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GEO-STRATEGIC SCAN

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Meets IMF
Officials,
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**China Urges
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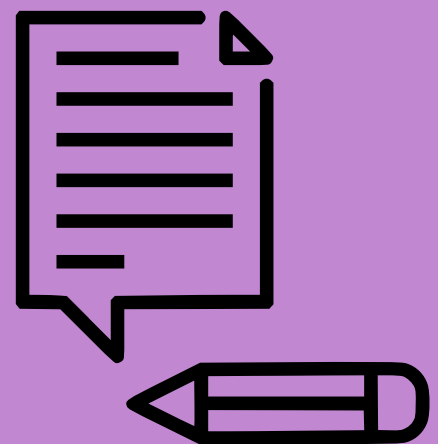
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Russia-Ukraine Conflict: A Glance

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UKRAINIAN COUNTER OFFENSIVE

Kinetic War. Ukraine's forces have reportedly made incremental progress along the roughly 800-mile front since launching its counteroffensive campaign to reclaim Russian-occupied territory. But a counteroffensive that began on June 4th shows little sign of breaking through Russian lines in force any time soon. Kyiv's troops have made "significant gains" near the war-torn city of Bakhmut and are continuing their offensive campaign along the Zaporizhzhia-Donetsk border. In recent days Ukraine's army has made modest advances in the east by encircling Russian defenders from the north and south. Further west, in the Kherson region, Ukrainian forces established small bridgeheads above and below the partially destroyed Kakhovka dam. Meanwhile, the US has decided to provide Ukraine with cluster munitions for the first time. Mr Biden defended his decision as "difficult" but necessary because "the Ukrainians are running out of ammunition".

NATO MEMBERSHIP

As Russia's invasion of Ukraine hit the 500-day mark, US president Joe Biden that a vote on Ukraine by NATO members would be premature while heading to Vilnius, Lithuania for the military alliance's summit. Volodymyr Zelensky called it "unprecedented and absurd" that Ukraine was apparently not being given a clear promise of speedy membership of the alliance. On July 12, 2023, the G7, a club of rich democracies, announced new security guarantees for Ukraine at a meeting of NATO leaders in Vilnius. They will provide weapons and training to Ukraine's armed forces over the coming years, and share intelligence

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COMMENTS



Source: Le Monde

The gains of Ukraine in the counteroffensive are slow and may steadily grow once the offensive reserve is pressed into the battle zones. Cluster munitions release a large number of smaller bombs; unexploded bomblets pose long-term risks to civilians. Mr Biden's decision to allow Ukraine to receive more cluster munitions has sparked criticism from human rights groups and some fellow Democrats. NATO was never going to admit Ukraine while there is active fighting because doing so would have put direct conflict between Russia and the West at risk and raised the possibility of nuclear escalation.

However, Ukraine has been given the option of joining the EU sooner after the war is ended. Prior to Putin's invasion, Russia occupied approximately 16,000 square miles of Ukrainian territory, consisting of Crimea and parts of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions. But in the early weeks of the war, Russian forces made quick gains in the northeast and southern parts of Ukraine, occupying portions of the area around the city of Sumy in north-eastern Ukraine, as well as the Kharkiv region. To the south, Russia claimed control of the port city of Mariupol by April after first occupying Kherson Oblast.

WAGNER REVOLT

1. Prigozhin, whose Wagner embarked on a lightning-fast 1,000km charge towards Moscow, before striking a deal and turning around with about 200km to go on June 24, 2023 had a meeting with Putin to discuss the armed mutiny against the military top brass. Putin had listened to the commanders' own explanations of what had happened and had offered them further options for employment and combat.

2. Lukashenko said that Prigozhin was back in Russia and that Wagner fighters had not yet taken up an offer to relocate to Belarus, raising questions about the implementation of the agreement

COMMENTS

Putin has so far kept Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu and Chief of the General Staff Valery Gerasimov in place, judging by appearances by both men on state TV - rejecting Prigozhin's appeals to sack them. Putin so far, has successfully handled the situation well.

