claims responsibility for attacks inside Russia (see below). Moreover, the ongoing risk of escalation (and inadvertent consequences) of the war were highlighted by two recent key events: the destruction of the Nova Kakhovka dam and the short-lived Wagner Group insurrection (see below). The humanitarian and ecological toll from the destruction of the dam is massive and mounting, while the repercussions from the Wagner mutiny remain uncertain.

## **Destruction of the Nova Kakhovka dam**

The Nova Kakhovka hydro-electric dam—located on the Dnipro river about 70 kilometres upstream of the city of Kherson in the Russian controlled part of southern

Ukraine—was [destroyed](#) on 6 June unleashing a flood of water across the region that inundated dozens of towns. Many of the flooded towns are in an active war zone, complicating a reliable count of casualties and the Ukrainian aid response, which was further hindered by continuing Russian attacks.

Ukraine accused Russian forces of blowing up the dam, while Russian news agencies said the dam had been destroyed in shelling; a Russian-installed official said it was a terrorist attack. About 42,000 people were [said](#) to be at risk from flooding on both sides of the Dnipro River. About 600 sq km of the Kherson region was under water on 8 June, the regional governor Oleksandr Prokudin [said](#), adding that 68% of the flooded territory was on the Russian-occupied left bank of the Dnipro River. He also said almost 2,000 people had left flooded territory.

President Zelensky [condemned](#) the attack as “an environmental bomb of mass destruction”, and said the evacuation of people and the urgent provision of drinking water were top priorities. Forty-one people were still missing in the floods caused by the collapse of the Kakhovka dam, while the death toll stood at 10 people, Ukraine’s interior minister [said](#) on 12 June. It was also [reported](#) that three civilians were killed and 10 others wounded after Russian forces opened fire on a boat carrying flood evacuees to the Ukrainian-controlled city of Kherson. However, the death toll had risen to 16 in Ukraine with 31 still missing and 29 in territories controlled by Russia, [according](#) to briefings by Kyiv and Moscow in mid-June. Tass [reported](#) on 6 July that the death toll in the Russian-occupied Kherson region had increased to 53.

The Kakhovka dam manages a reservoir that supplies water for drinking, irrigation, and cooling of the upstream six-reactor Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant (see below). The UN’s top aid official Martin Griffiths [warned](#) on 9 June that Ukraine’s humanitarian situation is “hugely worse” after the Kakhovka dam rupture. The World Health Organization [rushed](#) emergency supplies to flood-hit parts of Ukraine and prepared to respond to an array

of health risks including trauma, drowning and waterborne diseases such as cholera. By 9 June flood levels were [gradually receding](#) in parts of southern Ukraine according to officials.

President Zelensky [said](#) on 11 June that the International Criminal Court was investigating the breach of the Kakhovka dam and on 22 June he [said](#) that Russia has formed special groups to collect and hide bodies of people killed in the aftermath of that Kakhovka dam breach, adding that the situation in Russian-occupied parts of the region was “catastrophic to put it mildly”. On 12 June Ukraine [accused](#) Russian forces of destroying another dam along the Mokri Yaly River with the aim of slowing Kyiv’s counteroffensive in western Donetsk.

The UN [accused](#) Moscow on 18 June of continuing to block humanitarian aid deliveries to Russian-occupied areas in eastern Ukraine affected by the flooding. “We urge the Russian authorities to act in accordance with their obligations under international humanitarian law. Aid cannot be denied to people who need it,” the UN humanitarian coordinator for Ukraine, Denise Brown, said in a statement.

Meanwhile, evidence has been growing that the dam was blown up after [seismic data](#) showed there was a blast at the site in the early hours of 6 June. Norsar, the Norwegian Seismic Array, said signals from a regional station in Romania pointed to an explosion, but did not draw conclusions on who was responsible. According to Kyiv’s deputy defence minister, Hanna Maliar, Russian forces blew up the dam to [prevent](#) Ukrainian troops from launching an offensive and advancing in the southern Kherson region. She said the action was also intended to help Russia deploy reserves to the Zaporizhzhia and Bakhmut areas. A photograph of a car apparently laden with explosives parked at the top of the dam shortly before it gave way has been [said](#) to offer further evidence Russia was behind the bombing. Ukraine’s domestic Security Service (SBU) [said](#) on 9 June it had intercepted a telephone call proving a Russian “sabotage group” blew up the hydroelectric station and dam.

## The Wagner rebellion

On 24 June, President Putin faced the biggest challenge in over two decades: a mutiny by the Wagner mercenary group fighting alongside Russian forces in Ukraine. Yevgeny Prigozhin, the founder of the Wagner Group (for more on the Wagner Group, see below), took control of the city of Rostov-on-Don, a main bridgehead for Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. Several thousand Wagner fighters then advanced toward Moscow, reportedly shooting down Russian army helicopters and a fighter jet. What Putin dubbed a “betrayal” came to an end a day after it began. Having advanced within 200km of Moscow, Prigozhin [pulled back](#) his forces and travelled to Belarus, under a deal brokered by President Alexander Lukashenko. However, it was [reported](#) on 6 July that Prigozhin had returned to St Petersburg in Russia. Wagner troops who took part in the rebellion will not face any action in recognition of their previous service to Russia.

Prigozhin subsequently [denied](#) his forces engaged in an attempted coup. In an 11-minute speech released via Telegram, he said he was staging a protest at the treatment of his men and the conduct of the war with a “march for justice”. US Secretary of State Antony Blinken [said](#) the Wagner uprising showed “real cracks” in Putin’s government and may offer Ukraine a crucial advantage as it conducts a counteroffensive. Similarly, President Zelensky [said](#) the weekend’s events “exposed the weakness of Putin’s regime”.

Earlier on 23 June, Prigozhin had [accused](#) Moscow’s leadership of lying to the public about the justifications for invading Ukraine. He dismissed Moscow’s claims that Kyiv was planning to launch an offensive on the Russian-controlled territories in eastern Ukraine in February 2022. “There was nothing extraordinary happening on the eve of 24 February”, Prigozhin said. “The ministry of defence is trying to deceive the public and the president and spin the story that there was insane levels of aggression from the Ukrainian side and that they were going to attack us together with the whole NATO block”.

Many Western observers have concluded that Putin has been irrevocably weakened by Prigozhin's mutiny. For example, NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg [said](#) on 26 June that it demonstrated the weakness of the Russian leadership and the scale of the Kremlin's strategic mistake in waging war on Ukraine. However, considering how little is actually known about what happened to resolve the crisis, those conclusions are likely premature.

Stoltenberg also [said](#) NATO is ready to defend itself from "Moscow or Minsk" and increased its military presence on its eastern flank after Prigozhin [flew into exile in Belarus on his private jet](#) on 27 June. The movement of Wagner group troops to Belarus is a negative signal for Poland, President Andrzej Duda [said](#). Wagner forces in Russia are expected to begin the process of disarming after Moscow announced plans for the group to hand over weapons, vehicles and equipment. Elements of the force will be disbanded, absorbed into the Russian military or head into exile in Belarus along with Prigozhin under the agreement between the mercenary leader and President Putin.

## **Russian attacks on civilian infrastructure**

Russian missile and artillery attacks on civilian infrastructure have continued. For example, at least 10 people were killed after a Russian [missile hit](#) a residential building in the western Ukrainian city of Lviv on 5 July. Other recent attacks include: a missile strike by Russian forces in [Kramatorsk](#) on 27 June that struck a popular shopping centre in the city's centre, killing at least 13 people, including Ukrainian writer and war crimes researcher [Victoria Amelina](#) (Russia's Defence Ministry claimed it killed two Ukrainian generals and up to 50 officers); three people were killed and at least 13 injured in a Russian [missile attack](#) on the southern Ukrainian city of Odesa on 14 June, while three people were also killed and another three injured in an [attack](#) on Kramatorsk and Kostyantynivka in Donetsk; on 12 June, a Russian [missile strike](#) on an apartment in Kryvyi Rih in central Ukraine

killed 11 and injured more than 30 people; a drone [attack](#) by Russian forces killed three people and injured 27 people, including three children, in Ukraine's Odesa region on 10 June; and three people including a child were killed and at least 11 people were injured in a [missile attack](#) on Kyiv on 1 June that hit apartment buildings, two schools and a children's clinic, reportedly involving 10 Iskander short-range missiles.

Analysis [from the Kyiv Post](#) on 31 May suggested that about 90% of the 563 missiles and drones launched by Russia in May in attacks on Ukraine failed and had cost Russia \$1.7 billion. It said 533 of them were destroyed by the Ukrainian air force, including 401 Shahed-136 drones that cost about \$20,000 each. Ukraine [said](#) on 16 May that it had neutralised Russia's most potent hypersonic weapon, shooting down all six Kinzhal missiles launched at Kyiv during a sweeping and "exceptionally intense" night-time attack. It was the first time Ukraine had claimed to have struck an entire barrage of Kinzhals, and would seem to demonstrate the effectiveness of Kyiv's newly deployed western-supplied air defences.

