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# GEO-STRATEGIC SCAN

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## Russia-Ukraine Conflict: A Glance

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### SCENARIO



Source: *The Mirror*

President Vladimir Putin said Russia would bolster its nuclear forces in a speech on “Defender of the Fatherland Day”, on February 21, 2023 where, he stated that Russia will withdraw from New START, Russia’s last nuclear-reduction treaty with America . He also issued a nuclear warning by announcing new strategic systems had been put on combat duty and stated that Moscow could resume nuclear tests.

Meanwhile, following other developments took place:

(a) Russian strikes targeting energy infrastructure were reported across Ukraine. Intense fighting by Russian forces and Wagner Group continued around Bakhmut, an eastern Ukrainian city that Russia has sought to capture for almost nine months after the bloodiest battle of the war. Russia is trying to cut the Ukrainian defenders' supply lines to the city, and force them to surrender or withdraw. East of Bakhmutka River that bisects Bakhmut city, which sits on the edge of a swathe of Donetsk region, that is already largely under Russian occupation, has been occupied. Ukraine’s losses in Bakhmut could have a significant effect on its future chances of saving whole of Donetsk region and the wider Donbas industrial area.

## RUSSIA-UKRAINE CONFLICT

(b) Russia launched its biggest aerial attack on March 09,2023 with a complex barrage of weapons like cruise missiles like Kalibr cruise missile and including its Hypersonic missile, 'Kinzhal' for which Ukraine military has no air defence system to shoot them down. Days earlier, a Russian missile strike reportedly destroyed a road bridge in Khromove, just west of Bakhmut, blocking — at least temporarily — Ukraine's best remaining route into the city. On 5 March, several news outlets reported that Russia's 1.5-ton UPAB-1500B gliding bombs were designed to hit highly protected objects at up to 40 kilometres against Ukraine. Ukraine's air force says it lacks the capability to shoot down certain missiles, including the Kh-22, Kh-47 and S-300.

(c) Russia has deployed "Penicillin" reconnaissance system which is a weapon reconnaissance system which combines seismic detectors, thermal imaging and acoustic sensors to hit NATO supplied rocket launchers and modified drones.

(d) Chinese President Xi Jinping could wade deeper than before into Ukraine diplomacy as soon as next week, staging both his first trip to Russia and his first talks with Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskiy since Moscow's invasion, an effort that has been met with skepticism in the West.

Ukrainian soldiers are being pummelled on three sides by Russian forces who are trying to capture Bakhmut. The attention will soon turn to an expected counter-offensive that could start as early as April where the Ukrainian troops can simply reset along a new defensive line to the west of the Bakhmutka River. In recent weeks, Russian forces have made small, tactical advances into the city's northern, eastern, and southern sectors that could force a "turning movement" that is aimed at forcing their Ukrainian counterparts to flee. (Encirclement, on the other hand, aims to trap and destroy troops.) Last week's drone attacks were said to have targeted several areas in southern and western Russia, although no major damage was reported. Meanwhile, the EU Defence Ministers on March 08,2023 discussed plans to rush one billion euros worth of ammunition especially 155mm Howitzers shells and air defence systems to Ukraine. In Kyiv ,city authorities said heating and water supply had been fully restored following a missile barrage last week.

The Leopard 2's has gained a reputation as one of the world's best MBTs and are superior to the Soviet-era tanks that Russia is using on the battlefield, such as the T-72 and the T-90. The T-72 and T-90 tanks do not have the same level of stabilisation as Western ones, meaning they are less capable of firing accurately while moving. Poland on March 09,2023 said it had delivered to Ukraine the additional 10 Leopard 2A4 tanks it had promised, while allies would send theirs shortly. They are being supplemented with Britain's 14 Challenger 2s and around 250 Soviet-designed T-72 Tanks held by Ukraine. In addition, a variety of infantry fighting vehicles, from the ageing Soviet-era BMP-1's to America's Stryker and Bradley vehicles, are also being fielded.

