



# News Brief Update 49

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## Russia's war with Ukraine (Update covering the period 9-27 July 2023)

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### Overview

Russia and Ukraine have been presenting very different accounts of the progress of the war in recent weeks. Ukraine has reported a measure of progress in a counteroffensive launched early last month in the east and in capturing villages in the south, while Moscow says it has

contained any move forward by Kyiv's forces. Western officials and analysts report that Ukraine appears to be making limited advances in its counteroffensive against Russian forces but has yet to employ the kind of larger-scale operations that might enable a breakthrough.

Mark Milley, the US chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff [said](#) on 18 July that the ongoing effort was "far from a failure" but that "there's a lot of fighting left to go and I'll stay with what we said before: This is going to be long. It's going to be hard. It's going to be bloody". President Putin [said](#) on 23 July that Ukraine's counteroffensive "has failed". He was hosting Belarusian leader Alexander Lukashenko, his close ally, for talks in St Petersburg. "There is no counteroffensive," Russian news agencies quoted Lukashenko as saying, to which Putin replied: "It exists, but it has failed".

In other developments, Ukraine's application for NATO membership was again deferred at the NATO Vilnius Summit, while the repercussions from the Wagner mutiny in June included continuing tensions within the Russian army and increased border tensions between Belarus and Poland. The war also escalated with the US delivery of cluster munitions to Ukraine and in the Black Sea region following Russia's withdrawal from the UN-brokered grain deal. Ukraine warned that it could target all shipping out of Russian and Russian-occupied ports and signalled its readiness to fight on the Black Sea, after Moscow's declaration of a naval blockade and bombardment of Ukrainian ports. Despite growing calls for an end to the war, diplomacy remains stalled.

## Russian attacks on civilian infrastructure

Russian missile and artillery attacks on civilian infrastructure have continued. The Ukrainian Black Sea city of Odesa has come under repeated attack since 17 July when Moscow pulled out of a deal allowing the export of Ukrainian grain (see below). The [airstrikes](#) on 23 July killed at least one person, wounded 22 and severely damaged the historic Transfiguration Cathedral, a landmark Orthodox cathedral in the city. The cathedral's archdeacon, Andrii Palchuk, lamented the "enormous" [destruction of the church](#), which he said was caused by a direct hit from a Russian missile. Russia [claimed](#) the cathedral was struck by a Ukrainian air defence missile. In addition, at least three people were [killed](#) during Russian airstrikes on 20 July, the third night of successive airstrikes on southern Ukrainian port cities. China's consulate building in Odesa was also damaged in the strikes on 20 July. Ukraine claimed to have shot down five cruise missiles and 13 attack drones out of 19 cruise missiles and 19 drones launched by Russia in total.

In earlier Russian attacks, two people were [killed](#) on 16 July in a series of missile and shelling attacks on the city and region of Kharkiv; a Russian attack on a humanitarian aid distribution point in south-eastern Ukraine on 9 July [killed](#) seven people, and two people were killed by Russian shelling in the east; and eight people were [killed](#) and 13 injured on 8 July from Russian rocket fire in Lyman in eastern Ukraine.

## Ukrainian attacks inside Russia and Crimea

As discussed in NATO Watch [Update 47](#), and [Update 48](#) a covert, low-level campaign of attacks within Russia and Russian-occupied Crimea has been going on for several months. A drone attack on an ammunition depot in Crimea prompted authorities to evacuate everyone within a 5km radius and briefly suspend road traffic on the Kerch Bridge on 22 July, the Moscow-installed regional governor

said. President Zelensky [said](#) on 21 July the bridge "brings war not peace" and is therefore a military target. An earlier [attack](#) on the Kerch Bridge on 17 July temporarily closed the only land link between the occupied Crimean peninsula and the Russian mainland. President Putin [said](#) the Russian Defence Ministry was preparing a response to the attack, in which a Russian couple was killed and their daughter injured. The Russian president called it a "terrorist attack" by Ukraine and claimed the bridge had "not been used for military transportation for a long time".

Kyiv did not officially claim responsibility for the attack, but Ukrainian media [said](#) Ukrainian security services had deployed maritime drones against the bridge. In what also appeared to be a tacit acknowledgment, Ukrainian security service spokesperson Artem Degtyarenko [said](#) in a statement that his agency would reveal details of how the "bang" was organised after Kyiv had won the war. In [an interview with the Guardian](#), Ihor Terekhov, the mayor of Kharkiv said the bridge was a legitimate military target and that the attack would cause "a lot of logistical problems for Russia". He also dismissed Russia's claim that it was an act of Ukrainian terrorism, saying that the Kremlin had brought death and destruction to his city on an epic scale. On 26 July, the Ukrainian security service belatedly [claimed responsibility](#) for the Crimea bridge attack that happened in October 2022.

Ukrainian forces shelled the Russian town of Shebekino near the Ukrainian border with Grad missiles on 16 July, killing a woman riding her bike, the governor of Russia's Belgorod region [said](#). Meanwhile, Russia [accused](#) the west on 14 July of sponsoring "nuclear terrorism" after authorities said a Ukrainian drone struck the western Russian town of Kurchatov, where a nuclear power station similar to the Chernobyl plant is located. Roman Starovoit, the Kursk oblast governor, said on Telegram that no residents were injured. "Critical facilities were not damaged as a result of the drone crash and its subsequent detonation".