Bangladesh, India Launch Trade Transactions in Rupees

<https://www.outlookindia.com/business/bangladesh-india-launch-trade-transactions-in-rupees-news-302121>

- Bangladesh and India on Tuesday launched a much-anticipated trade transaction in rupees, a move aimed at reducing dependence on the US dollar and strengthening regional currency and trade. This is the first time Bangladesh has done bilateral trade with a foreign country in addition to the US dollar. Bangladesh Bank Governor Abdur Rouf Talukder described the start of trade settlement in rupees as the "first step in a great journey". "The trade position between India and Bangladesh has seen remarkable growth, with both countries benefiting from their economic cooperation," he said at the launching ceremony here, which was also attended by Indian High Commissioner Pranay Verma. The central bank governor said the transaction costs during trade with India would reduce with the introduction of the Taka-Rupee dual currency card which was "almost ready (to be) launched from September". Talukder also said that he was not just looking into this USD 2 billion export as when "we export and import in Indian rupees, it will have an effect on both countries' exporters and importers". "We can increase our exports manifold, because customers in India will be buying things in their own currency, considering it as their own products. It will open a new window for us in a bigger way in this (Indian) market, because India is a big market."
- Bangladesh and India, however, stage frontier trading in certain areas called "border hut" in a semi-formal manner, where both currencies are exchanged on a limited scale.
- Officials said under the formal arrangement from now on initially, the trade would be transacted in rupee and then gradually in Bangladeshi currency Taka upon the trade gap between the two countries decreasing.
- Banks in Bangladesh and India have been given permission to open nostro accounts, an account in a bank of another country for the purpose of foreign currency transactions.
- Officials said the exchange rate will be determined in line with market demand and banks involved in the process.
- The Indian envoy said India-Bangladesh relations transformed significantly over the last decade. "One of the most important manifestations of that transformation is our visibly growing economic and commercial ties and connectivity links," he said, adding Bangladesh is India's biggest trade partner in South Asia and fifth largest globally. He noted in the last five years, bilateral trade has more than doubled.

COMMENTS

India has emerged as the top export destination for Bangladesh in Asia, as the Bangladesh's exports to India have consistently crossed the one billion dollar mark consecutively over the last three years and crossed two billion dollars for the first time during the last fiscal. Although, owing to the trade deficit, Bangladesh may need considerable time to reap the benefits of the new system, however, this is a significant development for the growth of the Economies and India and Bangladesh.

The IMF Agrees To A Long-Awaited \$3 Billion Bailout For Pakistan

<https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/imf-agrees-long-awaited-3-billion-bailout-pakistan-rcna91967>

The International Monetary Fund agreed to provide \$3 billion to Pakistan — a long-awaited relief to bail out the impoverished country's ailing economy. The nine-month agreement must be approved by the IMF's Executive Board, which is expected to make a final decision in mid-July, a top IMF official, Nathan Porter, said. The proposed package is higher than what Pakistan was expecting.

Imran Khan Meets IMF Officials, Backs Bailout Deal Struck By Pakistan Government

<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/world/pakistan/imran-khan-meets-imf-officials-backs-bailout-deal-struck-by-pakistan-govt/articleshow/101585296.cms>

Former Pakistan Prime Minister and Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) Imran Khan sought a guarantee from the IMF that the general elections in the country would be held at its scheduled time. This comes as a delegation of the IMF met Khan at his Zaman Park residence in Lahore. During the meeting, the two sides discussed the recent staff-level pact agreed upon between Pakistan and the global lender with Khan extending his full support to it.



Source: [Interregional.com](https://www.interregional.com)

COMMENTS

Pakistan managed to clinch a last-minute relief from IMF on an initial \$3 billion loan. The \$3 bn funding will be spread over nine months ie covering the span of three governments - the incumbent set up under Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, whose term ends in August, a caretaker administration that will conduct the polls, and then a new government following the elections.

IMF had a meeting with PTI, the ruling Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) as well as Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP). Pakistan's national elections are scheduled to be held by early November amid a charged political atmosphere that has seen Imran Khan, the country's main opposition leader, in a bruising standoff with the government and the powerful military. Pakistan's economy had faced several challenges in recent times, including devastating floods last year and commodity price hikes following the war in Ukraine. The government has earmarked \$2.5bn in external receipts from the IMF in its federal budget for the financial year 2024. Pakistan needs upwards of \$22bn to service external debt, make interest payments, and finance its current account for FY24. Reserves, at \$3.5bn, are at a critical level, enough to cover barely one month of controlled imports. Pakistan's credit rating has suffered due to macroeconomic uncertainty.

