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Russia-US Launch New Round of Talks in Geneva

Russian and American diplomats [held talks in Geneva](#). The discussions covered disarmament, arms control, new technologies, space and artificial intelligence. These talks assume significance amidst the worst post-Cold War deterioration in ties between the two countries. Earlier in June 2021, Russian President Vladimir Putin and his American counterpart Joe Biden met in Geneva where they had agreed that it was vital to keep talking despite the differences that divide them.

Gazprom Inks 15-Year Gas Contract with Hungary

Gazprom and Hungary have signed a [15-year gas supply contract](#). Gazprom will supply 4.5 billion cubic meters (bcm) of natural gas each year until 2036 through the new TurkStream pipeline which runs under the Black Sea, thereby bypassing Ukraine. The Ukrainian government, in turn, criticised the deal as “nothing but a political, economically unfounded decision”. Crucially, Ukraine earns \$3 billion a year through transiting Russian gas to Europe. Kiev has argued that Russia is seeking alternative transit routes as a way of putting pressure on Ukraine.

Military Drills in the Central Asian Region

Uzbek [military](#) took part in the SCO’s Peace Mission drills held at the Donguz training ground in the South Western Russian province of Orenburg from September 20 to 24. About six thousand military personnel from Uzbekistan, China, Russia, India, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Tajikistan and Belarus took part in the military drills

based on an anti-terror theme. India Chief of Defence Staff General Bipin Rawat also attended the military drills and witnessed the final validation exercise.

The 5th edition of the annual bilateral [KAZIND](#) exercises were carried out between India’s Bihar Regiment and Kazakh’s Company Group at Training Node Aisha Bibi, Kazakhstan from 30 August- 11 September. The exercise focused on counter insurgency and counter terrorism operations.

Joint military exercises of the Collective Rapid Deployment Forces (CRDF) of the Central Asian region of the CSTO [Rubezh-2021](#) took place from 1-9 September, 2021 at Edelweiss training ground in Kyrgyzstan. The narrative of the exercise was on repelling external aggression by detachments of illegal armed groups.

Russia and Belarus conducted joint [Zapad-2021 drills](#). The Russian Defence Ministry stated that Zapad-2021 “tested the militaries’ interaction during combat operations and let commanders and staff practice troop management during joint actions in repelling aggression against the Union State”.

Against the backdrop of Taliban gaining ground in Afghanistan, these military exercises are a way for Russia and Central Asia to continue their engagement at the tactical and operational level.

Meeting of Council of Heads of State of the SCO and CSTO

Speaking at a [meeting](#) of the Council of Heads of State of the SCO (on 16-17 September, Dushanbe), President of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoyev assessed the

current situation in Afghanistan. Shavkat Mirziyoyev said “today a new reality has formed in Afghanistan and the Taliban’s coming to power is a fait accompli”. In this regard, the head of Uzbekistan stressed the need to develop coordinated approaches to the situation in Afghanistan. This step comes in accordance with Uzbekistan’s wait and watch policy, which also includes an option of cooperation with the Taliban led government.

At the special meet of the Collective Security Council of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) held on the sidelines of the SCO Heads of State Meet on September 16, President of Tajikistan Emomali Rahmon drew the participants' attention to the aggravation of the situation in Afghanistan. Emomali Rahmon said the [disastrous situation](#) in Afghanistan directly affects the Central Asian region. According to the President of Tajikistan, **Afghanistan was once again turning into a hotbed of international terrorism.** The leadership in Tajikistan has taken up a confrontational role when it comes to dealing with the Taliban. Tajik President’s strong views further reinforces Tajikistan’s possible stand to the Taliban in the recent months.

Kazakh President, Kassym-Jomart Tokayev addressed the joint session of the Council of CSTO and SCO members at Dushanbe, Tajikistan on 17th September. He urged member nations to start an [informal dialogue](#) with the authorities in Kabul. It will help the neighbouring countries to get an overview of possible threats in the region. Resuming trade and commercial activity would further

benefit the economy of Afghanistan, currently in shambles.

Visit of Indian Foreign Minister to Tajikistan

Indian External Affairs minister S Jaishankar, [visited](#) Tajikistan on September 16 to participate in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization meeting. Tajikistan’s President Emomali Rahmon and Indian External Affairs Minister discussed the current Afghan situation and prospects of engagements between Tajikistan and India in the political, trade, economic, energy, investment, military and other spheres of mutual interest. It is noted that Emomali Rahmon expressed satisfaction with the level of political contacts between Tajikistan and India and mutual trust between the two friendly countries. Tajikistan could act as a strong link between India and Central Asia, given its robust relations in the past.

The meet was also addressed by the Indian Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi virtually. The Prime Minister [spoke](#) on India’s commitment to connectivity with Central Asia, and how India’s market could be beneficial for the landlocked Central Asian countries. He also spoke on how radicalisation is a major threat to peace and security in the region citing the example of Afghanistan.

Kyrgyzstan President Addressed the 76th session of the UNGA

Kyrgyzstan President, Sadyr Japarov addressed the 76th session of the [UN General Assembly](#) via video conferencing on 22nd September. He declared his nation’s candidature for the non-permanent

membership of the UN Security Council for 2027-2028 and the UN Human Rights Council for 2023-2025. This year Central Asian nations are celebrating their 30th year of independence and the upcoming 30th anniversary of joining the UN next year. Addressing the members he said, "...we propose to hold a Central Asia — UN summit in 2022 in order to together summarize the results of mutual cooperation and outline joint plans for the future...". Regional security and instability in Central Asia might be better addressed with an in-house member at the table.

Iran Joins SCO

The Shanghai Cooperation Organization began the [technical process](#) of officially admitting Iran as a full member on Friday. The eight SCO member states gave their consent for upgrading Iran's status from an observer to a full member and signed the relevant documents at the end of their 21st summit in Tajikistan's capital Dushanbe.

Iran was an observer member for over 15 years, but had applied to join the organization as a full member in 2008. It has nine members, namely China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, India and Pakistan, now plus Iran.

Russian President Vladimir Putin expressed support for the start of Iran's SCO membership process, saying it will undoubtedly contribute to enhancing the organization's international authority.

The inclusion of Iran, gives a space to Central Asian nations extend beyond the neighbourhood and increase the organization's influence into the West Asian region.

Russia Says Nord Stream-2 Pipeline Complete

Russia [announced](#) the completion of the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline, which critics argue will increase Europe's dependence on Russian gas and bypass Ukraine. Nord Stream 2 is expected to double natural gas supplies from Russia to Germany. However, it has divided European capitals and raised tensions between the EU and Washington. A spokesman of Ukrainian President stated that Ukraine will "fight this political project, before and after its completion and even after the gas is turned on". U.S. President Joe Biden had objected to the project, calling it a "bad deal for Europe and a security risk". But critics have pointed out that the U.S. is seeking to boost its sales of liquefied natural gas (LNG) to Europe. In [May 2021](#), President Biden had waived-off sanctions on the Russian company behind the Nord Stream-2 project.