## The use of cluster munitions

Cluster munitions are air-dropped or ground-launched weapons that release smaller submunitions intended to kill enemy personnel or destroy vehicles. There are three main [criticisms](#) of cluster munitions: they disperse large numbers of submunitions imprecisely over an extended area; they are difficult to detect; and they frequently fail to detonate, thereby leaving unexploded submunitions that can remain explosive hazards for many decades. The humanitarian consequences of cluster munitions and the unacceptable harm to civilians that they cause are addressed by the 2008 Convention on Cluster Munitions (CCM), which establishes an unconditional prohibition on their use. The CCM has 110 parties and 13 signatory states, among which are former major producers and users of cluster munitions as well as affected states. However, neither Russia nor Ukraine are parties, and seven NATO Member States (Estonia, Greece, Latvia, Poland, Romania, Turkey and the United States) have thus far also not signed the accord.

No CCM state party has used cluster munitions since the convention was adopted, and most of the states still outside the convention abide de facto by the ban on the use and production of these weapons. Since the CCM entered into force in August 2010, cluster munitions have been [used in eight non-signatory states](#): Azerbaijan in 2020; Cambodia in 2011; Libya in 2011, 2015 and 2019; South Sudan in 2014; Sudan in 2012–2015; Syria in 2012–2021; Ukraine in 2014–2015 and 2022–23; and Yemen in 2015–2017. Ukraine is the only country in the world where cluster munitions have been used since the end of 2021. The extensive use of cluster munitions by Russia in its invasion of Ukraine has been documented by NGOs and the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine. Human Rights Watch (HRW), for example, [reported](#) that Russian armed forces used at least six types of cluster munition in hundreds of attacks in at least eight of Ukraine’s oblasts between 24 February and 10 May 2022, while the commission [documented](#) indiscriminate attacks with the use of cluster munitions on

Chernihiv city on 17 March 2022. Hundreds of civilians have been killed and injured in these cluster munition attacks and the International Criminal Court’s [investigation](#) into allegations of Russian war crimes in Ukraine may also examine allegations of indiscriminate use of cluster munitions.

There are also [allegations](#) that Ukraine used cluster munitions at least three times in 2022, and HRW’s most recent [report](#) published on 6 July 2023 attributes their use by both Russian and Ukrainian forces with resulting Ukrainian civilian deaths. The cluster munition attacks in Ukraine have been widely [condemned](#), including by the NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg, who in March 2022 [called](#) Russia’s use of cluster munitions in Ukraine ‘inhumane’ and ‘in violation’ of international law.

Although the United States also [expressed concern](#) at Russia’s use of cluster munitions, it has remained unwilling to join the CCM. On 22 April 2022, in a [letter](#) to the US president, 27 members of the US Congress called cluster munitions ‘barbaric and indiscriminate weapons’ and said that they ‘strongly believe the credible allegations of Russian use of cluster munitions necessitate a change to the administration’s cluster munitions policy’. However, the US military has strenuously [resisted](#) efforts to fully curtail the availability of cluster munitions and included their transfer to Ukraine in a military aid package on 7 July 2023—a decision for which US President Joe Biden was [criticised](#) by human rights groups (see NATO Watch [Update 48](#)).

Members of Biden’s own Democratic party, rights groups and the UN raised [questions](#) about the US decision to send cluster bombs to Ukraine. US senator Tim Kaine told Fox News he had “some real qualms” about the move because it “could give a green light to other nations to do something different as well”. Germany’s President Frank-Walter Steinmeier [said](#) the country should not “block” the US from sending cluster bombs to Ukraine, while maintaining its opposition to the use of the weapon. “Germany’s position against the use of cluster munitions is as justified as ever. But we cannot, in the current situation, block the

United States,” Steinmeier told German broadcaster ZDF on 9 July. The UK Prime Minister Rishi Suna [reiterated](#) that the UK is signatory to the cluster munitions convention, saying. “We will continue to do our part to support Ukraine against Russia’s illegal and unprovoked invasion, but we’ve done that by providing heavy battle tanks and, most recently, long-range weapons”. Former UK prime minister Boris Johnson backed the US decision, describing it as “difficult but brave”.

Senior US and Ukrainian military officials [confirmed](#) on 13 July that Ukraine’s armed forces have received the US cluster munitions. “We just got them, we haven’t used them yet, but they can radically change [the battlefield],” Ukrainian army commander Oleksandr Tarnavskiy told CNN. A week later, White House national security spokesperson John Kirby [said](#) that the US-supplied cluster bombs have been deployed against Russian forces. “We have gotten some initial feedback from the Ukrainians, and they’re using them quite effectively,” Kirby told reporters.

President Putin said on 16 July that Russia had a “sufficient stockpile” of cluster bombs and that Moscow reserved the right to use them if such munitions were used against Russian forces in Ukraine. He added that Russia had not yet used the weapons although evidence collected by HRW and others noted above (including in the [attack](#) on Kramatorsk railway station in April 2022), confirms the duplicitous nature of the president’s remarks.

## The aftermath of the Wagner rebellion

Following the short-lived [Wagner Group mutiny](#) on 24 June (see NATO Watch [Update 48](#)), many of the mercenaries relocated to Russia’s ally Belarus, although initial reports suggested differing accounts of the numbers involved. According to Andrii Demchenko, the spokesperson for Ukraine’s border guards, only a “few hundred” fighters from Russia’s Wagner Group had so far relocated to Belarus. “There are some groups of mercenaries on the territory of Belarus, but we are not talking about any massive or large-scale deployment

... we are talking about a few hundred”, Demchenko [told](#) Ukrainian television on 16 July. However, more Wagner mercenaries arrived in Belarus on 17 July, Belaruski Hajun, a Belarusian activist group, [said](#), including a convoy of more than 100 vehicles carrying Russian flags and Wagner insignia that headed toward a field camp that Belarusian authorities have offered to the company. Belarus’s Defence Ministry [said](#) it planned for the mercenaries and Minsk’s own armed forces to conduct joint military drills.