## **Ukrainian attacks inside Russia and Crimea**

As discussed in NATO Watch [Update 47](#), a covert, low-level campaign of attacks within Russia has been going on for several months. Fighting by [rebel groups](#) inside Russia's Belgorod region, attacks on Russia's railway infrastructure, on bridges linking Russia and Crimea, and on Russia's Druzhba [pipeline](#) and other refineries in Siberia – as well as the [drone](#) attacks on Moscow – indicate the scale of this parallel war. Although Ukraine has repeatedly denied launching attacks on Russian soil the evidence suggests that Kyiv is hoping to divert Russia's attention and resources from other parts of the frontline as it mounts its counteroffensive. While it also demonstrates that Russia is now seemingly unable to defend its borders, it is a strategy that risks further escalation and plays into Moscow's narrative that Russia itself fighting an existential conflict.

On 30 May Moscow was [targeted](#) with a large-scale drone attack (reportedly with more than 30 drones participating) for the first time in the 15-month war. The drones caused minor damage and no serious injuries, with air defence systems also destroying several more approaching the capital, Russian officials said. President Putin accused Ukraine of seeking to “frighten” Russians and said that Ukraine had chosen the path of attempting “to intimidate Russia, Russian citizens [with] attacks on residential buildings” and added that the drone attacks were “clearly a sign of terrorist activity”. Ukrainian presidential aide, Mykhailo Podolyak, [denied](#) Ukraine was involved, but he did he predict “an increase in the number of attacks”. One of the drones used in the raid appears to have been a [Ukrainian manufactured UJ 22 drone](#) produced by the Ukrjet company. James Cleverly, the UK Foreign Secretary, [told](#) reporters that Ukraine has the “legitimate right” to defend itself and can “project force” beyond its borders. Similarly, in an interview with German news website Deutsche Welle on 31 May a German Government spokesperson Steffen Hebestreit [said](#) “International law allows Ukraine to carry out strikes on the territory of Russia for the purpose of self-defence”. Given the security concerns after recent drone attacks inside the country, Russia [cancelled](#) its 2023 Maks international airshow—a biennial event since 1993 (although no official explanation was given for the cancellation).

Two people were killed and two injured by [Ukrainian artillery fire](#) on Russia’s Belgorod region on 3 June, according to the governor, Vyacheslav Gladkov. Ukraine has denied attacking Belgorod, saying Russian rebels are responsible. The [Washington Post](#) on 3 June reported that pro-Ukrainian forces who launched a [cross-border attack](#) from Ukraine into the Belgorod region in May used I vehicles originally given to Ukraine by the United States and Poland and carried rifles made in Belgium and the Czech Republic. Belgian prime minister Alexander De Croo [said](#) on 5 June that his officials will ask Ukraine for clarification on reports that Belgium rifles had been used.

## The G7 Summit

The G7 summit was held in Japan on 19-21 May and much of the focus was on the war in Ukraine and China. More military aid was announced for Ukraine (see below) and in a [statement](#) the G7 leaders said “Our support for Ukraine will not waver” and condemned Russia’s “brutal” war “in the strongest possible terms”, calling it a “serious violation of international law”. The G7 leaders also called for “just and lasting peace” and recommitted their intention to provide Ukraine with military, financial and humanitarian support.

In a G7 speech, President Zelensky [said](#) Kyiv’s plan to end Russia’s war in Ukraine was “an obvious expression of rationality” and sought support for his “peace formula”. He thanked western leaders for achieving “a level of cooperation which ensures that democracy, international law, and freedom are respected”, but questioned: “Is this enough?”. Russia’s Foreign Ministry [dismissed](#) the G7 summit in Japan as a “politicised” event which it said had pumped out anti-Russian and anti-Chinese statements.

President Zelensky [said](#) he had invited India to join Ukraine’s peace formula during his talks with the country’s Prime Minister Narendra Modi on the sidelines of the summit. Zelensky said on Telegram that they also discussed Ukraine’s needs in de-mining and mobile hospitals during their first face-to-face meeting since Russia’s invasion of Ukraine in February 2022.

The G7 also committed to reducing reliance of China in supply chains and combating Beijing’s “economic coercion,” pointing out a “disturbing rise” in the “weaponization of economic vulnerabilities”. In a subsequent [presentation](#) prepared for G7 members, Kyiv called for the world’s leading economies to further tighten export controls on microchips and other components. Ukraine claims that such components, coming largely via China, are being used to manufacture Russian cruise and ballistic missiles that are being launched at Ukraine.



## Ukraine's NATO membership application

Speaking alongside German Chancellor Olaf Scholz in Berlin on 19 June, Jens Stoltenberg [said](#) NATO leaders will not issue a formal invitation for Ukraine to join the alliance at the Vilnius summit, although he added leaders would discuss how to move Ukraine closer to NATO. Ukraine expects to be invited to join NATO with an "open date" at the summit, the Ukrainian president's chief of staff, Andriy Yermak, [said](#) on 21 June. He added that the failure of the alliance to deliver a "strong" decision at the summit would demoralise Ukrainians and that Kyiv had demonstrated it was ready to join with its fighting on the battlefield. At the Bucharest Summit in 2008, NATO member states agreed that Ukraine will become a NATO member, and Ukraine formally requested an accelerated procedure for NATO membership in September 2022. However, despite support from some, mainly eastern members of the alliance, Ukraine's path to membership remains vague.

Opinion within NATO remains divided on the terms on which Ukraine should be offered NATO membership. President Zelensky [secured](#) Turkey's crucial backing during his meeting with President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan in Istanbul on 7 July. "There is no doubt that Ukraine deserves membership of NATO," Erdoğan said. The UK Foreign Secretary James Cleverly [said](#) on 21 June that all NATO allies were backing a plan to give Ukraine a fast track to NATO membership of the kind offered to Sweden and Finland earlier this year. He added that the UK was "very, very supportive" of Ukraine being able to join NATO without the usual need for it to meet the conditions set out in a NATO membership action plan (MAP). Cleverly said the Ukrainian army through the war had modernised and aligned its weaponry with NATO to make it possible to dispense with an action plan. The French Foreign Minister, Catherine Colonna, was more cautious but said circumstances had changed since 2008 when Ukraine was last offered NATO membership on the condition it met the terms set out in an action plan.

President Joe Biden [said](#) on 17 June that the United States does not support a fast-tracked process for Ukraine to join NATO at the conclusion of the war. Ukraine would need to meet certain criteria for NATO membership, Biden said, raising concerns about corruption in the country. On the 31 May French President Emmanuel Macron for the first time called for Ukraine to be granted a NATO membership "path" at the summit. But he admitted it would be difficult to achieve consensus on full membership, so instead he advocated a new approach, potentially along the lines of how the US backs Israel with multiyear commitments to provide specific weapons and support. The former NATO Secretary General Anders Rasmussen [said](#) on 7 June that a group of NATO countries may be willing to put troops on the ground in Ukraine if member states do not provide tangible security guarantees to Kyiv at the alliance's summit in Vilnius. Current NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg [said](#) the alliance must discuss options for giving Ukraine security assurances for the time after its war with Russia.

Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) have also called on NATO member states to honour their commitment to Ukraine by inviting the country to join the alliance. In a resolution [adopted](#) by the European Parliament on 15 June (with 425 votes in favour, 38 against and 42 abstentions), MEPs stressed that they expect that the "accession process will start after the war is over and be finalised as soon as possible".

## Stalled diplomacy

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. Nonetheless, a growing number of Global South powers have pushed for a negotiated settlement to end the war. Earlier this year, Brazilian President Lula da

Silva called for a coalition of non-Western states to mediate peace talks (see NATO Watch [Update 47](#)), and at the Shangri-La Dialogue defence summit in Singapore on 2-4 June, Indonesia's defence minister, Prabowo Subianto, [proposed](#) a peace plan, calling for a demilitarised zone and a UN referendum in what he called disputed territory. However, the proposal was quickly dismissed by Ukraine. The Indonesian proposal was followed by an African initiative, the first since the start of the war to hold separate face-to-face talks with both the Russian and Ukrainian leaders.

### ***The African peace mission***

The South African President Cyril Ramaphosa [announced](#) on 17 May that a delegation of African leaders would travel to Russia and Ukraine "as soon as is possible" to help find a resolution to the war. The Russian and Ukrainian presidents had "agreed to receive the mission and the African heads of state, in both Moscow and Kyiv", Ramaphosa said. Their [goal](#), according to President Ramaphosa, was to "secure a commitment from both sides that they too should seek [...] to end this conflict by peaceful means" and to get each party to share their "minimum requirements to end the conflict". "We will be able to give our own point of view as Africans on how we perceive the impact of this war on Africa in terms of food prices, grain, and fuel prices, as well as on Europe and the rest of the world because it has become a rather globalized type of conflict," Ramaphosa added.

The delegation of seven African leaders (from Comoros, Congo-Brazzaville, Egypt, Senegal, South Africa, Uganda and Zambia) travelled to Ukraine and Russia on 16 and 17 June, respectively. The African leaders' [peace plan](#) involved a series of "confidence building measures" and called for Russia to withdraw its troops ahead of a cessation of hostilities, which Kyiv has said must be the basis of any settlement to end the war. The delegation [met](#) with President Zelensky in Kyiv on 16 June and urged Russia and Ukraine to de-escalate and negotiate, hours after sheltering from missile strikes on the capital. The diplomatic team called their visit a "historic mission" and voiced

concerns of a continent suffering from the fallout of the war, including rising grain prices. The South African president, Cyril Ramaphosa, said both sides needed to stop fighting and "this war must be settled and there should be peace through negotiations". President Zelensky rejected any negotiations with Moscow, saying he had made clear to the African leaders that "permitting any talks with Russia now, when the occupier is on our land, means freezing the war, freezing pain and suffering".