The strikes temporarily disconnected the Zaporizhzhia nuclear-power plant from the grid for the sixth time since Russia invaded Ukraine in February 2022.

The plant was later reconnected, said Ukrenergo, the operator of Ukraine's electricity-transmission system. Nearly a year after Russia's March 4, 2022 seizure of the Zaporizhzhia nuclear plant in Ukraine, the facility remains in a precarious state. Like most nuclear plants, the six-reactor Zaporizhzhia facility is situated near a body of water that serves as its ultimate heat sink (UHS), an assured supply of water to its "essential service water system" that enables removal of the radioactive decay heat from shutdown reactors and spent fuel pools. That water system is also used to cool equipment such as the emergency diesel generators needed to provide electrical power when off site power is lost.

At Zaporizhzhia, the water supply for the UHS is provided to cooling ponds from the Kakhovka Reservoir, 80 miles downstream of the plant on the Dnipro River. Ukraine has accused Russian forces controlling the reservoir dam of draining its water, although, as is typical in this conflict, Russian authorities have denied responsibility and blamed Ukrainian forces for the drop in water levels.

### COMMENTS

1. The Ukrainian army's stated aim is to restore the borders of 1991 by seizing Crimea and the four provinces Russia has annexed in September. In a confrontation where one of the combatants is a nuclear power and the other has the backing of a nuclear coalition, there can be no winner. The hard truth is that Ukraine cannot push Russia off its territory and Russia does not have the conventional capability to defeat Ukraine, as long as the western powers are supporting it.

2. The flood of Western weapons to Ukraine cannot protect it from Russia's aerial assaults and therefore, the conflicts between states would lead over time to the exhaustion of their powers and, then, the peace processes using diplomacy would eventually begin "step by step", "cautious" and "sceptical, designed to buy enough time for exhaustion to set in.

3. Russia, claims to have annexed nearly 20% of Ukraine's territory. Bakhmut, the former salt mining town, which once had a population of 70,000, has been reduced to rubble over the past seven months. With no significant outcome so far, for reasons known to the two leaders, the battle has outsized the importance and may have ramifications where the side that fails could end up losing the war as well. For Russia, taking over the control of Sloviansk and Kramatorsk will be tough as the current battle will lead to exhaustion. The efficiency with which the repairs undertaken by the authorities to restore power and water supply in Ukraine is a lesson for other nations.

4. As of now, Ukraine has received enough help in the shape of information, cutting-edge ground combat systems, air defence capabilities, and battle tanks to fend off Russian attacks in Bakhmut. Yet Ukraine has increased its demands for advanced aviation to stop Russia in the area in an effort to end the ongoing loss of its resources. Though the reports suggest that the Zaporizhzhia Plant is operational and is feeding power to the grid, the status of water reservoir levels should not result in another Fukushima disaster like accident. Therefore, if nuclear power is to continue to play a role in providing energy for the world, the international community must ensure that nuclear facilities and their supporting infrastructure are considered strictly off-limits in any military conflict.

# India, US Sign Agreement On Semiconductor Supply Chain

<https://www.ndtv.com/business/piyush-goyal-gina-m-raimondo-india-us-sign-agreement-on-semiconductor-supply-chain-3848943>

Shri Piyush Goyal, Union Minister of Commerce and Industry and Ms Gina M. Raimondo, US Secretary of Commerce signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) on the semiconductor supply chain and innovation partnership during the India-USA Commercial Dialogue in New Delhi on 10 March 23. The dialogue has been re-launched with a strategic outlook with a focus on supply chain resiliency and diversification and new emerging areas, after a gap of three years. The MoU seeks to establish a collaborative mechanism between the two governments on semiconductor supply chain resiliency and diversification in view of the US's CHIPS and Science Act and India's semiconductor Mission. It aims to leverage complementary strengths of both countries and facilitate commercial opportunities and the development of semiconductor innovation ecosystems through discussions on various aspects of the semiconductor value chain. The MoU envisages mutually beneficial research and development, talent and skill development.