It has since been [disclosed](#) that President Putin met with Yevgeny Prigozhin, the Wagner leader, just five days after the rebellion, according to the Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov. A three-hour meeting took place on 29 June, which also involved Wagner commanders. A [video](#) has also appeared purporting to show Prigozhin addressing his fighters in Belarus and calling the Russian war effort in Ukraine a “disgrace”. Earlier, in an interview with the Kommersant newspaper President Putin in a surprise admission [said](#) he had sought and failed to have Yevgeny Prigozhin replaced as the leader of Wagner’s fighters in Ukraine.

Poland [began moving](#) more than 1,000 troops and almost 200 units of equipment to the east of the country on the 8 July amid rising concern that the presence of Wagner fighters in Belarus could lead to increased tension on its border. “This is a demonstration of our readiness to respond to attempts at destabilisation near the border of our country”, the Defence Minister Mariusz Błaszczak wrote on Twitter. A week previously Poland said it would send 500 police to shore up security at its border with Belarus. President Putin [said](#) on 21 July Russia will use “all means at its disposal” to defend Belarus. The Russian president claimed at a meeting of the Russian security council that Poland was seeking to invade Belarus.

Tensions in the Russian army have also grown in the aftermath of the Wagner Group’s short-lived mutiny. Maj Gen Ivan Popov, who commanded the 58th Combined Arms Army, which is fighting on the front in Ukraine near Zaporizhzhia, [said](#) in a voice message on 12 July

that he had been fired after he brought up problems on the battlefield. Meanwhile, a senior Russian official [described](#) Gen Sergei Surovikin as “resting” and “not available”. The general, who previously led the invasion force in Ukraine, [hasn't been seen](#) in public since the Wagner mutiny.

## Ukraine's NATO membership application

NATO leaders [agreed](#) at their Vilnius summit (see below) that “Ukraine's future” is in the alliance and the country will join when “allies agree and conditions are met”, but failed to provide a timeline for when that will happen. “Allies will continue to support and review Ukraine's progress on interoperability as well as additional democratic and security sector reforms that are required,” the summit [communiqué](#) said. In short, NATO has said Ukraine cannot join its ranks while the war with Russia continues and made it clear that it would not happen automatically after the war ended. This prompted President Zelensky to say he has [“faith” but not confidence](#) in the alliance's decisions. Before NATO published the communiqué, the Ukrainian leader said it would be [“absurd”](#) if Ukraine was not offered NATO membership.

[Caution from the US and Germany](#) was widely attributed for the compromise outcome of closer integration with NATO and a stronger political declaration in favour of its membership in principle. Speaking to CNN ahead of the summit Joe Biden had [said](#) Ukraine is “not ready” for NATO membership, adding that NATO needed to “lay out a rational path” for Kyiv to follow in order to join the bloc, but that it would take time before the country met “all the qualifications, from democratisation to a whole range of other issues”.

Boris Johnson [criticised](#) NATO's “mealy mouthed procrastination” and called for a timetable to be drawn up for Ukraine to join. Meanwhile, Ukrainians [reacted](#) with bemusement, mild irritation and irony to UK Defence Secretary [Ben Wallace's comments](#) on 12 July that the country should be more

grateful for the UK military aid it is receiving. Kyiv previously regarded Wallace as a staunch supporter and friend. His remarks—on the second day of the NATO summit—mystified officials. “Whether we like it or not, people want to see a bit of gratitude,” Wallace said, when asked about President Zelensky's frustration at not being given a formal invitation to join NATO.

Nonetheless, in a rather strained display of unity, NATO leaders, and eventually Zelensky, lauded the summit as a landmark for NATO's renewed focus on deterring Russia, and a pivotal step on Ukraine's journey into the pillars of the Euro-Atlantic community. The situation was rescued in part by a [G7 declaration](#) on 12 July outlining security and economic support for Ukraine, including modern military equipment, across land, air, and sea, intelligence sharing and the training of Ukrainian forces in exchange for Ukraine committing to reforms “to underscore its commitments to democracy, the rule of law, respect for human rights and media freedoms”.

President Zelensky welcomed a “good result” from the NATO summit, despite his earlier complaints that his country had not been issued a firm timetable or set of conditions for joining the alliance. But in his regular remarks on 13 July he said: “For the first time since independence, we have formed a security foundation for Ukraine on its way to NATO”. The US Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin in an [interview](#) on CNN on 13 July said he is certain Ukraine will become part of NATO after Russia's war against the country ends, adding “I have no doubt that will happen, and we heard just about every country in the room say as much”.

## The role of the CIA in Ukraine

According to a recent Newsweek [report](#) the CIA is transporting weapons into Ukraine using a “gray fleet” of commercial aircraft that traverses Central and Eastern Europe. CIA personnel are also reportedly going into Ukraine on secret missions and assisting Ukrainians with new weapons and systems.



One senior military intelligence official told Newsweek, “The CIA has been operating inside Ukraine, under strict rules, and with a cap on how many personnel can be in country at any one time”. The CIA is also said to be using Poland as its clandestine hub to coordinate its operations inside Ukraine. Under a formal declaration of war, these CIA activities would be the domain of the military. The report also suggests that the United States has only limited intelligence about Zelensky and Putin's decision-making on the war.

## Stalled diplomacy

US President Joe Biden [met](#) with Pope Francis' peace envoy, Cardinal Matteo Zuppi, on 18 July as part of the Holy See's peace and humanitarian initiatives for Ukraine. Cardinal Zuppi's two-day visit to Washington follows his recent mission to Moscow and an earlier stop in Kyiv, where he met with President Zelensky (see NATO Watch Update 48). Pope Francis has repeatedly called for an end to the war, and he was joined by more than 230 religious leaders who expressed support for a negotiated settlement and published a [press release](#) to coincide with Zuppi's visit. “The time to begin building a just peace is now, not after every military option has been exhausted,” [said](#) Michele Dunne, Executive Director of Franciscan Action Network.

