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Russian Foreign Minister Visits Beijing

During the official [visit](#) of Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov to Beijing on 9 April, Russia and China said that they would strengthen bilateral strategic cooperation. Lavrov also called upon Chinese President Xi Jinping where Xi stated that China attaches “great importance” to relations with Moscow and “stands ready, with Russia, to strengthen bilateral communication and strengthen multilateral strategic coordination”.

Kremlin Says U.S. Aid for Ukraine Would Not Alter Military Situation

On 18 April Kremlin’s spokesman Dmitry Peskov [said](#) that fresh U.S. aid for Ukraine will not change the dynamics on the battlefield. He stated, “it won’t in any way influence the development of the situation on the front...all experts now assert that the situation on the front is very unfavourable for the Ukrainian side”. Meanwhile, Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said “the allocation of U.S. military aid to Ukraine, Israel and Taiwan will exacerbate global crises”. She called aid for Kyiv “direct support for terrorist activities” and said aid to Taiwan represented “interference in China’s internal affairs”.

IMF Raises Russia’s Growth Forecast

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has [upgraded](#) its forecast of Russia’s economic growth in 2024. Russia’s economy is expected to grow 3.2 per cent this year, up from the previous forecast of 2.6 per cent issued in January 2024. The Kremlin has earmarked 10.8 trillion Roubles (\$115 billion) for defence spending in 2024, thus placing its economy more firmly on a war footing as the conflict in Ukraine drags on.

Spring Military Conscription in Russia

Russian President Vladimir Putin has [signed](#) a decree setting out the routine spring conscription campaign, calling up 1,50,000 citizens for statutory military service. All men in Russia are required to do a year-long military service, or equivalent training during higher education, from the age of 18. In July 2023, Russia’s lower house of parliament voted to raise the maximum age at which men can be conscripted to 30 from 27.

Uzbekistan Signs Enhanced Security Cooperation Agreement with China

On 2 April Chinese Minister of Public Security, Wang Xiaohong [visited](#) Tashkent and met with Uzbekistan’s President Shavkat Mirziyoyev. During the visit, the two nations signed an enhanced security cooperation agreement for 2024-25 which aims to strengthen cooperation in combating the three evils: “terrorism, separatism and religious extremism.” It would extend cooperation to combat drug trafficking, cybercrime and other forms of transnational crimes.

Kazakh President Visits Armenia

On 15 April Kazakhstan’s President Kasym-Jomart Tokayev visited Armenia and [met](#) with Armenian Prime Minister, Nicol Pashinyan. The two leaders reaffirmed their commitment to enhancing the multifaceted ties. The nations assured to promote partnership within the framework of the Eurasian Economic Union and to adapt the Commonwealth of Independent States to modern realities. They discussed the increasing cooperation in the field of defence at the bilateral and multilateral levels. The Kazakh leadership also

appreciated Armenia's efforts for peace in the South Caucasus, particularly its "Crossroads of Peace" initiative.

Uzbek President Visits Tajikistan

Uzbekistan's President Shavkat Mirziyoyev embarked on a two-day official [visit](#) to Dushanbe on April 18. The two leaders focused on advancing dialogue, expanding economic cooperation, inter-regional relations, and cultural-humanitarian exchange. They stressed the need to continue cooperation in regional and international organisations. They also emphasized that signing of the historic Agreement on Alliance Ties significantly upgraded Uzbek-Tajikistan relations to a new level.

India Conducts Military Exercise with Uzbekistan

The Indian Army contingent [departed](#) for the 5th edition of India-Uzbekistan Joint Military Exercise- DUSTLIK- on 15 April. The Indian Forces comprise 45 soldiers from the Army and 15 personnel from the Air Force. On the Uzbek side, approximately 100 personnel from the Army and Air Force are participating in the exercise. . It is an annual exercise aimed at enhancing military cooperation and capabilities to execute joint operations in challenging terrains is scheduled from 15 to 28 April at Termez,.