Earlier, India-US CEO Forum was soft-launched by the Indian Commerce and Industry Minister and US Secretary of Commerce on November 9, 2022, via videoconference for which identified key priorities were increasing supply chain resilience, enhancing energy security and reducing overall greenhouse gas emissions, advancing inclusive digital trade; and facilitating post-pandemic economic recovery, especially for small businesses. India is the ninth largest trading partner for the US, while the US is India's largest trading partner and the largest export destination, according to a statement of the ministry of commerce and industry. The bilateral trade in goods saw robust growth during the calendar year 2022 (CY2022), surpassing USD 131 billion in goods, thus doubling since 2014 (in 8 years) while total trade in goods and services is expected to cross USD 180 billion. According to the ministry statement, US is also the third biggest source of foreign direct investment (FDI) for India, and the US is one of the top five investment destinations for India. It also said this visit of the US commerce secretary would immensely contribute towards furthering trade and commercial ties between the two countries.

## COMMENTS

The last India-USA Commercial Dialogue was held in February 2019. Since then, due to the pandemic and other factors, it could not be held. Earlier in January 2023, the Union Minister of Commerce and Industry of India and the US Trade Representative Ambassador had co-chaired the 13th Ministerial-level meeting of India – US Trade Policy Forum (TPF) in Washington D.C. The increasing trade relationship adds onto the strategic engagement that has seen a rise in recent years. The MoU is important for India's own initiatives related to semiconductors, as it also supports R&D and skill development.

## Pakistan's Recession Risk Looms Large Amid IMF Loan Talks: Survey

<https://www.livemint.com/news/world/pakistans-recession-risk-looms-large-amid-imf-loan-talks-survey-11678871195825.html>

Pakistan's lingering political and economic turmoil, coupled with multiple delays in the International Monetary Fund's bailout program, will likely push the nation into a recession. Crisis-hit Pakistan has failed to meet several deadlines to secure funds to stave-off a default, raising concerns that it may have to pause debt repayments. To seal the bailout, authorities have raised taxes, cut energy subsidies and raised interest rates to a 25-year high to tamp down prices, but some issues are yet to be resolved.



*Source: The Economic Times*

### COMMENTS

Pakistan's economy is in dire straits. Pakistan has been teetering on the brink of default, which, in simple terms, means the country cannot pay back what it is owed and the treasury does not have sufficient money to meet its debt obligations. The Pakistan economic crisis has forced the Pakistani government to implement several harsh measures, high oil & gas prices arising from the crisis in Ukraine and high-interest loans, including those from China, are contributors.

At the same time, security problems on its western frontier with Afghanistan, and the threat from TTP, are rising, as are cross-border attacks and military strikes. All this is likely to have a further detrimental impact on the economy. The country is awaiting a much-needed \$1.1 bn tranche of funding from IMF. The funds are part of a \$6.5 bn bailout package the IMF approved in 2019. Pakistan needs funds to revive its \$350 bn economy, ease widespread shortages and rebuild its foreign currency reserves. Pakistan has almost met the pre-conditions of IMF for the loan.

Despite the severity of the challenges, Pakistan is unlikely to collapse, largely because of its geo-strategic importance. Pakistan continues to prove its utility to the US and UK by acting as a conduit to supply weapons to Ukraine. Pakistan has already received a \$700 mn loan from China to help boost its forex reserves and a rollover of a \$1.3 bn loan. For China, Pakistan remains a low-cost way to keep India off-balance. In the case of China, concessions could be greater control over Gwadar Port, which could host a military presence in the future. We will keep monitoring for future implications.

## Sri Lanka Says 'Positive News' Coming from IMF on \$2.9bn Package

<https://www.aljazeera.com/economy/2023/3/7/sri-lanka-says-positive-news-coming-from-imf-on-2-9-bln-package>

Sri Lanka is on the verge of getting "very positive news" from the International Monetary Fund on a \$2.9bn programme for the country, a government minister has said and had also won debt restructuring support from China. The island nation of 22 million is struggling with its worst economic crisis in more than 70 years. The IMF programme is essential for Sri Lanka which has worked very hard since last September to secure it. Export-Import Bank of China had written to the IMF supporting Sri Lanka's debt restructuring programme, which is critical to securing final approval for the loan.