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 a recent African initiative (see NATO Watch [Update 48](#)) was the first since the start of the war to hold separate face-to-face

talks with both the Russian and Ukrainian leaders.

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 (virtual) meeting [took place](#) on 18 July., where NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg outlined the major decisions taken at the Vilnius Summit to support Ukraine. Earlier, at its [Madrid Summit](#) NATO agreed 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 €31.9 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 announcement***

Since the war began in February 2022, the US has provided nearly 40 military assistance packages to Ukraine, and [announced](#) a new \$400 million package on 25 July that includes air defence munitions, artillery rounds, armoured vehicles and anti-armour capabilities.

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

Bulgaria [said](#) on 21 July it would send about 100 armoured personnel carriers to Ukraine. It is the country's first shipment of heavy equipment to Kyiv. Bulgaria has so far sent only one military aid package to Kyiv, containing mostly flak jackets and helmets, but a pro-EU government took office last month. Meanwhile, France [agreed](#) on 11 July to start supplying Ukraine with long-range Scalp missiles that will allow Kyiv's forces to defend themselves. "I have decided to increase deliveries of weapons and equipment to enable the Ukrainians to have the capacity to strike deeply while keeping our doctrine to allow Ukraine to defend its territory," President Emmanuel Macron said.

South Korea's President Yoon Suk-yeol [pledged](#) to increase his country's humanitarian and non-lethal military assistance to Ukraine after a meeting with President Zelensky in Kyiv on 15 July. Yoon said Seoul would "expand the scale of supplies from last year, when we provided materials such as helmets and bullet-proof vests", adding that humanitarian aid would be increased to \$150 million in 2023, from \$100 million last year.

Ukraine [criticised](#) Bulgaria's President Rumen Radev over his remarks on 14 July that Kyiv is to blame for Russia's ongoing war and that supplying arms to Ukraine only prolongs the conflict. Radev spoke about the recent NATO summit (see below) and said that he wanted "to make it clear that Ukraine insists on fighting this war ... But it should also be clear that the bill is paid by the whole of Europe". The embassy of Ukraine in Sofia rejected Radev's stance that supplying arms to Ukraine fuels and prolongs the war, saying Kyiv was making all possible efforts to restore peace.

### ***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 (see NATO Watch [Update 48](#)). Only two states have so far agreed to supply combat aircraft to Ukraine: Poland and Slovakia (see NATO Watch [Update 46](#)).

### ***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 (see NATO Watch [Update 48](#)).

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, with [undercounting and manipulation](#) of the data is common in war. According to the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project ([ACLED](#)), a disaggregated data collection, analysis and crisis mapping project, there were a total of 93,211 conflict-related fatalities in Ukraine between 24 February 2022 and 21 July 2023: 44,804 in explosions/remote violence; 47,067 in battles; 1,336 in violence against civilians; and 4 in protests.

A joint investigation by the Russian investigative journalism outfits Meduza and Mediazona [estimates](#) that about 47,000 Russian soldiers and contract fighters have died since the beginning of the war in Ukraine. The figures were calculated based on data from the beginning of the war until 27 May

2023. Russia has not released official figures for those killed in action since September 2022, when it said 5,937 soldiers had died. The numbers were widely seen as implausibly low. Ukraine [claims](#) to have killed more than 243,000 Russian soldiers in the war to date. The UK's Ministry of Defence [said](#) in an intelligence update on 10 July that Russia is "almost certainly struggling with a crisis of combat medical provision, after suffering an average of about 400 casualties a day for 17 months".

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 16 July, 9,287 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. According to [Action on Armed Violence](#) (AOAV) the number of civilian casualties from explosive violence in the Ukrainian conflict reached 14,984 people by 21 July. From this number, 4,716 were killed and 10,268 were injured. Ninety-five per cent (14,178) of civilian casualties have occurred in populated areas.

The number of [refugees](#) from the conflict stood at 6,221,100 as of 18 July, down from 8,207,977 on 9 May.

## Continuing concerns over nuclear power plants

The IAEA [said](#) on 24 July that it had found anti-personnel mines in an area of the Russian-held Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant and complained for the second month running that this violated safety procedures. Earlier, on 20 July, the IAEA [said](#) it had been unable to inspect the roofs of the nuclear power plant. Ukraine has [accused](#) Russia of turning the plant into a shield for its artillery and of dynamiting the reactor roof, turning the site into an atomic bargaining chip (see NATO Watch [Update 48](#)). Russia's nuclear chief Alexei Likhachev denied the claims [saying](#) on 13 July that only "a complete idiot" would do such a reckless thing.

## Further reading:

### On outcomes and consequences of the war

[Ukraine's defense minister says attacks on Crimea will continue, predicts possible NATO entry next year](#), CNN, 25 July 2023

Joshua Shiffrinson, [Why NATO Should Be Cautious About Admitting Ukraine](#), Carnegie Endowment for International Peace Commentary, 24 July 2023

[Wagner mercenaries train Belarus special forces near Polish border](#), Reuters, 20 July 2023

William Arkin, [CIA Is Playing "Outsize Role" in Ukraine Despite Biden Pledge Not to Send U.S. Forces](#), Democracy Now, 19 July 2023

Daniel L. Davis, [Why Ukraine's counter-offensive is failing](#), Responsible Statecraft, 19 July 2023

[Secretary General to Ukraine Defense Contact Group: NATO support will continue for as long as it takes](#), NATO News, 18 July 2023

[US and NATO grapple with critical ammo shortage for Ukraine](#), CNN, 18 July 2023