Similarly, after receiving the delegation on 17 June, President Putin gave a list of [reasons](#) why he believed many of the African delegation's peace proposals were misguided. He reiterated his position that Ukraine and its western allies started the conflict and said Russia had never refused talks with the Ukrainian side, but these had been blocked by Kyiv. Moscow said any peace must allow for "new realities", meaning its declared but globally unrecognised annexation of five Ukrainian provinces, four of which it only partially controls. South Africa's president told Putin that the fighting had to stop. "This war must be settled ... through negotiations and through diplomatic means," said Ramaphosa after talks in the suburbs of St Petersburg.

Despite the lack of progress, President Ramaphosa [sought](#) to present the African peace mission in a positive light, tweeting on 18 June "Africa Peace Initiative has been impactful and its ultimate success will be measured on the objective, which is stopping the war".

### ***The Papal peace mission***

Pope Francis [said](#) on 30 June there was no apparent end in sight to the war in Ukraine as his peace envoy wrapped up three days of talks in Moscow. Pope Francis had tasked a leading Italian cardinal, Matteo Zuppi, with a mission in an attempt to "ease tensions" in the Ukraine war and lead to a path of peace, the Vatican [said](#) on 20 May. Cardinal Zuppi helped mediate an end to Mozambique's civil war in 1992. The envoy reportedly [met](#) with Putin adviser and former Russian ambassador to Washington Yuri Ushakov, but not with Putin himself. Zuppi

also met with President Zelensky in Kyiv in early June. Russian spokesperson Dmitry Peskov [said](#) Moscow “highly appreciates the efforts and initiatives of the Vatican to find a peaceful solution to the Ukrainian crisis”. The Vatican [said](#) Zuppi’s trip was more of a fact-finding mission than an attempt at mediation, noting that conversations with Ukrainian leaders “will certainly be useful for evaluating the steps to continue taking both on a humanitarian level and in the search for paths of a just and lasting peace”.

The African and papal peace efforts earned a mixed reaction from the United States. The US Secretary of State, Antony Blinken [said](#) on 2 June that the US was working with Ukraine and other allies to build consensus around the core elements of a “just and lasting peace” to end the war with Russia. Washington would also encourage initiatives by other countries to bring about an end to the conflict, as long as they uphold the UN charter and Ukraine’s sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence. Earlier on 30 May Blinken [said](#) that efforts for a ceasefire in the short term will lead to a “Potemkin peace,” suggesting that any pause in fighting would be a chance for Moscow to regroup and prepare a more effective strategy.

### ***Other calls for peace***

Former US President Donald Trump [said](#) on 29 June that now is the time for the US to try to broker a negotiated peace settlement between Russia and Ukraine, and that Putin has been “somewhat weakened” by Wagner’s aborted mutiny. “I want people to stop dying over this ridiculous war,” Trump told Reuters in an interview. Trump said everything would be “subject to negotiation” if he were president.

The French President Emmanuel Macron [said](#) in a speech in Bratislava on 31 May that a negotiated peace in Ukraine may have to be prioritised over putting President Putin on trial for war crimes. “If in a few months to come, you have a window for negotiation with the existing Russian political power, the question you will have is an arbitrage between a trial and a negotiation. And you will have to negotiate with the leaders you have, de facto,

even if the day after you will have to judge them in front of international justice ... Otherwise you can put yourselves just in an impossible situation where you say ‘I want you to go to jail but you are the only ones I can negotiate with’”. The Danish Foreign Minister Lokke Rasmussen [said](#) on 22 May that his country would host a peace summit in July if the time is right for talks. Notably, Rasmussen said that “we need to put some effort into creating a global commitment to organize such a meeting.” This would mean getting support from China, Brazil, and India, all of which have expressed interest in getting Ukraine and Russia to the negotiating table. Rasmussen’s comments marked the first time that an EU and NATO member country, other than France, had supported the idea of inclusive talks since the early days of the conflict.

Any peace settlement acceptable to Ukraine would include a demilitarised zone extending between 100km and 120km into Russia, the adviser to the head of the office of Ukraine’s president, Mykhailo Podolyak, [suggested](#) on 29 May. The key topic of the postwar settlement should be the establishment of safeguards to prevent a recurrence of aggression in the future, he said.

An open letter calling for a swift diplomatic end to the war in Ukraine was [published](#) on 16 May in the New York Times. The letter’s 14 signatories consisted mostly of former US military officers and other national security officials. The letter called the war an “unmitigated disaster” and cautioned that “future devastation could be exponentially greater as nuclear powers creep ever closer toward open war”. While condemning President Putin’s “criminal invasion and occupation,” the letter, encourages readers to understand the war “through Russia’s eyes”. “In diplomacy, one must attempt to see with strategic empathy, seeking to understand one’s adversaries,” according to the letter. “This is not weakness: it is wisdom”.

Former US national security officials reportedly held secret meetings with Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov and other Russians in New York in April. They were joined by Richard



Haass, a former US diplomat and outgoing president of the Council on Foreign Relations, and two former White House aides. US President Joe Biden's administration did not sanction or support the meetings on potential talks to end the Ukraine war, the White House and state department [said](#) on 6 July.

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, the 13<sup>th</sup> in total, [took place](#) on 15 June.

In addition, NATO agreed at its [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 \$47 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 \$22.4 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 €5.6 billion in assistance.

## ***New US announcements and the supply of cluster munitions***

Since the war began in February 2022, the US has provided nearly 40 assistance packages to Ukraine, with five new packages announced in the last eight weeks. In the most recent announcement on 7 July the \$800 million military aid package included widely banned cluster munitions – a decision for which US President Joe Biden was [criticised](#) by human rights groups, with one fellow Democrat labelling the decision “unnecessary and a terrible mistake”. Washington said it has received assurances from Kyiv that it would minimise risk to civilians, including by not using the munitions in populated areas. Biden said the decision was “very difficult”, but that Ukrainian forces were “running out of ammunition”.

Both Russian and Ukrainian forces have used cluster munitions that have killed Ukrainian civilians, Human Rights Watch (HRW) said in a [report](#) on 6 July. The advocacy group called on both Russia and Ukraine to stop using [the controversial weapons](#), and urged the United States not to supply them as they would inevitably cause long-term suffering for civilians. The US military [believes](#) cluster munitions would be useful for Ukraine in pushing back against Russian forces.

Other recent US military aid packages to Ukraine include: a new \$500 million package [announced](#) on 27 June, including Bradley fighting vehicles and Stryker armoured personnel carriers; a military aid package on [13 June](#) worth \$325m, which included artillery rounds, anti-aircraft systems and 15 new Bradley Infantry Fighting Vehicles; a \$300 million arms package on [31 May](#), including air defence systems and tens of millions of rounds of ammunition; and during the G7 summit on 21 May, US president Joe Biden [announced](#) military assistance worth up to \$375 million to Kyiv, including ammunition, artillery, armoured vehicles and training. Washington regularly warns Kyiv that US weaponry should not be used for attacks within Russia. “We

have been very clear with the Ukrainians privately – we’ve certainly been clear publicly – that we do not support attacks inside Russia”, [said](#) National Security Council spokesman John Kirby.

In addition, the US, the UK, the Netherlands and Denmark [announced](#) on 15 June that they were partnering to send military equipment to Ukraine, including hundreds of missiles. Some deliveries had already been made and were expected to be completed “within several weeks” they said in a joint statement.

### ***New European and other announcements***

President Zelensky undertook a three-day trip to Europe on 14-16 May and held [meetings](#) in London, Berlin, Paris and Rome, where he secured promises of more military assistance. The UK [promised](#) to provide hundreds of air defence missiles and further uncrewed aerial systems, including new long-range attack drones with a range of more than 200km in the coming months, while France [announced](#) dozens more light tanks and armoured vehicles for Ukraine’s army, together with training for the soldiers using them. The German government [announced](#) a new military package worth €2.7bn.

In addition, the UK Ministry of Defence [announced](#) on 13 June a £92 million air defence package for Ukraine. The Kremlin [said](#) on 4 June that any supply of long-range missiles to Kyiv by France and Germany would lead to a further round of “spiralling tension” in the conflict. The UK in May (see NATO Watch [Update 47](#)) became the first country to supply Ukraine with long-range cruise missiles.

The Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen [said](#) on 29 May that her government planned to increase spending on military aid to Ukraine by \$2.6 billion over this year and next year. Earlier this year, Denmark set up a \$1b fund for military, civilian and business aid to Ukraine. Canada will donate 43 AIM-9 missiles to Ukraine to help the country “secure its skies”, Canada’s defence minister, Anita Anand, [said](#) on 26 May.

The Australian government [pledged](#) on 26 June to deliver a new \$110m military assistance package in its next round of support for Ukraine, including vehicles, ammunition and humanitarian funding. The Israeli prime minister [said](#) he had rejected calls from Washington and Kyiv to arm Ukraine due to “concerns that I don’t think any of the western allies of Ukraine have”. Benjamin Netanyahu said in an interview with the Wall Street Journal on 29 June that Israel needed “freedom of action” in Syria, where Israel often bombs Iranian targets near Russian forces. He said he also had fears that Israeli weaponry could be captured in Ukraine and turned over to Iran.