Despite the larger than expected IMF bailout, the agreement stressed that Pakistan will have to continue to mobilise multilateral and bilateral financial support. Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates have pledged a combined \$3bn that is expected to come in now that the IMF bailout has materialised. Debt rollovers from China, Pakistan's largest creditor, will also be key. Ensuring the materialisation and building of a spending framework for pledges secured earlier this year at an international donor conference will be key. More than \$9bn in climate-related pledges were made to help Pakistan recover from devastating floods in 2022.

Hague Court Rejects India Objections Over Water Row With Pakistan

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/7/7/hague-court-rejects-india-objections-over-water-row-with-pakistan>

The Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA) in The Hague has rejected India's objections to a Pakistan-initiated procedure over water use in the Indus River basin, reopening a procedure that had been blocked for many years. India called the arbitration proceeding illegal as a neutral expert was also looking at the issue and the World Bank-brokered treaty prohibits parallel proceedings. The South Asian neighbours have been arguing over hydroelectric projects on the shared Indus River and its tributaries for decades, with Pakistan complaining that India's planned hydropower dams in upstream areas will cut flows on the river which feeds 80 percent of its irrigated agriculture.

COMMENTS

In 2015, Pakistan sought appointment of a neutral expert to handle its objections to the two hydropower projects, but it unilaterally retracted this in 2016 and requested a court of arbitration. In 2016, the World Bank appointed both a Neutral Expert (NE) and the chair of the Court of Arbitration (CoA). India has boycotted The Hague court proceedings and questioned the competence of the court. The court said that it will address the interpretation and application of the bilateral Indus Water Treaty, notably the provisions on hydroelectric projects, as well as the legal effect of past decisions of dispute resolution bodies under the treaty. Established in 1899 to facilitate arbitration and other forms of dispute resolution between states, the PCA is a non-UN inter-governmental institution that serves as a forum to address the dispute resolution needs of the international community. The Indus Waters Treaty provides for two forums for the settlement of disputes — the Court of Arbitration, which addresses legal, technical and systemic issues, or the Neutral Expert, which can address only technical issues. This approach was flawed since two simultaneous processes on the same issue can result in inconsistent and contradictory rulings, create a legally untenable situation and even put a question mark on the working and integrity of the treaty. India has been attending meetings convened by the neutral expert but has stayed away from the court of arbitration.

The dispute pertains to concerns raised by Pakistan over India's construction of the 330-megawatt Kishanganga hydroelectric project on the River Jhelum and plans to construct the 850 MW Ratle hydroelectric project on the Chenab in Indian-held Jammu & Kashmir.

Opening Remarks By NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg At The Meeting Of The North Atlantic Council At The Level Of Heads Of State And Government, With Sweden, Indo-Pacific Partners, And The EU

https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_217091.htm?selectedLocale=en

NATO is a regional Alliance between Europe and North America but the challenges we face are global and our security is interconnected. What happens in the Euro-Atlantic region matters for the Indo-Pacific, and what happens in the Indo-Pacific matters to the Euro-Atlantic.

COMMENTS

Although the Indo-Pacific partners were present in Madrid in 2022 and Vilnius in 2023, their relationship with NATO has not developed recently. For Japan, New Zealand, Australia, and the ROK, dialogue and collaboration with NATO stretch back to the 1990s, 2001, and 2005, respectively. Between 2012 and 2014, these nations signed '**Individual Partnership and Cooperation Programme (IPCP)**' papers, formally establishing their respective alliances with NATO.

NATO started holding sporadic talks with the IP4 as a group in 2016, with the initial discussions concentrating on North Korea. Although not new, relations between NATO and its allies have gained more salience in recent years due to new challenges in areas like cyber, space, and disruptive technologies as well as strategic challenges brought on by a more assertive China and the effects of Russia's war in Ukraine. As NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg noted, these events serve as more evidence that "what happens in Europe matters for Asia, for the Indo-Pacific, and what happens in Asia and the Indo-Pacific matters for Europe."