Peter Dickinson, [Russia's invasion of Ukraine was never about NATO](#), Atlantic Council, 18 July 2023

Elizabeth Beavers and Samuel Moyn, [Congress is Grappling with the Wrong Questions on Ukraine](#), Time, 17 July 2023

[Ukraine will 'no doubt' join NATO when war with Russia ends, US defense secretary tells CNN](#), CNN, 13 July 2023



[Zelensky Leaves NATO Summit to Face Hard Realities of War](#), New York Times, 13 July 2023

James R. Webb, [Why Dems should support Rep. Greene's more narrow cluster weapons ban](#), Responsible Statecraft, 13 July 2023

Kelley Beaucar Vlahos, [Riddle this: How many casualties are there, truly, on both sides of Ukraine war?](#) Responsible Statecraft, 12 July 2023

Patrick Hinton, [Lean on the Barrage: The Role of Artillery in Ukraine's Counteroffensive](#), RUSI Commentary, 12 July 2023

Connor Echols, [Will proposed watchdog for Ukraine aid make it past the White House?](#) Responsible Statecraft, 11 July 2023

[The Future of European Security: A report on the discussions of a working group convened by the Quincy Institute](#), Quincy Brief No. 43, July 2023

[G7 countries pledge long-term support for Ukraine](#), Politico, 12 July 2023

[Germany keeps distance from US cluster bombs for Ukraine](#), Deutsche Welle, 12 July 2023

Alexander Clarkson, [Prigozhin's Mutiny Shouldn't Have Caught the West Napping](#), World Politics Review, 12 July 2023 (paywall)

[Russia attacks Kyiv and other Ukrainian cities before NATO summit](#), Reuters, 11 July 2023

Eli Clifton, [Ukraine in NATO? War Inc. knows a great deal when it sees one](#): Politico published a letter calling for sending more weapons to Kyiv without disclosing the potential financial interests of its signatories, Responsible Statecraft, 11 July 2023

Jack Watling and Justin Bronk, [Giving Ukraine Cluster Munitions is Necessary, Legal and Morally Justified](#), RUSI Commentary, 10 July 2023

Simon Tisdall, [Defeat for Ukraine would be a global disaster. Nato must finally step in to stop Russia](#), The Observer, 8 July 2023

Philip Dandolov, [Imperialist Red Herring? NATO Expansion and the Ukraine War](#), Geopolitical Monitor, 5 July 2023

## 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 February that Moscow would suspend its participation in the New START treaty, threatening the end of the last remaining US-Russian nuclear arms control agreement, while 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.

In March Russia [said](#) that it would station tactical nuclear weapons in neighbouring Belarus (see NATO Watch [Update 47](#)) and President Putin [confirmed](#) deployment of the first tranche on 16 June (see NATO Watch [Update 48](#)). NATO said it has not seen a change in Russia's nuclear posture despite its announcement that it is stationing nuclear weapons in Belarus. However, NATO Secretary Jens Stoltenberg [cautioned](#) on 11 July that "the nuclear rhetoric of Russia is reckless and dangerous" and that NATO allies were closely monitoring what Russia was doing. "So far we haven't seen any changes in the Russian nuclear deployment posture that requires a change from us, but we will remain vigilant", he said. Similarly, the US President Joe Biden [said](#) on 13 July he doesn't believe there is "any real prospect" Russia using nuclear weapons in Ukraine. Biden made the comment in response to a question about whether the Russian president could escalate actions in Ukraine after the disarray caused by last month's failed Wagner mutiny. The US president was speaking during a press conference with the Finnish President Sauli Niinistö in Helsinki after the US-Nordic leaders' summit.

The war in Ukraine just became even more toxic and lethal: the UK supply of 'depleted uranium' ammunition to Ukraine and Russia's 'nuclear sharing' with Belarus, NATO Watch [Briefing Paper No.105](#), 31 March 2023

[Wagner fighters neared Russian nuclear base during revolt](#), Reuters, 11 July 2023

## On investigation of war crimes in Ukraine

South Africa announced on 19 July that Russian President Vladimir Putin would [not attend](#) the summit of BRICS nations hosted by Johannesburg in August. Because South Africa is a member of the International Criminal Court (ICC), and which issued an arrest warrant for Putin in March, it would have been obliged to arrest the Russian leader for alleged war crimes if he set foot in the country. Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov will attend in his place. South African President Cyril Ramaphosa had earlier [asked permission](#) from the ICC not to arrest Putin, because to have done so would have amounted to a declaration of war, a local court submission published on 18 July showed.

Meanwhile, an [investigation](#) by the Centre for Information Resilience, an independent, non-profit social enterprise dedicated to exposing human rights abuses and war crimes, has identified military units under Russia's command that carried out human rights abuses in 2022 during the occupation of the Ukrainian city of Izium. The report names four militia units that allegedly abused civilians and prisoners of war.

The Belarus Red Cross [sparked](#) international outrage after its chief told Belarusian state television that the organisation is actively involved in bringing Ukrainian children from Russian-occupied areas to Belarus. Both Ukraine and the Belarusian opposition have labelled the transfers unlawful deportations, and there have been calls for international war crimes charges for the authoritarian Belarus leader, similar to the charges against President Putin.

### ***Selected investigations Feb 2022-June 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 the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (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. A second OHCHR [report](#) published on 27 June 2023 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 [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.

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. The UN Secretary-General's [Annual Report](#) on Children and Armed Conflict in June 2023 [called out](#) Russia for killing 136 children in Ukraine in 2022 and also verified that Russian armed forces and affiliated groups injured 518 children and carried out 480 attacks on schools and hospitals.

Finally, 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.