### ***Supplies of combat aircraft and training***

NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg [revealed](#) on 15 June that Ukrainian fighter pilots are being trained to fly F-16 combat aircraft, even though NATO member states have yet to agree on delivering the so-called fourth-generation US combat aircraft to Ukraine. The British and Dutch prime ministers, Rishi Sunak and Mark Rutte, [agreed](#) on 16 May to build an “international coalition” to help procure F-16 combat aircraft for Ukraine. Western countries will be running “colossal risks” if they supply Ukraine with F-16 combat aircraft, the Tass news agency [quoted](#) the Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Alexander Grushko as saying on 20 May.

In the meantime, there have been numerous announcements in recent weeks about training packages. First, President Biden [told](#) G7 leaders that Washington supports joint allied training programmes for Ukrainian pilots on F-16s, and [told](#) a press conference on 21 May that he had received a “flat assurance” from President Zelensky that he would not use western-provided F-16 combat aircraft to go into Russian territory. Biden said F-16s could, however, be used “wherever Russian troops are within Ukraine and the area”. Second, Denmark’s Ministry of Defence [said](#) on 19 May that it will train Ukrainian F-16 pilots following the US decision to support the training. Third, the EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell [said](#) on 23 May that the training of Ukrainian pilots to

fly F-16s had begun in Poland. Fourth, the Dutch Defence Minister Kajsa Ollongren [said](#) on 24 May in a letter to parliament that the Netherlands wanted to provide F-16 training as soon as possible, in coordination with Belgium, Denmark and the UK. Fifth, Romania is [reportedly](#) considering opening a regional training hub for F-16 pilots which would ultimately be available to its NATO allies and partners, including Ukraine. Finally, during a trip to Kyiv on 10 June, Canada's Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said Canada would be part of a multinational effort to train Ukrainian fighter pilots, and he also [announced](#) \$375 million worth of military aid for Ukraine.

Only two states have so far agreed to supply combat aircraft to Ukraine: Poland and Slovakia (see NATO Watch [Update 46](#)).

### ***Financial support***

The US [announced](#) on 16 June a further \$205 million in humanitarian aid to Ukraine to help with shortages of food, drinking water and other needs. The aid, to be distributed via partner NGOs in the region, was also aimed at helping victims of the war maintain contact with family members who have been separated. On 13 June Latvia [allocated](#) another \$460,000 in humanitarian aid to Ukraine to assist with the Kakhova Dam disaster.

### ***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](#). The United States has claimed that Russia and Iran are expanding their defence partnership. Iran has reportedly provided Russia with one-way attack drones—Iranian-made Shahed drones supplied to Moscow have played a major role in Russia's attacks on cities and infrastructure—including more than 400 since August, US national security adviser John Kirby [said](#) at a news briefing on 16 May. The US [repeated](#) these allegations on 9 June. Citing newly declassified information, the White House said the drones were built in Iran, shipped across the Caspian Sea and then used by Russian forces against Ukraine.

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](#).

## **Humanitarian consequences of the war**

Exact figures for the number of war fatalities, both military and civilian, are difficult to verify and confirm. According to the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project ([ACLED](#)), a disaggregated data collection, analysis and crisis mapping project, there were a total of 85,990 conflict-related fatalities in Ukraine between 24 February 2022 and 30 June 2023: 43,660 in explosions/remote violence; 40,991 in battles; 1,335 in violence against civilians; and 4 in protests. [Undercounting and manipulation](#) of the data is common in war. The Supreme Commander of the Joint NATO Forces in Europe and Commander of the US Armed Forces in Europe, General Christopher Cavoli, said in March that 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 232,000 Russian soldiers in the war to date. The White House [estimated](#) on 1 May that Russia's military has suffered 100,000 casualties in the previous five months in fighting against Ukraine, mostly in the Bakhmut region. National security spokesperson John Kirby told reporters the figure, based on US intelligence estimates, included more than 20,000 dead, half of them from the Wagner group.

The official Ukrainian armed forces' casualty toll is a secret, but leaked US military briefings put the number of Ukrainian dead at between 15,500 and 17,500 with more than five times that injured. Speaking on Ukrainian tv on 2 December, Kyiv's presidential adviser Mykhailo Podolyak [said](#) up to 13,000 Ukrainian soldiers had 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 30 June, 9,177 civilians have died since Russia invaded Ukraine in February 2022. 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. President Zelensky [said](#) on 4 June that at least 500 Ukrainian children have been killed in the war. It was impossible to establish the exact number of children who have become casualties, however, because of the continuing fighting and because some areas are under Russian occupation, he said.

According to [Action on Armed Violence](#) (AOAV) the number of civilian casualties from explosive violence in the Ukrainian conflict reached 14,676 people by 7 July. From this number, 4,675 were killed and 10,001 were injured. Ninety-five per cent (13,890) of civilian casualties have occurred in populated areas. The World Health Organization assembly passed a [motion](#) on 24 May condemning Russia's aggression against Ukraine, including attacks on healthcare facilities. The motion passed by 80 votes to nine, with 52 abstentions and 36 countries absent.

The number of [refugees](#) from the conflict stood at 6,331,100 as of 4 July, down from 8,207,977 on 9 May. The war in Ukraine has driven the largest annual increase of people forcibly displaced by persecution, conflict, violence and human rights violations in decades, [according](#) to the UNHCR. In 2022, the number of displaced people grew by 21%, standing at an estimated 108.4 million at the end of the year. That likely rose to over 110 million people in May 2023, with Russia's ongoing invasion and the war in Sudan being the biggest drivers of the growth, according to a [report](#) released on 14 June by UNHCR.

## Continuing concerns over nuclear power plants

Ukraine accused Russia on 4 July of planning a "provocation" at the Moscow-controlled Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant, while Russia claimed that Kyiv was planning to "attack" the facility. Fears over the safety risks for the nuclear plant, Europe's largest, have been constant throughout Russia's invasion, but increased in early June after the destruction of the Kakhovka dam, the source of cooling water for its reactors. President Zelensky [said](#) that "objects resembling explosives" had been placed on the roof of several power units "perhaps to simulate an attack". He added: "The world sees – can't but see – that the only source of danger to the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant is Russia and no one else". (He made similar [comments](#) on 1 July). The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) said on 5 July they have yet to observe any indications of mines or explosives but called for additional access to the plant. However, Ukraine's military intelligence chief, Kyrylo Budanov, [said](#) on 6 July that the threat of a Russian attack on the Zaporizhzhia nuclear plant was receding, but warned that it could easily return as long as the facility remained under occupation by Moscow's forces.

Rafael Grossi, the head of the IAEA, [said](#) on 16 June that the situation at the Zaporizhzhia nuclear plant is "serious" and that ensuring water for cooling was a priority of his visit, adding that the station could operate safely for "some time". Grossi was inspecting the state of the plant following the breach in the Kakhovka dam downstream on the Dnipro river (see above). After visiting the plant Grossi also [said](#) that inspectors would stay at the facility but that signing a document on security on the site was "unrealistic" while the two sides were still fighting. Ukraine's nuclear energy agency [said](#) on 9 June that it had put the last operating reactor at the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant into a "cold shutdown" as a safety precaution amid the flooding risk.

Neither Russia nor Ukraine have committed to respect the five principles laid out by the IAEA to try to safeguard the Zaporizhzhia nuclear

power plant. The principles included that there should be no attacks on, or from the plant and that no heavy weapons should be housed there. However, Rafael Grossi [said](#) he was encouraged that the principles were “widely supported and there was no voice opposing them”. The Russian and Ukrainian envoys at the United Nations blamed each other’s countries for the crisis at Zaporizhzhia, but did not reject outright the principles put forward by the IAEA.

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## On the risk of nuclear war

Risks of a direct military confrontation between Russia and the United States/NATO are steadily growing. There have been [concerns](#) since the start of the war that it 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. President Putin [announced](#) on 21 June that the new Sarmat nuclear-capable intercontinental ballistic missiles would soon enter service. The missiles are designed to carry out nuclear strikes on targets thousands of miles away and can be launched from land, sea or air but their deployment has proceeded slower than planned.

## Russia-Belarus nuclear sharing agreement

In March Russia [said](#) that it would station tactical nuclear weapons in neighbouring Belarus (see NATO Watch [Update 47](#)). Speaking at the St Petersburg International Economic Forum on 16 June President Putin [confirmed](#) that Russia had deployed its first tranche of tactical nuclear weapons in Belarus. (Earlier, on 9 June, Putin had [told](#) his Belarusian counterpart Alexander Lukashenko in a meeting in Sochi, that Russia would start deploying tactical nuclear weapons in Belarus after the facilities were ready on 7-8 July). Putin said nuclear weapons would only be used in the event of a threat to the existence of the Russian state. However, President Lukashenko [said](#) on 14 June he would not hesitate to use Russian tactical nuclear weapons if faced with an act of aggression. Lukashenko's comment contradicted earlier statements by President Putin who had said that nuclear weapons stationed in Belarus would remain exclusively under the control of Moscow.