### COMMENTS

As of now, the protests are going on in Sri Lanka to reverse the new taxes, which were among the measures taken to qualify for a \$2.9 billion rescue package from the IMF. The executive board of the Washington-based lender of last resort is due to decide on Sri Lanka's rescue package on 20 March, 2023. IMF was closely monitoring the protests and social unrest since the tax reforms. Sri Lanka has a long and challenging road ahead. After securing debt restructuring, it will need to make painful choices, tackle vested interests and undertake severe fiscal tightening. In addition, it will have to enhance and improve social protection to minimize the pain of the less fortunate. The beleaguered people of Sri Lanka can only hope that relief comes soon. IMF's requires a sustainable debt profile and financing assurance/ debt relief from official and private creditors. China, India, Japan, another significant creditor representing the Paris Club, a group of wealthy country creditors, is trying hard to play a constructive role. Private creditors are the other major holders of Sri Lanka debt. India has extended \$4.4 billion in official credit to Sri Lanka, excluding other forms of lending. Sri Lanka borrowed heavily from China over the past decade for infrastructure projects that include a seaport, airport and a city being built on reclaimed land. The projects failed to earn enough revenue to pay for the loans, a factor in Sri Lanka's economic woes. China accounts for about 10% of Sri Lanka's loans after Japan and the Asian Development Bank.

## 'A Friend in Need is A Friend Indeed': Sri Lanka's Minister Says India Took Bold Steps to Help Crisis-hit Colombo

<https://www.news18.com/world/a-friend-in-need-is-a-friend-indeed-sri-lankas-minister-says-india-took-bold-steps-to-help-colombo-7246531.html>

India helped Sri Lanka more than any other country, especially when the island nation was struggling through an unprecedented crisis, Sri Lanka's Foreign Minister Ali Sabry said during Raisina Dialogue 'Ideas Pod.'



## REGIONAL SCAN: PAKISTAN AND SRI LANKA

While the Indian government took some bold decisions to help the country tide over its economic crisis, even the Indian public came forward to support Sri Lanka. Sabry said, "Your real friends are tested when bad time comes. India has stood by us, a friend in need and a friend indeed that they say. So we are very grateful to India, for what it has done for us." He further stated that it is the line which gave Sri Lanka the lifeline to fight the battle for another day, which probably saved the bankrupt country from oblivion.

### COMMENTS

India has always stood with Sri Lanka, and will continue to support that country in all possible ways for overcoming the economic crisis. As close friends and maritime neighbours, both India and Sri Lanka stand to gain from closer economic interlinkages. The island nation is also facing a severe foreign exchange crisis. India has been provided assistance on several fronts. India's financial package has prevented Sri Lanka from spiralling into a major economic tailspin for the time being.

Assistance from India was in the form of a \$ 500 million oil line of credit, \$900 million loan to build up its depleted foreign reserves and for food imports, amid a shortage of almost all essential commodities in the island nation, \$1 billion lines of credit for essentials to be imported from India under negotiation, Currency swap of \$ 400 million, deferral of \$ 515 million under Asian Clearance Union, 40,000 MT of fuel on credit, 100,000 Rapid Antigen Test kits and supply of 1,000 tons of liquid medical oxygen etc. India has also extend a food and health security package to Sri Lanka along with an energy security package and currency swap, and also push Indian investments. India had also taken the lead in providing guarantees to the IMF to help Sri Lanka access a \$2.9 billion bailout package.