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

On 20 July the United States [imposed](#) new Russia-related sanctions against nearly 120 individuals and entities aimed at blocking Moscow's access to electronics and other goods that aid its war against Ukraine. The new measures are designed to "reduce Russia's revenue from the metals and mining sector, undermine its future energy capabilities and degrade Russia's access to the international financial system," the treasury department said in a statement.

The UK added individuals and groups with links to Russia's Wagner group and operating in Central African Republic (CAR) and Mali to its sanctions list on 20 July. Vitalii Viktorovitch Perfilev was named as the head of the Wagner group in the CAR and the UK said he would be subject to an asset freeze and travel ban. In addition, the UK [introduced](#) new sanctions on 17 July, including against Russian education minister Sergey Kravtsov, related to what it described as Moscow's forced deportation of Ukrainian children.

The UK removed sanctions on Oleg Tinkov, the founder of digital bank Tinkoff, on 20 July, days after an appeal by Richard Branson and nine months after Tinkov, critical of Moscow's invasion of Ukraine, renounced his Russian citizenship. The UK sanctioned Tinkov a month after Russia invaded Ukraine but Tinkov contested that designation, routinely criticising Russia's actions in Ukraine and offloading his stake in the bank. Meanwhile, Eugene Shvidler, a longtime ally of the billionaire Roman Abramovich, [launched](#) a legal challenge against UK sanctions imposed upon him after Russia's invasion of Ukraine. In a high court case being closely watched by other sanctioned oligarchs, lawyers for Shvidler, who is reportedly worth £1.3bn, are seeking to have his designation for sanctions declared unlawful and quashed, as well as pursuing restitution of his costs. Shvidler's seized assets include [two private jets](#). Similar challenges by Russian oligarchs are now entering the courts in Europe where a separate but similar sanction regime operates.

The EU [announced](#) a ban on exports of battlefield equipment and aviation parts to Belarus on 26 July. Spain, the current holder of the EU's rotating chair, said in a post on social media that the new sanctions were a response to "the situation in Belarus and the involvement of Belarus in the Russian aggression against Ukraine".

### 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.

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

On 17 July Russia [pulled out](#) of the Black Sea grain deal, brokered by the UN-Turkey a year ago to alleviate a global food crisis by allowing Ukrainian grain to be exported safely. The agreement had been extended three times since July 2022 — most recently in May — but expired on 17 July. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan had [said](#) on 14 July that President Putin had agreed to extend the deal after they had spoken over the phone, while UN Secretary-General António Guterres had [proposed](#) to Putin that he extend the deal in return for connecting a subsidiary of Russia’s agricultural bank to the SWIFT international payment system, sources told Reuters.

Moscow said the decision not to renew the agreement was final and warned it could not guarantee the safety of ships. Antony Blinken, the US Secretary of State, [said](#) Russia’s decision was “unconscionable”, while António Guterres [said](#) he did not accept its explanations for why it had terminated the agreement, including the loss of Russian food markets. Ukrainian President Zelensky [said](#) the grain deal must continue and could operate without Russian participation. “Africa has the right to stability.

Asia has the right to stability,” he said in his nightly video address.

The head of USAid Samantha Power accused Putin of making a [“life and death decision”](#) affecting millions of the world’s poorest people by withdrawing from the deal. Speaking on 19 July in the shadow of several vast grain silos in the key trading port of Odesa, Power pledged a further \$250 million to create and expand alternative routes for Ukrainian grain to leave the country, but admitted nothing would compensate for the loss of the Black Sea ports. The Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov discussed with his Turkish counterpart, Hakan Fidan, ways of exporting Russian grain via routes “that would not be susceptible to Kyiv and the west’s sabotage”, Russia’s Foreign Ministry [said](#) on 18 July.

The situation was further exacerbated after Moscow declared a naval blockade and bombardment of Ukrainian ports. On 19 July Ukrainian officials [said](#) Russian airstrikes had destroyed 60,000 tonnes of grain awaiting export, while Russia [said](#) the same day that it would deem all ships heading for Ukrainian waters to be potentially carrying weapons from 20 July, in what Washington called a signal it might attack civilian shipping. Russia’s defence ministry said it would “flag countries of such ships ... considered parties to the Ukrainian conflict”. The ministry did not say what actions it might take. In turn, Ukraine [warned](#) on 20 July that it might target all shipping out of Russian and Russian-occupied ports and signalled its readiness to fight on the Black Sea.

Russia’s Black Sea Fleet “carried out live firing of anti-ship cruise missiles at the target ship in the combat training range in the north-western part of the Black Sea”, Russia’s Defence Ministry [said](#) on 21 July. Amid this growing uncertainty over whether commercial traffic could be attacked, the number of ships looking to pick up grain cargoes from the Black Sea area [fell](#) 35% between the week ended 21 July and the week ended 14 July. Wheat prices also [spiked](#) after these latest developments. Wheat was trading almost 1.5% higher on the Chicago Board of Trade exchange on 20 July,



while corn and soya bean prices were also rising. It followed a rise of more than 8% in wheat prices on 19 July. The International Monetary Fund [warned](#) on 25 July that global grain prices could be driven up by 10-15%.

The EU's foreign policy chief, Josep Borrell, [said](#) on 20 July that Russia is responsible for a major global food supply crisis, while Germany's Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock [said](#) her country was intensify work with allies to get the grain out by rail. The US ambassador to the UN Linda Thomas-Greenfield [told](#) a meeting of the UN Security Council on 21 July that Russia is "waging war on the world's food supply" and has "upended peace and security around the world". She also called on Moscow to cease attacking Ukrainian food facilities and reenter the Black Sea grain deal. "Russia has zero legitimate reason to suspend its participation in this arrangement ... It is using the Black Sea as blackmail", she added.