The US has frequently said that there was no indication that Russia planned to use nuclear weapons to attack Ukraine. However, an [article](#) (paywall) in *Intelligence Online* on 12 June suggested from "the fragments of information available" that Moscow is preparing the weapons deployed to Belarus "for offensive, rather than deterrent, use", and "may be in a position to carry out strikes on Ukraine at some time between July and October". This seems unnecessarily alarmist given that Russia could just as easily use tactical nuclear weapons based on its own territory to attack Ukraine.

Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko [said](#) on 30 June he was certain Russian tactical nuclear weapons deployed in his country would never be used. Lukashenko and President Putin have acknowledged that some tactical weapons have arrived in Belarus and the remainder would be put in place by the end of the year. "As we move along, we become more and more convinced that they [the weapons] must be stationed here, in Belarus, in a reliable place," Lukashenko said. Polish Prime Minister Morawiecki has [stated](#) that

Poland wants to join NATO's nuclear weapons sharing programme, in response to Russia's deployment of nuclear warheads to Belarus.

### ***Suspension of New START***

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. The United States [announced](#) on 1 June that it will stop providing Russia with some notifications required under the treaty, including updates on missile and launcher locations. The US described it as a retaliatory countermeasure due to Moscow's violations of the accord. Russia [said](#) it would come back to full compliance with the treaty if Washington abandoned its "hostile stance" towards Moscow, Russian news agencies reported on 3 June, citing the deputy foreign minister, Sergei Ryabkov.

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### **On investigation of war crimes in Ukraine**

A new [international office](#) to investigate Russia's invasion of Ukraine opened on 3 July in The Hague, in the first step towards a possible tribunal for Moscow's leadership. The International Centre for the Prosecution of the Crime of Aggression (ICPA), which includes prosecutors from Ukraine, the EU, the United States and the International Criminal Court (ICC), will investigate and gather evidence in a move seen as an interim step before the creation of a special tribunal that could bring Russian officials to justice for starting the Ukraine war. Meanwhile, President Putin's admission that the Wagner group had been "fully funded" by the Russian state could make it easier for an international court to prosecute him for war crimes, experts in international law [said](#). In the year to May 2023 alone, Wagner reportedly received more than 86bn roubles from the state budget, or over a billion dollars. As detailed below, war crimes researchers have been collecting evidence to be used in court, but alleged Wagner atrocities, in Ukraine and elsewhere, are potentially harder to pin to the Russian state than attacks by enlisted soldiers.

Ukrainian prosecutors on 30 June [charged](#) a Russian politician and two suspected Ukrainian collaborators with war crimes—the first suspects to be charged by Ukraine—over the alleged deportation of dozens of orphans from the formerly occupied southern city of Kherson, some of them as young as one.

A [report](#) by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) published on 27 June said Russian forces have carried out widespread and systematic torture of civilians detained in connection with its attack on Ukraine, summarily executing more

than 70 of them. The OHCHR interviewed hundreds of victims and witnesses for a report detailing more than 900 cases of civilians, including children and elderly people, being arbitrarily detained in the conflict, most of them by Russia. The report will be handed to the Ukrainian prosecutor general and to the ICC as it assembles evidence against individual Russians accused of war crimes during the invasion of Ukraine.

The UN Secretary General António Guterres [called out](#) Russia on 22 June for killing 136 children in Ukraine in 2022 and added its armed forces to a global list of offenders, according to a [report](#) to the UN Security Council. The UN also verified that Russian armed forces and affiliated groups injured 518 children and carried out 480 attacks on schools and hospitals. The forces used 91 children as human shields, according to the report. Guterres was “particularly shocked” by the high number of child casualties, he said in the report, while also saying he was disturbed by the high number of offences against children by Ukrainian forces. In response on 28 June, Russia [dismissed](#) the allegations that Russia had violated children's rights in Ukraine and said that, on the contrary, its armed forces were rescuing children from conflict zones.

The International Court of Justice based in The Hague, Netherlands, [said](#) on 9 June that it had accepted requests from 32 countries to back Ukraine in a genocide case against Russia. This is the largest number of countries to join another nation's complaint at the world court. Meanwhile, the ICC [said](#) on 20 May that it was “undeterred” after Russia put prosecutor Karim Khan on a wanted list over his issuance of an arrest warrant for President Putin. Khan, who is British, issued an arrest warrant for Putin in March on the war crime accusation of unlawfully deporting Ukrainian children.

European leaders convening in Iceland on 15-16 May for a Council of Europe Summit (only the fourth summit of the 46-member Council of Europe since it was founded after World War II) [pledged](#) to hold Russia to account for its war against Ukraine and unveiled a new mechanism - a Register of Damages - to track

the losses and damage inflicted by Moscow's forces.

### ***Selected investigations Feb 2022-April 2023***

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 Council of Europe, 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, and on 17 March the ICC [issued](#) an arrest warrant for President Putin for overseeing the [mass abduction](#) of Ukrainian children. 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.

A [report](#) from the UN-backed Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine published on 16 March 2023 said Russia has committed a wide-range of war crimes in Ukraine including wilful killings, systematic torture and the deportation of children. In an earlier October 2022 [report](#) the Commission found reasonable grounds to conclude that an array of war crimes, violations of human rights and international humanitarian law have been committed in Ukraine, with Russian armed forces responsible for the vast majority of the violations identified.

A [report](#) published on 7 December 2022 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. Finally, The [UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination](#)— a body of independent experts that monitors implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination— [said](#) on 28 April that it is deeply concerned about human rights violations by Russian forces and private military companies in Ukraine, including enforced disappearances, torture, rape and extrajudicial executions.

Charli Carpenter, [Holding Russia Accountable for 'Ecocide' in Ukraine Won't Be Easy](#), World Politics Review, 20 June 2023 (paywall)

## On sanctions against Russia and post-war reconstruction in Ukraine

A [report](#) by the Kyiv School of Economics and B4Ukraine, a coalition of NGOs which lobbies international businesses to leave Russia, said that 56% of foreign companies were still operating in the country in 2022. Meanwhile, energy companies TotalEnergies and Shell [defended](#) activities linked to Russia after a [critical report](#) into their trading in natural gas despite the war in Ukraine. The campaign group Global Witness said TotalEnergies was the third-biggest player in Russian liquified natural gas last year and Shell the fourth, behind two Russian companies. Both companies said on 2 July they were tied to ongoing contracts despite pulling out of Russian partnerships after Ukraine was invaded last year. Nonetheless, according to [data](#) from Russia's finance ministry on 5 July, Russia's earnings from oil and gas sales fell by almost 50% in the first half of 2023.

The US Treasury department [announced](#) new sanctions on 27 June targeting four companies it says engaged in illicit gold trading to help fund the Wagner group. The Treasury's Under Secretary for Terrorism and Financial Intelligence, Brian Nelson, said the companies were located in the United Arab Emirates (which has also become a key [trade hub](#) for Russian gold since Western sanctions over Ukraine cut Russia's more traditional export

routes), Central African Republic and Russia with the transactions used by the mercenary group to sustain itself. "The Wagner group funds its brutal operations in part by exploiting natural resources in countries like Central African Republic and Mali," Nelson said. In addition, the US imposed sanctions on members of a Russian intelligence-linked group for their role in Moscow's efforts to destabilise democracy and influence elections in Moldova, the US Treasury department [said](#) on 6 June. On the 19 May, the United States [halted](#) exports of a range of consumer goods to Russia including clothes dryers, snow ploughs and milking machines out of concern the goods may be repurposed to support Moscow's war in Ukraine. The list of banned consumer goods came as the Biden administration also added 71 companies to a trade blacklist.

EU governments agreed to an [11th package](#) of sanctions against Russia on 23 June, aimed at stopping other countries and companies from circumventing existing measures. The new package forbids transit via Russia of an expanded list of goods and technology which might aid Russia's military or security sector. Meanwhile, Italy has frozen Russian oligarchs' assets valued at about €2bn since the invasion of Ukraine, the country's central bank [said](#) on 4 July. Italy seized assets – including bank accounts, luxury villas, yachts and cars – as part of the EU's sanctions against Russia.

The UK [unveiled](#) a swathe of new sanctions ahead of the G7 summit on the 19 May. The UK Prime Minister Rishi Sunak announced a UK ban on imports of Russian diamonds and Russian-origin copper, nickel and aluminium. Australia [imposed](#) a new set of sanctions and an export ban on Russia. The sanctions will target 21 entities and three individuals, with entities including the major Russian oil company Rosneft, gold company Polyus PJSC, steel company Severstal PJSC and five banks.

Russia's Foreign Ministry [said](#) on 15 June it had summoned a Canadian diplomat in Moscow in protest over the confiscation of a Russian-registered Antonov cargo plane in Toronto, and warned that Russian-Canadian relations were on the "verge of being severed". Canada

has imposed sanctions on hundreds of Russian officials and companies as well as wide-scale trade bans, and the seizure of the plane was Canada's first asset seizure.

Ukraine's parliament [passed](#) a bill on 28 May that sanctions Iran for 50 years. The bill was put forward by President Zelensky and will stop Iranian goods transiting through Ukraine and ban use of its airspace, as well as imposing trade, financial and technology sanctions against Iran and its citizens.

### Sanctions – an overview

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](#) almost 1,800 individuals and 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 over 1,500 individuals and entities; 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. There have also been calls to confiscate already-frozen Russian state assets, but so far only Canada has [enacted](#) the authority to do so.