Azerbaijan President Visits Russia

Azerbaijan's President Ilhan Aliyev was in Moscow on 22 April for an [official](#) working visit. He held a one-on-one meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin, where the leaders discussed the evolving relationship between the two nations,

including how the current relationship is shaped under the framework of the Declaration on Allied Interaction, signed in 2022. Discussions were held on the significance of the North-South Transport Corridor and regional Security was the highlight of the meeting.

Chinese Defence Minister Meets Kazakh President

Chinese Defense Minister Dong Jun [met](#) with Kazakh President Tokayev in Astana on 25 April. Dong expressed China's willingness to strengthen strategic cooperation with Kazakhstan, support each other's core interests and major concerns, safeguard national security, and play a constructive role in the political resolution of regional issues. President Tokayev stressed on Kazakhstan's will to enhance strategic communication and coordination with China, cooperate over risks and challenges, and jointly uphold international and regional peace and stability.

EU and India Set to Deepen Defence and Security Cooperation

EU's Special Envoy for the Indo-Pacific, Richard Tibbels said that EU's [defence](#) and security cooperation with India in the Indo-Pacific is expected to increase amid a worsening of the security environment in the region. He highlighted that "We have already stepped up our security cooperation in recent years with a first joint naval exercise in the Gulf of Guinea and India has also participated in an exercise with EU Operation Atalanta in the North-West Indian Ocean". "Cooperation on space security issues should also certainly be explored between India and the EU as we both have high stakes in the space domain".

EU Adopts New Schengen Visa Rules for Indians

The European Commission [adopted](#) specific rules on the issuing of multiple entry visas to Indian nationals. This new visa ‘cascade’ regime will provide easier access to visas with multi-year validity for Indian travellers. Under this visa holders will enjoy travel rights equivalent to visa-free nationals. This [decision](#) comes in the context of strengthened relations under the EU-India Common Agenda on Migration and Mobility, which seeks comprehensive cooperation between EU and India.

Chancellor Scholz Visits China

German Chancellor Olaf Scholz's [visited](#) China from 14-16 April. It was his first visit to China after his cabinet unveiled the China strategy aimed at de-risking trade ties. Scholz met Xi Jinping and Premier Li Qiang and held a press conference with the German- Chinese economic committee. Chancellor Scholz pressed for open and fair markets, [warning](#) China against dumping and overproduction while calling for the EU not to act out of protectionist self-interest. A week after this visit, three Germans were [arrested](#) on suspicion of working with the Chinese secret service. The accused are said to have handed over knowledge on military technology, to help strengthen China's Navy.

President Biden Signs \$95 Billion Aid Package

On 20 April 2024 the House of Representatives approved the much awaited [aid package](#) containing bills for

Ukraine, Israel and Taiwan which amounts to \$95 bn. The package was also passed by the Senate on 24 April after which President Biden has signed on it, thereby making it law. The first three bills include \$60.8 billion for Ukraine, \$26.4 billion for Israel, and \$8.1 billion to counter China in the Indo-Pacific. The fourth bill will deal with the frozen assets of Russian oligarchs to help fund future aid to Ukraine.

EU Tightens Sanctions on Iran

The scheme has also blacklisted After [Tehran's](#) attack on 13 April against Israel, which saw over 300 projectiles headed from different fronts, the EU began working on expanding the raft of sanctions to cover the production of missiles and broaden the section on prohibited drone-related components. The same was endorsed by foreign affairs ministers meeting in Luxembourg on 22 April and will enter into force soon. People and entities involved in Iran's UAV program have also been blacklisted through travel bans and asset-freezing measures.

UK Passes Rwanda Deportation Bill

Rishi Sunak's Rwanda deportation bill was finally passed by both houses of the [British](#) Parliament on 22 April. Under this, any asylum seeker who arrives illegally in Britain will be sent to Rwanda under a scheme the government says will deter Channel crossings and smash the people smugglers' business model. Home secretary, [James Cleverly](#), said it was a “landmark moment in our plan to stop the boats... the act will prevent people from abusing the law by using false human rights claims to block removals.”