Almost 30 ships dropped anchor near Ukraine's Izmil port terminal after Russia attacked grain warehouses on the Danube River on 24 July. The pre-dawn Russian [airstrikes](#) wounded seven people and hit infrastructure along the Danube, a vital alternative route for Ukrainian grain since the grain deal ended. Kyiv said the attack was an expansion of an air campaign Russia launched after pulling out of the deal. Ukraine's Minister for Infrastructure Oleksandr Kubrakov [said](#) on 26 July that over the past nine days, 26 port infrastructure facilities and five civilian vessels were damaged and partially destroyed by Russian attacks on Odesa. He also claimed that Russia is restricting shipping near Crimea and the territorial waters of Bulgaria, blocking the movement of ships in the direction of seaports of Ukraine.

On 25 July, Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov [told](#) reporters that it was impossible for Russia to return to the deal for now, as an agreement related to Russian interests was "not being implemented", however, he added that President Putin had made it clear the deal could be revived if its Russia-focused part was honoured. After a [meeting](#) of the NATO-Ukraine Council on 26 July, a body established

at the Vilnius Summit to coordinate cooperation between the alliance and Kyiv, NATO said it was stepping up surveillance of the Black Sea region and it also condemned Russia's exit from the grain deal.

[NATO-Ukraine Council addresses serious security situation in the Black Sea](#), NATO News Release, 26 July 2023

[NATO says it's boosting Black Sea surveillance, condemns Russian grain deal exit](#), Reuters, 26 July 2023

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## **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 recent development was that Germany found traces of subsea explosives in samples taken from a yacht that it suspects "may have been used to transport the explosives" to blow up the Nord Stream gas pipelines, it [told](#) the UN Security Council in a letter with Sweden and Denmark on 11 July.

## **On China's position on the war**

Russia will continue to cooperate with Beijing and can count on China's "friendly shoulder", the speaker of Russia's upper house of



parliament Valentina Matvienko [said](#) on 10 July after meeting Chinese President Xi Jinping in Beijing. Meanwhile, a Chinese naval flotilla set off on 16 July to join Russian naval and air forces in the Sea of Japan in an exercise aimed at “safeguarding the security of strategic waterways”, [according](#) to China’s Defence Ministry. Codenamed ‘Northern/Interaction-2023’, the drill marks enhanced military cooperation between China and Russia since Moscow’s invasion of Ukraine.

Although China’s position on Russia-China relations and on the Russia-West confrontation is not uniform, the Chinese Government has presented a relatively consistent and developed position. First, that 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](#)). 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.

## On developments within Russia

Russia [said](#) on 26 July that just 17 African heads of state would be attending the [Russia-Africa summit](#) (26-29 July) in St Petersburg. This fewer than at its 2019 conference (when 43 leaders attended) or at similar summits held elsewhere, including a [US-African Leaders Summit](#) in December 2022, where delegations from all 49 invited African countries and the African Union, alongside members of civil society and the private sector attended.

Russian lawmakers on 25 July backed [legislation](#) increasing the maximum age limit to 30 for compulsory military service. The bill comes as Moscow seeks to replenish its forces on the frontline in Ukraine without resorting to another mobilisation – a step the Kremlin took in September 2022 that proved unpopular.

Russia [arrested](#) Igor Girkin—a former battlefield commander of Moscow’s proxy forces in eastern Ukraine—on extremism charges, probably fuelled by his criticism of the Russian war effort in Ukraine. Girkin was convicted in absentia by a Dutch court over the shooting down of Malaysia Airlines Flight 17 in 2014. Meanwhile, a senior Russian draft officer and former submarine commander, Stanislav Rzhitsky, accused by Ukraine of missile strikes on its territory was [shot dead](#) by an unidentified gunman while jogging in the southern Russian city of Krasnodar on 10 July. Russian FSB security services said the next day that a 64-year-old man was arrested on suspicion of carrying out the attack.

According to a [decree signed](#) by President Putin on 16 July, foreign-owned stakes in Danone Russia, along with beer company Carlsberg’s stake in a local brewer have been put under the “temporary management” of government property agency Rosimushchestvo. French dairy group Danone is reportedly reviewing its legal options.

## On developments within NATO

### *The Vilnius Summit*

The NATO Vilnius Summit took place on the 11-12 July 2023. It was the fourth NATO summit since Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. This was to have been Jens Stoltenberg’s last summit as Secretary General, but NATO member states [agreed](#) on 4 July to extend his mandate by a further year, until 1 October 2024. In a [pre-Summit press conference](#) on 7 July, Stoltenberg said, “Russia’s war of aggression against Ukraine continues to rage on. For 500 days, Moscow has brought death and destruction to the heart of Europe, seeking to destroy Ukraine and divide NATO”. The Secretary General indicated that Ukraine’s future would be front and centre in the discussions: “At the summit, we will make Ukraine even ... stronger and set out a vision for its future”, Stoltenberg said. Key developments at the Summit fell within seven headings: I. Ukraine membership and security assurances; II. Strengthening NATO’s long-term deterrence and defence: (a) the new

regional defence plans; (b) nuclear weapons and arms control; and (c) enhancing resilience; III. Sweden's accession; IV. The challenge of China and NATO's expansion into the Indo-Pacific; V. Military investments and burden-sharing; VI. Combating climate change; and VII. Combatting terrorism in the Middle East, North Africa and the Sahel. Key decisions at the Summit were as follows:

