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Kremlin Open To Peace Talks With Zelenskyy

On 25 July, the Kremlin [said](#) it was open to negotiation with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy. Presidential spokesperson Dmitry Peskov said, ‘Russia is generally open to the negotiation process, but we first need to understand if the Ukrainian side is ready’, referring to the Kremlin’s demands for Ukraine to give up four regions occupied by Russian troops and drop its ambitions to join NATO.

Russia And China Conducted Strategic Bomber Patrol Near Alaska

Russian and Chinese strategic bombers, on 25 July, carried out a joint [patrol](#) of Russia’s Far East and the Bering Sea near Alaska. Russia’s Defense Ministry said that the Tu-95MS and Xian H-6 strategic bombers performed an aerial patrol over the Chukchi and Bering Seas and the North Pacific Ocean.

Russia’s Central Bank Raised Interest Rate to 18 per cent.

Russia’s Central Bank, on 26 July, [raised](#) its key interest rate from 16 to 18 per cent amidst rising inflation. Labour shortages have been driving up wages. In a press release, the Bank stated, ‘growth in domestic demand is still outstripping the capabilities to expand the supply of goods and services.’ The rate hike marks the sixth such increase in just over a year. Russia is set to spend almost 9 per cent of its GDP on defence and security this year, a figure unprecedented since the days of the Soviet

Union, as the country ramps up arms production for the war in Ukraine.

Russia Condemned EU’s Transfer of Frozen Russian Funds To Ukraine

Russia’s Presidential Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov, on 26 July, [called](#) the EU’s transfer of frozen Russian funds to Ukraine as ‘illegal’. The EU transferred 1.5 billion euros to Ukraine, the first chunk of money earned from profits on frozen Russian assets. The EU had frozen approximately 200 billion euros of Russian Central Bank assets held in the bloc as part of sanctions imposed on Moscow for its war in Ukraine in 2022. Brussels said 90 per cent of the money would go to a central fund used to pay for arms for Ukraine, known as the European Peace Facility. The remaining 10 per cent will go to the EU’s separate Ukraine Facility to support the country’s reconstruction requirements.

Azerbaijan and China Sign Joint Declaration to Establish Strategic Partnership

On 3 July, Azerbaijan and China [signed](#) a joint declaration to establish a strategic partnership in Astana, where the two leaders were attending the SCO summit. The declaration states that Azerbaijan and China will establish a strategic partnership based on mutual respect, equality, trust, support, benefit, and cooperation. It further stresses that the two nations view each other as a priority and reliable partner, independent of external influences. The two nations would deepen practical

cooperation within the “Belt and Road Initiative” framework.

SCO Council of Heads of States sign the Astana Declaration

On 4 July, the Heads of State of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation [signed](#) the Astana Declaration. India was represented by the External Affairs Minister, Dr S. Jaishankar. The Declaration stressed that the member states underscored the SCO’s role in bolstering global peace, security, and stability and shaping a new democratic, equitable international political and economic order, inviting the global community to join the initiative. The Council of Heads of State Members also [adopted](#) the SCO Development Strategy until 2035. The meeting concluded with the declaration that China will host the next SCO Summit in 2025.

Xi awards Tajik President Rahmon China’s Friendship Medal

On 5 July, Chinese President Xi Jinping held a grand awarding ceremony at the Presidential Palace in Dushanbe and [awarded](#) Tajik President Emomali Rahmon the Friendship Medal. This is the first time the award has been presented outside of China. The two leaders emphasised the importance of good-neighbourly friendship and mutual benefits for both countries.

Belarus becomes a Permanent Member of SCO

During the SCO Summit in Astana on 6 July, Belarus [became](#) a full member of the

Shanghai Cooperation Organisation. In his statement, Belarusian Foreign Minister Maxim Ryzhenkov emphasised that “the SCO is a strategic prospect for Belarus. President Aleksandr Lukashenko said, “Belarus is very proud to have become a full member of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. We will bolster the Shanghai spirit of the organisation based on principles of mutual respect, equality, and solidarity.”

US Hosts 75th NATO Summit

The United States hosted the 75th [NATO](#) Summit from 9-11 July. The summit agenda focused on affirming unwavering support for Ukraine, strengthening deterrence and defence posture, collaborating with industry on increasing production, enhancing NATO partnerships, and ensuring member countries meet their commitments on individual and collective defence investments. The summit invitation was extended to the European Union, Australia, Japan, the Republic of Korea, and New Zealand. On this occasion, President [Biden](#) praised the addition of Finland and Sweden to the grouping and iterated, “Today, NATO is larger, stronger, and more determined than ever before...our Allies have increased their annual defence spending by almost \$80 billion.”

European Countries at Exercise Pitch Black

Exercise Pitch Black 2024 is being hosted by the Royal [Australian](#) Air Force (RAAF) and Italian and 18 other nations’ air and naval components from 12 July to 2 August. In

addition to France, Germany and the United Kingdom, for the first time, aircraft and personnel from Spain and Italy will also participate in the exercise. The deployment of the air forces of these European countries in waters far away from their shorelines (barring France) symbolises their interests in the Indo-Pacific region. Spanish and German Eurofighters, French fighters, French and German A330 MRTTs and French A400M are expected to train for realistic and simulated [threats](#) in a modern combat environment.

[Ursula Von Der Leyen Re-elected as European Commission President](#)

Lawmakers at the European Parliament re-elected Ursula von der Leyen to a second 5-year term as [President](#) of the European Commission on 18 July. A majority in the 720-seat legislature voted for the German Christian Democrat, where she gained 401 of the 707 votes cast, with 284 votes against her candidacy and 15 abstentions.

[Serbia and the European Union signed a Memorandum of Understanding](#)

On July 19th, the EU and the Republic of Serbia [signed](#) a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) establishing a strategic partnership on sustainable raw materials, battery value chains, and electric vehicles. This partnership aims to foster local industries and high-quality jobs within the EV value chain while upholding stringent environmental and social standards and ensuring transparency with local communities.