At an international conference on the funding of Ukraine's reconstruction in London on 22 June, foreign donors pledged about €60 billion in new financial support, the UK [said](#). The EU pledged a further €50bn in loans and grants, while the UK and the US promised \$3bn and \$1.3bn respectively in [financial support](#). The World Bank, in conjunction with the government of Ukraine, the European Commission and the UN, has put the cost of reconstruction and recovery at \$411bn after over a year of war. Delegates at the summit,

including Ukraine's Prime Minister Denys Shmyhal, the UK Prime Minister Rishi Sunak and the US Secretary of State Antony Blinken [said](#) the Kremlin would ultimately foot the bill. "Let's be clear: Russia is causing Ukraine's destruction and Russia will eventually bear the cost of Ukraine's reconstruction," Blinken said.

Taiwan has donated more than \$5 million to Lithuanian-led reconstruction projects in Ukraine, a Lithuanian government investment agency [said](#) on 31 May. The funds will go towards rebuilding a school in Borodianka and a nursery in Irpin, the Central Project Management Agency said.

Lee C. Buchheit and Paul Stephan, [The REPO Act: Confiscating Russian State Assets and Ukrainian Reparations](#), Lawfare, 7 July 2023

Thomas Kleine-Brockhoff, [Why the Ukraine Recovery Conference Was a Success](#), GMF Commentary, 26 June 2023

Josh Rudolph and Norman Eisen, [West Supports Ukraine Anti-Corruption Efforts at the Ukraine Recovery Conference in London](#), Securing Democracy, 23 June 2023

Luke Cooper, [Insourcing the war-economy: Building a resilient Ukraine means maximising its domestic output](#), PeaceRep Ukraine policy brief, Conflict and Civiness Research Group, London School of Economics, June 2023

Olha Vasylevska-Smahliuk, [Blacklisting Russia Should be a Priority for the FATE](#), RUSI Commentary, 16 June 2023

Tom Keatinge, [Developing Bad Habits: What Russia Might Learn from Iran's Sanctions Evasion](#), RUSI Occasional Paper, 6 June 2023

Volodymyr Vlasiv & Brian Milakovsky, ["Insourcing" the Recovery: Maximizing engagement of Ukrainian manufacturers in reconstruction efforts](#), PeaceRep Ukraine policy brief, Conflict and Civiness Research Group, London School of Economics, 30 May 2023

Alina Inayeh, Jacob Kirkegaard, Thomas Kleine-Brockhoff, Josh Rudolph, Bruce Stokes and Norman L. Eisen, [Toward a Marshall Plan for Ukraine](#), GMF Report, 22 May 2023

Andrew Fink and Matthew Johnston, [Evading Sanctions with Russian MK Companies](#), Lawfare, 18 May 2023

Maria Shagina, [Enforcing Russia's Debt to Ukraine: Constraints and Creativity](#), Survival, Vol.65 No.2, 2023, pp.27-36

## On the Black Sea grain agreement and global food security

If Russia does not agree to extend the Black Sea grain deal (which was [extended](#) on 17 May for two more months) allowing the safe export of grain and fertiliser from Ukrainian ports, it is unlikely western states will continue cooperating with UN officials helping Moscow with its exports, the UN aid chief, Martin Griffiths, [said](#) on 7 July. Russia has [threatened](#) to quit the deal, which expires on 17 July, because several demands to dispatch its own grain and fertiliser have not been met. The last three ships traveling under the deal are loading cargoes at the Ukrainian port of Odesa and are likely to depart on 10 July.

The UN Secretary General, António Guterres, [said](#) on 12 June he was concerned that Russia would quit the deal, which was first brokered by the UN and Turkey in July 2022. Moscow had flagged once again that it might withdraw from the deal after President Putin [said](#) on 13 June he has been cheated by the west who have failed to deliver on a promise to help bring Russian agricultural goods to world markets. Senior UN trade official Rebeca Grynspan [met](#) with Russia's deputy foreign minister Sergei Vershinin on 9 June, where the UN argued that it has helped boost Russian exports of food and fertilisers. Ukraine's farm minister [said](#) on 2 June that his country would be ready to continue exporting grain across the Black Sea as part of a "plan B" without Russian backing if Moscow pulled the plug on the current grain export deal and it collapsed.

On the 1 June the UN expressed [concern](#) at the 'continuous slowdown' in Black Sea grain trade. Only 33 vessels departed Ukrainian ports in May, less than half the number observed during April. Moreover, following the destruction of the Kakhovka dam on 6 June (see above), Ukraine [fears](#) losing millions of tons of crops because of flooding. Meanwhile, the G7 is [reportedly](#) working on a UK-led scheme to combat the suspected theft of

Ukraine's grain by using chemical identification of its origin, while Ukraine wants to begin work to make its Danube shipping canal deeper to expand alternative routes to export grain, deputy minister of renovation and infrastructure, Yuriy Vaskov, [said](#) on 27 May.

Connor Echols, [Diplomacy Watch: Brinkmanship on grain deal could frustrate Russia's friends](#), Responsible Statecraft, 23 June 2023

Bradford Dismukes and Barry Blechman, [A New Strategy for the Black Sea](#), Lawfare, 11 June 2023

Mykhailo Soldatenko, [The Uncertainty of the Black Sea Grain Agreement: A Counterresponse](#), Lawfare, 8 June 2023

## On energy security in Europe (and the Nord Stream attack)

Europe is striving to diversify its energy supply sources to curb its dependence on Russia. Gas shortages occurred across Europe during 2022 but now appear to have eased. Questions continue as to who blew up the Nord Stream pipelines in September 2022. Many European governments have suspected Russia, while Vladimir Putin has blamed the US and its allies. Ukraine has strenuously denied any link to the attacks. Investigations by Denmark, Germany and Sweden into explosions on the Nord Stream gas pipelines have not yet concluded. For an overview of the various allegations and media reports on the issue, see NATO Watch Update 47. The only new recent development was a [report](#) in the Wall Street Journal on 10 June that German investigators are examining evidence suggesting a sabotage team (operating from a chartered yacht) used Poland as an operating base.

NATO has [launched](#) a new centre for protecting undersea pipelines and cables after the unsolved Nord Stream attack. "The threat is developing," said Lt Gen Hans-Werner Wiermann, who heads a special unit focused on the challenge, after NATO defence ministers in June gave the green light for the centre, located in Northwood, north-west London (see below).

Jeremy Scahill, [The Searcher: Fishing for Secrets in the Nord Stream Abyss](#), The Intercept, 28 June 2023

[Biden 'knew of Ukrainian plan to attack Nord Stream' three months before explosion](#), The Guardian, 6 June 2023

Sidharth Kaushal, [Stalking the Seabed: How Russia Targets Critical Undersea Infrastructure](#), RUSI Commentary, 25 May 2023

Claire Jordan and Steve Husbands, [Europe's Not Buying: The Impact of Lost Gas Markets for Gazprom and Russia](#), RUSI Commentary, 5 May 2023

## On China's position on the war

China's position on Russia-China relations and on the Russia-West confrontation is not uniform. However, the Chinese Government has presented a relatively consistent and developed position, namely that, first, the war undermines the stability of the international system and that a zero-sum game must be avoided, and second, that any use of nuclear weapons is a 'red line' that should not be crossed. China is also being touted both as a potential mediator in the conflict and as a future supplier of lethal aid to Russia (see NATO Watch [update 44](#)). China's Ukraine envoy on 2 June [called](#) on governments to "stop sending weapons to the battlefield" and appealed for peace talks.

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 lethal support for Russia's war in Ukraine. The US Secretary of State Antony Blinken [said](#) during a visit to Beijing on 19 June that he had asked China's government to be vigilant about private companies that may be providing Russia with technology that could be used against Ukraine, although he said he had seen no evidence Beijing was providing lethal assistance to Moscow.

## On developments within Russia

In an address to a virtual gathering of leaders from the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation on 4 July, President Putin [said](#) that Russia remains "united as never before" in the wake of the failed mutiny by the Wagner mercenary group and claimed the country continued to flourish in the face of heavy western sanctions over his invasion of Ukraine. The same day, former Russian president Dmitry Medvedev [said](#) that 185,000 new recruits had joined the Russian army as professional contract soldiers since the start of the year, adding that almost 10,000 new recruits had joined up in the last week, after the Wagner Group fighters were given the option of signing on as regular soldiers.

### *The Wagner Group*

The Wagner Group is a private military company composed of mercenaries and was described as a *de facto* private army of Yevgeny Prigozhin, formerly a close ally of President Putin. There is compelling evidence that Wagner was used as a proxy by the Russian Government. Indeed, President Putin recently [said](#) that the Wagner Group was entirely financed by the Russian state, which spent 86bn roubles (\$1bn) on it between May 2022 and May 2023.

In the weeks leading up to the Wagner mutiny on 24 June (see above), the relationship between Putin (and especially his generals), and Prigozhin soured. The Russian Government had sought to bring "volunteer detachments" fighting in Ukraine under tighter control by getting them to [sign contracts](#) with the Defence Ministry by 1 July. The order from Moscow was widely seen as an attempt to reign in the Wagner Group and its leader by incorporating them into the army. However, within hours of the Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu giving the order, Prigozhin, [said](#) his fighters would not sign contracts with the Russian Defence Ministry. "Wagner will not sign any contracts with Shoigu", Prigozhin said on 11 June, adding that the minister "cannot properly manage military formations". Wagner forces were subsequently [told](#) that they would no longer fight in Ukraine after Prigozhin



refused to sign the contracts. Russia's Defence Ministry [said](#) it had signed a contract on 12 June with the Akhmat group of Chechen special forces.