*Source: NDTV*

# UN Security Council Discusses Continued Violence in Myanmar

<https://www.thenationalnews.com/world/us-news/2023/03/13/un-security-council-discusses-continued-violence-in-myanmar/>

- The UN Security Council met on Monday to hear reports from the UN's Special Envoy for Myanmar on the slow progress of reforms by the country's ruling military powers. The Security Council in December adopted a resolution demanding an end to violence and urging the Junta to release all political prisoners, including removed leader Aung San Suu Kyi. But at Monday's closed-door meeting, Special Envoy Noeleen Heyzer was expected to discuss how abuses by the country's military leadership have worsened since the resolution was approved. Before a meeting, Britain's UN Ambassador Barbara Woodward said the Security Council "really expects to see progress now". "The people of Myanmar have been suffering for too long," Ms Woodward said. "Myanmar is the second deadliest place in the world for civilians and the people of Myanmar really can't wait." Myanmar's Junta has agreed with the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) to end violence in the country and to certain measures.
- Myanmar civilian activist May Sabe Phuy told reporters at the UN that she questioned the UN's impartiality. She asked that if the UN and Ms Heyzer were able to "publicly" engage with the "Illegitimate Junta", then why do they not also publicly meet with the pro-democracy movement?
- Human Rights Watch (HRW) on Monday called for countries to impose an arms embargo on Myanmar's military leadership. Louis Charbonneau, HRW's Director for UN Affairs, urged the Security Council to identify concrete steps to counter the grave abuses and violations by the Myanmar military. These include instituting a global arms embargo, referring the country's situation to the International Criminal Court and imposing sanctions on the Junta's leadership and military-owned companies. "Myanmar's Junta has demonstrated it's impervious to statements of condemnation or concern," Mr Charbonneau said. "Its disregard of the Security Council's December resolution shows the need for a new resolution imposing strong measures like an arms embargo and targeted sanctions for senior military officials and companies linked to the military."

## COMMENTS

For more than two years, Myanmar has been in turmoil since the Army toppled the elected government, detained officials and responded to pro-democracy protests and dissent brutally. The UN Security Council has been split on its response to deal with this crisis, with China and Russia not in favour of strong action. The International Community, especially the UN and members states of the ASEAN need to hold the Junta to account and pressurise Myanmar's Military to end its abuses and restore the civilian democratic government.

## Japan May Implement UPI Model, Inter-Linkage: Digital Minister Kono

<https://www.livemint.com/news/world/japan-may-implement-upi-model-inter-linkage-digital-minister-kono-11678642468563.html>

Japan will send a team to India after April's G7 meeting to closely study the UPI platform, digital minister Kono Taro said. Japan would consider eventually linking systems if his country adopts UPI, Kono said in an interview. He also pitched for India to support Japan's proposal for a new international data organization.

### COMMENTS



*Source: Mint*

In August 2016, India launched its Unified Payments Interface (UPI) to smoothen the process of transfer of money on a mobile platform between two bank accounts. According to a report released by a US-based provider of banking technology, FIS, India's digital payment is the most advanced and ahead of twenty-five nations which would include the UK, China, and Japan. The Digital Minister of Japan, Kono Taro opined that Japan aspires to learn a lot from India and encourages import from India.

A globalized economy is making the world smaller and therefore the Japanese Digital Minister believes that enhancing some sort of financial transaction mechanism is of great salience. At the same time, Japan emphasises on a "Data free flow with trust (DFFT)", which is one of the top goals for G7 Digital Minister's Meeting 2023. However, for a smooth functioning of DFFT, a secretariat at a worldwide level is of utmost salience. A global database in terms of cross-border data transfer from each nation is a project which needs to be completed. Japan's motive behind promoting cross-border data transfer is mostly due to its small companies which wanted to conduct business in Europe. Although, Japan and EU are on an equal footing but the same privilege is not enjoyed by the tiny Japanese companies due to the laws, rules, and court rulings which are different in different countries and are tend to change quite frequently. Therefore, Japan emphasises on creating a system of database which would update the new rules automatically.