- The summit adopted an official text: the 90-paragraph [Vilnius Summit Communiqué](#).
- A package of measures was agreed "to bring Ukraine closer to NATO", including (a) a multiyear programme of assistance to ensure full interoperability between the Ukrainian armed forces and NATO; (b) creation of a NATO-Ukraine Council; and (c) reaffirmation that Ukraine will become a member of NATO "when allies agree and conditions are met". However, it was agreed to remove the requirement for a Membership Action Plan.
- President Zelensky joined the summit for the inaugural meeting of the new NATO-Ukraine Council. After initially expressing disappointment with the Summit outcome, Zelensky said what Ukraine got from the summit was "unambiguous clarity that Ukraine will be in NATO".
- The G7 (and not NATO) launched a framework for bilateral negotiations to provide long-term security assistance commitments to Ukraine.
- The most comprehensive regional defence plans since the end of the Cold War were approved to counter the two main "threats": Russia and terrorism. The plans cover the Atlantic and European Arctic; the Baltic region and central Europe; and the Mediterranean and Black Sea. They have not been made public or independently assessed.
- To execute the new defence plans, NATO is putting 300,000 troops on higher readiness, including substantial air and naval combat power.
- Sweden agreed a new bilateral Security Compact with Türkiye that assuaged Ankara's previous objections, and the Nordic country will become NATO's 32nd

member state after the Accession Protocol is ratified by the Turkish and Hungarian parliaments.

- NATO will establish its first Special Coordinator for Counter-Terrorism and will update its Policy Guidelines and Action Plan on Counter-Terrorism. A comprehensive review of the situation in NATO's southern neighbourhood (the Middle East, North Africa and Sahel regions) has been instigated for presentation at the next NATO Summit in 2024.
- A new Defence Production Action Plan was agreed "to accelerate joint procurement, boost interoperability, and generate investment and production capacity".
- A new defence investment pledge was agreed to spend a minimum of 2% of GDP annually (i.e., the pledge has gone from being a 'ceiling' to a 'floor'). Military spending across European allies and Canada in 2023 is already anticipated to increase by 8.3%, the ninth consecutive year of increases.
- A new set of Alliance Resilience Objectives were agreed. Although allies are meant to "use these objectives to guide the development of their national goals and implementation plans", and to promote "societal resilience", the objectives have not yet been made public.
- To address the threat to critical undersea infrastructure, it was agreed to establish a Maritime Centre for the Security of Critical Undersea Infrastructure and to set up a network of relevant actors to improve information sharing and exchange best practice.
- NATO's approach to cyber issues was enhanced by the endorsement a new concept to enhance the contribution of cyber defence to NATO's overall deterrence and defence posture, and a commitment to new national goals to further strengthen national cyber defences. Neither the concept nor the goals were made public. A new Virtual Cyber Incident Support Capability (VCISC) was launched "to support national mitigation efforts in response to significant malicious cyber

activities". The first NATO Cyber Defence Conference will be held in Berlin in November 2023.

- Three major reports were released with the aim of contributing to increased understanding of the impact of climate change on NATO's strategic environment.
- Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania signed a Declaration of Cooperation on cross-border airspace.
- A commitment was made to deepen cooperation with Indo-Pacific partners Australia, Japan, New Zealand and South Korea that participated in a NATO Summit for the second time. No new measures were announced.
- The next NATO Summit will be held in Washington, D.C. in 2024 (for NATO's 75th anniversary), followed by a meeting in the Netherlands in 2025.

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## **Sweden**

Sweden's historic move to join NATO following Russia's invasion of Ukraine had been blocked by Türkiye and Hungary. After Finland officially became a member state on 4 April 2023, the United States and other NATO member states started to exert [pressure](#) on Türkiye (and Hungary) to accelerate approval for Sweden prior to the Vilnius summit. President Biden was [reportedly](#) trying to complete a four-nation deal that would lead to Türkiye allowing Sweden into NATO in return for the [sale of US F-16 combat aircraft](#) to Ankara, on the condition they would not be used to threaten Greece. But Erdoğan threw another obstacle in the way of Biden's plan by announcing he wanted Türkiye's stalled application to join the EU to be included in the package.

Stoltenberg then met with President Erdoğan and Swedish Prime Minister Kristersson in Vilnius on 10 July—and that is when the breakthrough was made. During this meeting, on the eve of the Summit, the three leaders—Stoltenberg, Erdoğan and Kristersson—reached a new understanding, as set out in a [press statement](#) following the meeting. The statement underlined that Stockholm had changed laws, expanded counterterrorism cooperation against the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) and restarted arms exports to Türkiye. It also said that Ankara and Stockholm agreed to create a “new bilateral Security Compact” and that Sweden will present a “roadmap as the basis of its continued fight against terrorism in all its forms”. Sweden and Türkiye also agreed to step up economic cooperation, through the Türkiye-Sweden Joint Economic and Trade Committee (JETCO), and “Sweden will actively support efforts to reinvigorate Türkiye's EU accession process, including modernisation of the EU-Türkiye Customs Union and visa liberalisation,” the statement said. Finally, Stoltenberg also

agreed to create a new post of “Special Coordinator for Counter-Terrorism” at NATO. In turn, Türkiye agreed to “transmit the Accession Protocol for Sweden to the Grand National Assembly, and work closely with the Assembly to ensure ratification”.

Although a precise date by when the Turkish parliament must approve Sweden's NATO membership was not agreed, it is now almost certain to occur before the end of the year. In his first post-Summit public comments on the issue on 12 July, President Erdoğan [said](#) that the final decision rested with the Turkish parliament and that Sweden needed to take more steps to win parliamentary support, without giving specifics. He also said parliament would not take up the matter until October. But it seems very unlikely that further conditions will be set by Türkiye. And with Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán promising that his country would not be the last holdout against Sweden's membership, an enlargement of NATO to 32 member states now appears to be a formality. The inclusion of Finland and Sweden in NATO represents a major geopolitical shift in Europe.

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