On 3 June, Prigozhin had [said](#) that Kremlin factions were destroying the state by trying to sow discord between him and Chechen fighters. He said that a dispute between him and Chechen forces had been resolved, but blamed the discord on unidentified Kremlin factions, which he called "Kremlin towers". Also in June the Wagner group was [accused](#) of stoking "anarchy" on Russia's frontlines after one of the Kremlin's military commanders claimed the group's forces had kidnapped and tortured his soldiers during the battle for Bakhmut. In a video posted online, Lt Col Roman Venevitin also accused Wagner soldiers of stealing arms, forcing mobilised soldiers to sign contracts with Wagner, and attempting to extort weapons from the Russian defence ministry in exchange for releasing kidnapped soldiers.

The Wagner Group lost 20,000 fighters in the drawn-out battle for Bakhmut, [according](#) to Prigozhin. He said on 24 May that about 20% of the 50,000 Russian prisoners recruited to fight in the 15-month war had died in the eastern Ukrainian city, and a similar number of its regular troops. The figure was in stark contrast with claims from Moscow that it has lost just over 6,000 troops in the war, and is higher than the official estimate of the Soviet losses in the Afghanistan war of 15,000 troops between 1979 and 1989.

### ***Russia's bridge-building with partners***

In the wake of the rupture between Russia and the West, Russia has sought to build ties with other countries and regions of the world as part of a shifting world order. Most attention has been given to Russia-China ties, but Moscow is developing strategic partnerships with several other countries. For example, the Russian and Algerian presidents, Vladimir Putin and Abdelmadjid Tebboune, [pledged](#) to deepen their two countries' "strategic partnership" during a three-day state visit by Tebboune to Moscow that concluded on 16 June. Russia is also seeking to strengthen ties

with the Muslim world. To this end, the [Russia-Islamic World Forum](#) took place on 18-19 May in Kazan, Russia. The event was first held in 2009 and aims to strengthen economic ties between Russia and Islamic countries.

### ***Continuing domestic repression***

Russia's constitutional court on 21 June [rejected](#) an attempt by rights groups to seek the repeal of a law that bans people from speaking out against Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Campaigners including legal defence group OVD-Info and the banned human rights organisation Memorial had filed the case in April, saying it violated articles of Russia's constitution including on free speech and freedom of conscience. Meanwhile, a Russian anti-war activist [reportedly](#) died in a detention centre in the southern city of Rostov-on-Don, where he had alleged he was being mistreated, his lawyer said on 15 June.

Liliya Chanyшева, a former campaign leader for the jailed Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny, was [sentenced](#) to seven years and six months in prison on 14 June for "creating an extremist organisation", according to the rights group OVD-Info. Alexei Navalny [urged](#) his supporters to begin a broad campaign against Moscow's actions in Ukraine as he went on trial on new charges of extremism that could keep him in prison for decades. In a statement posted on social media by his allies, Navalny declared that the decision to close his trial was a sign of fear on the part of President Putin.

Anatol Lieven, [The failed Wagner coup shows Vladimir Putin's regime remains stubbornly strong](#), The Guardian, 29 June 2023

John Feffer, [The Beginning of the End for Putin?](#) FPIF, 29 June 2023

Kyle Hiebert, [Prigozhin's Quixotic Revolt Sends Russia Down Uncharted Path](#), CIGI Commentary, 28 June 2023

[NATO Stresses Risk of Wagner Group's Potential Relocation to Belarus](#), New York Times, 28 June 2023

Alexander Clarkson, [The Wagner Mutiny Was a Preview of Russia's Post-Putin Civil War](#), World Politics Review, 28 June 2023 (paywall)



Heather A. Conley, [Russia's Rebellion and Its Aftermath](#), GMF Commentary, 27 June 2023

[GMF Expert Analysis: Mutiny in Russia](#), 26 June 2023

Emily Ferris, [Prigozhin's Rebellion: What We Discovered, and What We Still Need to Know](#), RUSI Commentary, 26 June 2023

Quinta Jurecic, Gia Kokotakis, Eugenia Lostri and Tyler McBrien, [Yevgeny Prigozhin, We Knew Him When](#), Lawfare, 26 June 2023

Anatol Lieven, [Putin: Disastrous but indispensable for the system he created?](#), Responsible Statecraft, 25 June 2023

Julian Cooper, [Russia's Military Expenditure During Its War Against Ukraine](#), SIPRI Insights on Peace and Security, No.2023/07, June 2023

John Mecklin, [Prigozhin, Putin, and the Russian coup that evaporated](#), Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, 24 June 2023

[Why Wagner mercenary force has moved against Russia's military](#), Al Jazeera, 24 June 2023

Anatol Lieven and George Beebe, [Rampant Russophobia takes us down a dangerous path](#), Responsible Statecraft, 21 June 2023

Anatol Lieven and George Beebe, [Prigozhin erupts: Has a Russian succession struggle begun?](#) Responsible Statecraft, 31 May 2023

Volodymyr Artiukh, Mazen Gharibah and Inna Berezkina, [Russia and Putin: Authoritarianism at Home, Imperialism Abroad](#) (PeaceRep Policy Brief), Conflict and Civiness Research Group, London School of Economics, 11 March 2023

Nigel Gould-Davies, [How the War Has Changed Russia](#), Survival, Vol.65 No.2, 2023, pp.23-26

## On developments within NATO

### *Upcoming NATO Vilnius Summit*

Five issues are likely to dominate the NATO Summit in Vilnius on 11-12 July: future NATO membership and/or security assurances for Ukraine; approving updated and more detailed defence plans for enhancing NATO's eastern flank; upgrading NATO's 2% military spending target; the accession of Sweden; and NATO's outreach in the Indo-Pacific.

[What Biden needs to accomplish with his NATO trip](#), CNN, 8 July 2023

Robert E. Hunter, [The elephant in the room at next week's NATO summit](#), Responsible Statecraft, 7 July 2023

[Secretary General: Vilnius Summit will make Ukraine stronger, reinforce NATO's deterrence and defence](#), NATO News Release, 7 July 2023

[Nato to recommit to Ukraine's accession as Zelenskiy campaigns for support](#), The Guardian, 7 July 2023

[NATO Chief Details Plans for Summit](#), US Department of Defense, 7 July 2023

[Explainer: What NATO leaders will decide at the Vilnius summit](#), Reuters, 6 July 2023

John Weaver, [Why the 2023 NATO Summit is the most important meeting of the summer](#), The Hill, 3 July 2023

[NATO Readies Military Plans to Defend Against Bruised But Unbowed Russia](#), Military.com, 3 July 2023

[NATO is drafting new plans to defend Europe](#), The Economist, 2 July 2023 (paywall)

[Ukraine wants NATO invite at Vilnius summit, urges 'courage,' Zelenskiy aide says](#), Reuters, 29 June 2023

[Polish special forces to protect Nato summit in Vilnius](#), The First News, 29 June 2023

[Secretary General welcomes Estonian Prime Minister to NATO for talks on Vilnius Summit](#), NATO News, 28 June 2023

[Secretary General co-hosts meeting of seven NATO Allies to prepare Vilnius Summit](#), NATO News Release, 27 June 2023

[Countdown until the NATO Vilnius Summit: Priorities and expectations in 2023](#), EPC, 22 June 2023

### *NATO Defence Ministers Meeting, 15-16 June*

In addition to discussions on Ukraine and preparations for the Vilnius summit, the Defence Ministers agreed a new rotational model for air and missile defence; agreed substantially increase capability targets for battle-decisive ammunition; and reviewed the NATO Defence Production Action Plan, with measures to aggregate demand, boost capacity, and increase interoperability and interchangeability. NATO's Nuclear Planning Group also met to discuss the nuclear aspects

of the current security environment and the ongoing adaptation of NATO's nuclear deterrence.

[NATO focuses on underwater assets amid Russia sabotage concerns](#), Al Jazeera, 17 June 2023

[NATO-Ukraine Defense Council to Be Established](#), US Department of Defense, 16 June 2023

[NATO may remove some hurdles on Ukraine's path to membership, Germany says](#), Reuters, 16 June 2023

[NATO meeting fails to approve first defense plans since Cold War](#), Reuters, 16 June 2023

[NATO Defence Ministers conclude two days of meetings, pledging increased support for Ukraine](#), NATO News Release, 16 June 2023

[NATO Secretary General: Defence Ministers will focus on support to Ukraine, bolstering deterrence and defence](#), NATO News Release, 15 June 2023

[NATO races to design long-term package for Ukraine, differences remain](#), Reuters, 15 June 2023

[NATO Secretary General: we must ensure Ukraine can defend itself now and in the future](#), NATO News Release, 15 June 2023

[Four more Allies join NATO's Multinational Ammunition Warehousing Initiative](#), NATO News Release, 15 June 2023

## **Kosovo**

NATO reinforcements arrived in Kosovo on 5 June 2023, following violence in which over 30 KFOR peacekeepers were injured (11 Italian and 20 Hungarian soldiers). Around 500 [Turkish service members](#) from Türkiye's 65th mechanized infantry brigade make up the bulk of the 700 NATO reinforcements. NATO already had about 4,000 soldiers in Kosovo. An additional battalion of NATO reserve forces has also been put on higher alert to be deployed if needed.