Japan shows great interest in promoting India-Japan trade considering India to be a rising economy. To commence such a trade relationship, a common database is of great significance which would enable both the countries to figure out what exactly should be done. Japan also plans to create a regulatory sandbox at an international level for the emerging technologies in

in the globe. The sandbox would test the new technologies and if it passes then everyone can use it with prior approval of the country of origin. To make it happen, Japan needs a reliable and trustworthy partner and hopes that India would join the cause.



*Source: PayTm Business*

In this context, India and Japan also share a common interest in terms of the Chinese telecom equipment. To promote and revive a supply chain of telecom equipment, Japan believes that India, Japan, Europe and US should initiate cooperation in this field especially to substitute Huawei or the other China based equipment makers.

Thus, Kono Taro affirmed that immediately after the G7 conference, Japan would dispatch a team to India to explore the UPI platform. Once Japan adopts UPI, it could consider connecting systems eventually. But at the same time India's support is expected in the Japanese effort to promote a new global data organisation.

Seen from an Indian perspective, India's export trade to Japan is not satisfactory. After India and Japan inked the "Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA)" in 2011, trade between the two countries increased from US\$ 13.1 billion in 2010 to 17.6 billion in 2019 which totalled to US\$ 20.57 billion during FY 2021-22. However, India's exports to Japan made up 1.46% while Japan's exports to India made up 2.35% of their total trade. This shows that India's exports to Japan remained the same as they were in 2010. Thus, an initiative like this, where Japan is interested in adopting Indian UPI and includes India in a larger gambit of DFFT to enhance trade, is an immense platform for India to improve its trade connection not only with Japan but with the rest of the world.

## Yoon, Japan's Kishida To Discuss Ways To 'Normalize' Bilateral Ties At Summit

<https://en.yna.co.kr/view/AEN20230314005952315?section=national/diplomacy>

President Yoon Suk Yeol and Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida will talk about ways to "normalize" the bilateral relationship, including through the implementation of Seoul's solution to the issue of wartime forced labor, during their summit in Tokyo this week, his office said Tuesday. Yoon and Kishida will meet Thursday on the first day of the South Korean president's two-day working visit to Japan, National Security Adviser Kim Sung-han told reporters. The summit will be followed by a dinner.

### COMMENTS

In a historic summit that is set to take place between South Korea and Japan, a new security and economic dimension will open up. Though the Yoon Seok Yeol administration is facing severe backlash on how the Japanese have been kept away to solve the 'comfort women' issue, the summit can be a game changer in reprimanding the bilateral relations between the two countries.



*Source: The Japan Times*

Japan, South Korea and Taiwan have been at the core of the global semiconductor supply chain. However, with shifts in the policy pursued by both the US and China, the local companies of native origins to these countries have been facing the consequences of these policy shifts. **Japan and South Korea as technologically advanced countries, can use this bilateral summit as a platform to reconsider their trade relations and rework channels that mutually benefit them in addressing the semiconductor debacle.** Moreover, the two countries can establish a model for securing themselves at the heart of the semiconductor global supply chain if carefully looked at.

## THE KOREAN PENINSULA

As far as the security vertical is concerned, both Japan and Korea have remained true to their alliance vis a vis the United States. However, ***the disconnect between US-Japan and US-Korea relations that have persisted so long due to colonial antagonism between Japan and Korea may actualize into a troika that in effect can be used to strengthen cooperation and address the China and North Korean issue in the region.*** Unlike his predecessor Moon Jae-in, incumbent President Yoon Seok-Yeol has adopted an aggressive policy measure against North Korea, which has further provoked disruptions rather than rapprochement in North and South Korean relations. Similarly, the security concerns for Japan from North Korea can also not be undermined provided the escalations made by the latter in its missile testing.

Further, if bilateral relations between ***Japan and South Korea are to get normalized, it cannot go without addressing the China factor.*** Japan and South Korea both have their interest-specific approach towards China and this may again lead to a rise of contentions between the two countries. With the ***deep involvement of the US in the region, Japan and South Korea may also need to assess their China equation prior to strong bilateral commitments.***

The summit nonetheless must be taken in positive spirit and seen as an attempt by the two countries to forget agnostic colonial relations and renew their ties to forge strong bilateral relations to increase stability and cooperation in the region.