The latest crisis was sparked by the Kosovo government taking control of municipal buildings in four northern Serb-majority cities on 26 May. Violent protests demanding the removal of recently-elected ethnic Albanian mayors prompted KFOR, the NATO-led peacekeeping force, to intervene. On 29 May, ethnic Serb protesters [clashed](#) with KFOR troops in Zvečan, one of the northern

municipalities, leaving dozens injured, some seriously, on both sides. The US and EU blamed the Kosovo government for escalating tensions while faulting the Serbs for attacking the peacekeepers. Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic said 52 Serbs were injured in the disturbances, three seriously, while one was "wounded with two gunshots by [ethnic] Albanian special forces". Hungary's defence minister said on Facebook "more than 20 Hungarian soldiers" were among the wounded, with seven in serious but stable condition.

The latest violence in the region has rekindled fears of a renewal of the 1998-99 conflict in Kosovo that claimed more than 10,000 lives, displaced more than 1 million people and resulted in a NATO peacekeeping mission that has lasted nearly a quarter of a century.

[NATO stresses need for de-escalation for lasting security in Kosovo and stability in the Western Balkans](#), NATO News Release, 5 July 2023

[Serbia army chief urges NATO, international agencies to protect Kosovo Serbs](#), Reuters, 23 June 2023

[NATO and EU together for stability in Kosovo and the Western Balkans](#), NATO News Release, 13 June 2023

[Behind the Renewed Troubles in Northern Kosovo](#), International Crisis Group, 7 June 2023

[NATO says reinforcements arriving in Kosovo after clashes last week](#), Reuters, 5 June 2023

[NATO reinforcements start arriving in Kosovo](#), NATO News Release, 5 June 2023

[Turkey to send commandos to Kosovo in response to Nato peacekeeping call](#), The Guardian, 3 June 2023

Anatol Lieven, [Ethnic conflict in Kosovo: Cutting the Gordian Knot](#), Responsible Statecraft, 2 June 2023

[Efforts to defuse Kosovo crisis intensify amid more protests](#), Associated Press, 31 May 2023

[NATO to send 700 more troops to Kosovo to help quell violent protests](#), Associated Press, 30 May 2023

[Kosovo clashes: Nato commander criticises 'unacceptable' attacks on troops](#), The Guardian, 30 May 2023

[Statement by the NATO Spokesperson on unprovoked attacks against KFOR troops](#), NATO Press Release, 29 May 2023

[NATO urges Kosovo to de-escalate tension with Serbia](#), Reuters, 27 April 2023

### ***Sweden's membership application***

NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg hosted a [meeting](#) of senior officials from Finland, Türkiye and Sweden on 6 July 2023, focused on Sweden's membership in NATO. "Today, we reaffirmed that Sweden's membership is within reach," concluded Stoltenberg, adding that he will convene a meeting in Vilnius on 10 July with President Erdogan and Prime Minister Kristersson as the next step in the process. A day earlier, US President Joe Biden told Kristersson that he is "looking forward" to the country's stalled NATO membership bid winning final approval. However, this now seems likely to happen at some future date after the Vilnius summit.

Sweden's Prime Minister [said](#) on 30 June that his Hungarian counterpart had assured him that Budapest would not delay the Nordic country's NATO accession, following reports that Hungary's parliament would delay a ratification of the membership until its autumn legislative session. Sweden applied last year to join NATO following Russia's invasion of Ukraine but Turkey and Hungary have so far blocked ratification. The situation was further exacerbated on 28 June by an incident in Stockholm when two men tore pages out of the Quran and burned them in front of a crowd outside a mosque. Officials from several Muslim-majority countries condemned the act and have taken diplomatic measures against Sweden. Most notably, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, used a similar incident in January 2023 (see NATO Watch [update 40](#)) as a reason to further delay ratification of Sweden's NATO membership and will likely do the same thing again. Earlier, Erdogan [told](#) the NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg in a phone call on 25 June that Sweden must stop protests by supporters of the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) in Stockholm to get the green light. Senior officials from Türkiye, Sweden, Finland and NATO met in

Ankara on 14 June 2023 for talks on Sweden's progress toward full NATO membership.

On 30 May, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken urged Türkiye to immediately finalize Sweden's accession to NATO, saying the country had already taken significant steps to address Ankara's objections to its membership. Blinken also rejected the suggestion that the Biden administration was linking Türkiye's approval of Sweden's NATO accession to the sale of F-16 fighter jets to Ankara, although he said the US Congress was doing so. A day before, the US President also [alluded to](#) a link.

Given the ongoing delay to NATO membership, Sweden will allow NATO to base troops on its territory even before it formally joins, the Swedish Prime Minister and Defence Minister said on 9 June. Meanwhile, the Swedish Defence Commission [submitted](#) its report on Sweden's Security Policy to Minister for Defence Pål Jonson on 19 June. It concluded that a military attack against Sweden cannot be ruled out following Russia's invasion of Ukraine, stressing the importance of its swift entry into NATO. The [report](#) did not single out Moscow for instigating a potential attack but rather said Russia's war in Ukraine and China's mounting influence in Asia and the world were responsible for rising insecurity.

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### ***Russia's withdrawal from CFE Treaty***

On 9 June NATO condemned Russia's decision to withdraw from the treaty on conventional armed forces in Europe (CFE). "Russia's decision to withdraw from the CFE Treaty is the latest in a series of actions that systematically undermines Euro-Atlantic security," the alliance said in a [statement](#). "Russia's decision further demonstrates Moscow's continued disregard for arms control". [In May](#), Moscow said that the treaty is contrary to Russia's security interests, "due to the changed situation".

[NATO Condemns Russia's Decision To Quit Treaty On Conventional Armed Forces In Europe](#), RFE/RL, 9 June 2023

North Atlantic Council [Statement](#) on Russia's withdrawal from the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe, 9 June 2023

### ***Air Defender 23 exercise***

NATO's largest ever military combat aircraft exercise, Air Defender 23, started on 12 June in the skies over Germany, the Netherlands and

the Czech Republic. About 10,000 soldiers from 25 countries were involved, making use of 250 combat aircraft to prepare for a simulated attack on a NATO member state. Although the exercise was planned long before Russia's February 2022 invasion of Ukraine, it is nevertheless being viewed as a signal towards the Kremlin. The United States alone is sending 2,000 US Air National Guard personnel and about 100 aircraft to take part in the June 12-23 June exercise. Germany (with 70 aircraft), Sweden and Japan will also take part.

[How NATO Blends Aircraft From 25 Nations](#), New York Times, 23 June 2023

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### ***NATO cooperation with Japan***

Japan and NATO are preparing a new document to strengthen their cooperation in areas including disinformation and outer space, with China and Russia in mind, it was [reported](#) in late June. Tokyo hopes to release the document by the time of Prime Minister Fumio Kishida's trip to the NATO summit in Lithuania in July, sources said. In January, Kishida held talks with NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg during his visit to Japan. The two leaders agreed to "elevate current Japan-NATO cooperation to new heights that reflect the challenges of a new era", according to a joint statement issued after their meeting. NATO will set up a liaison office in Tokyo in 2024 and use it as a hub for co-operation with Australia, Japan, New Zealand and South Korea, the Nikkei newspaper said on 13 June, a plan China has described as unwelcome. In

May, Japan's ambassador to the United States said NATO was planning a Tokyo office, the first in Asia, to ease regional consultations, but French President Emmanuel Macron objected to the plan. France is reportedly unenthusiastic about the move as it would take the alliance away from its prime region of focus.

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### ***Extension of the Secretary General's mandate for another 12 months***

NATO member states agreed on 4 July 2023 to extend the mandate of Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg by a further year, until 1 October 2024. US President Joe Biden welcomed the decision: "With his steady leadership, experience, and judgment, secretary general Stoltenberg has brought our alliance through the most significant challenges in European security since the second world war," Biden said in a [statement](#). The decision will be endorsed by NATO Heads of State and Government at the Vilnius Summit. Stoltenberg was due to step down from his position in September after nine years in charge. Speculation about his successor had intensified in recent months. However, NATO leaders decided to extend Stoltenberg's term amid mounting pessimism around the prospects of agreeing a successor. Stoltenberg's term has already been prolonged three times and the Norwegian has broad support. Moreover, member states fear any



show of disunity during Russia's war in Ukraine.

[Jens Stoltenberg to stay as Nato chief for another year](#), The Guardian, 4 July 2023

[North Atlantic Council extends mandate of the NATO Secretary General](#), NATO News Release, 4 July 2023

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### ***Northern Group meets in Poland***

Defence ministers and senior defence officials from 12 northern European countries [met](#) in Poland on 22 May to discuss stepping up deterrence and security on NATO's eastern flank and strengthening Ukraine's defences, ahead of NATO's July summit in Vilnius,

Lithuania. Initiated by the UK in 2010, this so-called Northern Group consists of Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Sweden and the UK, and is a platform for developing security initiatives for NATO and EU member states.

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