*Source: Nikkei Asia*

## Erdogan Announces Turkish Elections To Be Held On May 14

<https://www.thehindu.com/news/international/erdogan-announces-turkish-elections-to-be-held-on-may-14/article66421750.ece>

Turkey's president has announced May 14 as the date for the country's next parliamentary and presidential elections. President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, who plans to seek reelection, made the announcement during a Saturday youth conference in northwestern Bursa province. A video of the event was released Sunday. "I thank God that we are destined to share our path with you, our valued youth, who will vote for the first time in the elections that will be held on May 14," said Mr. Erdogan, who had hinted at the date last week. The new arrangement holds presidential as well as parliamentary polls on a single day.

### COMMENTS

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*Source: NDTV*

## Turkey Plans To Ratify Finland's NATO Bid Ahead of May Polls

[https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/world/europe/turkey-plans-to-ratify-finlands-nato-bid-ahead-of-may-polls/articleshow/98672727.cms?utm\\_source=contentofinterest&&utm\\_medium=text&utm\\_campaign=cppst](https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/world/europe/turkey-plans-to-ratify-finlands-nato-bid-ahead-of-may-polls/articleshow/98672727.cms?utm_source=contentofinterest&&utm_medium=text&utm_campaign=cppst)

Turkey's parliament will "highly likely" ratify Finland's NATO accession bid before mid-April, two Turkish officials told Reuters on Wednesday, a day before Finnish President Sauli Niinisto visits the country.

**COMMENTS**

Following the Russia-Ukraine war, Finland filed to join the NATO alliance but was met with unanticipated pushback from Turkey. Erdoğan stated on 15th March, that he will "honour his word" and submit approval of Finland's membership soon. Earlier Ankara had objected to Finland's membership citing its record of harboring individuals of Kurdish terrorist organizations and supplying weapons to militants from 2019 onwards due to Ankara's military involvement in Syria.

Finland remained neutral, opting not to join forces militarily with NATO; it had stable relations with Russia. The war caused Finland to reconsider, worrying that they could be attacked next. It has also started constructing a 200-kilometer surveillance fence with Russia, intending to increase its security. Russia has repeatedly warned Finland against joining Nato, claiming that doing so would obligate it to "establish military balance" in the Baltic Sea region, including the deployment of nuclear weapons. Finland and Russia share an 810-mile land border; joining NATO would result in a futile threat escalation from Moscow.

## The China-Brokered Saudi-Iran Deal Has Big Repercussions For The Middle East

<https://www.cnbc.com/2023/03/15/does-chinas-role-in-saudi-iran-rapprochement-represent-a-new-order-.html>

The China-brokered Saudi-Iran rapprochement is a major diplomatic breakthrough after years of mutual animosity, suspected attacks and espionage between the two countries. It represents Beijing's first foray into Middle East mediation, an area that for the past few decades was largely occupied by Washington.

**COMMENTS**

The deal is a clear indication that even though Saudi Arabia is a major importer of US weapon systems, Gulf states believe that China has become a significant global power. Establishing diplomatic ties between the Saudi and Iran does not indicate that these two countries are strategic allies. But, through Iran, Saudi Arabia may be looking for options to end the ongoing conflict in Yemen, where the Houthis still rule a large portion inside Yemen. To stop cross-border missile and drone assaults, the Saudis are ready to negotiate with the Houthis which would keep the threat perception in check. So the possibility of a parallel accord between Saudi and Houthis in Yemen, might be foreshadowed by the Saudi-Iranian deal. It won't put an end to the conflict straight away but it would provide a face-saving way out for Saudi's. In a multipolar world, the nation has exploited the other poles—specifically, China and Russia—in order to deepen the interest of its nation.



Source: The Wall Street Journal