Apart from the IPCP, both the parties commenced '**Individually Tailored Partnership Programme (ITPP)**' through which they strive to strengthen their bilateral ties. According to NATO officials, the ITPPs are expected to be longer than the IPCPs and would mostly focus on strategic objectives, specific partnership goals, associated milestones and a public diplomacy element. They also lay emphasis on working together on space, maritime security, cyber, disinformation, climate change etc and resilience including opening of a NATO liaison office in Tokyo.

However, Julianne Smith, the U.S. ambassador to NATO, stated on the eve of the NATO summit in Lithuania: "We're not adding members from the Indo-Pacific." Rather she mentioned the various areas where they could collaborate without formally bringing anyone from the Indo-Pacific into the alliance.

JAPAN/ INDO PACIFIC

Meanwhile, **China criticised the joint NATO statement** claiming that it misrepresented China. The joint statement claimed that China risks the alliances' interests and security with its "coercive policies." China stated that that the communique ignored the truth. The spokesperson of the Chinese Foreign Ministry asked NATO to "quit the outdated Cold War mentality" and to cease trying to "sow chaos in the Asia-Pacific or elsewhere in the world."

Apart from China, India's response to NATO's presence in the Indo-Pacific is salient. The Indian Minister of External Affairs S. Jaishankar has clearly ruled out India's chances of becoming a member of NATO. India's foreign policy doesn't believe in forming any alliance, especially a military alliance. Although since 2019, India has formally participated in political discussions and dialogues with NATO, the strategic community is quick to reject any overtures made in this direction, and public opinion in the Indo-Pacific which patronizes NATO. Despite its defensive character, it has been seen in Asia as a tool by which America has the ability to project strength.

However, the current geopolitics is undergoing a turmoil. The newly developing problems need new means to mitigate them. The 'Strategic Concept 2022' has highlighted a few points which converge with India's goals and opportunities. For instance, the 14th point discusses freedom of navigation, 15th and 17th points discuss future technological problems in the new information age and are directly relevant to New Delhi.

The 19th point discusses NATO's plans to mitigate the climate change challenges which remains one of India's biggest challenges. Thus, NATO's pivot to the Indo-Pacific shouldn't be a serious concern or a complete denial from India's side as long as it doesn't create new security alliances in the Indo Pacific.



Source: Asia Society

South Korea And NATO Call For United Front Against North Korean Nukes

<https://www.nknews.org/2023/07/south-korea-and-nato-call-for-united-front-against-north-korean-nukes/>

South Korea's president called on NATO and several of the bloc's member states to oppose North Korea's nuclear and missile activities on Tuesday, while Seoul reached an agreement with the organization to boost cooperation on non-proliferation and cybersecurity. In a meeting with NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg on the sidelines of the security alliance's summit in Lithuania, Yoon Suk-yeol emphasized that the international community must respond firmly to Pyongyang's "illegal nuclear and missile provocations" and requested NATO's support, Seoul's presidential office said in a [press release](#). In response, Stoltenberg [expressed concern](#) about North Korea's nuclear and missile development and stated the international community must work together to solve this issue.

North Korea Said It Fired Hwasong-18 Intercontinental Ballistic Missile

<https://amp-cnn-com.cdn.ampproject.org/c/s/amp.cnn.com/cnn/2023/07/11/asia/north-korea-missile-test-intl-hnk-ml/index.html>

North Korea said that the intercontinental ballistic missile it launched on Wednesday, which flew for more than 70 minutes, was a Hwasong-18, marking a potential new round of confrontation with Washington and its allies. The 74-minute flight time represents a marginal advancement on the missiles tested by North Korea in March and April of this year, both of which were also ICBMs – weapons with the required range to potentially hit the continental United States.

Wednesday's launch, which landed in waters near to Japan, comes after Pyongyang earlier this week threatened to shoot down US military reconnaissance aircraft engaging in what it called "hostile espionage" activities near its territory.

COMMENTS

North Korea's testing of nuclear missiles coinciding with the NATO Summit in Vilnius is archetypal of Kim Jong-Un's regime. Additionally, the South Korean President's visit to the NATO Summit to draw attention to North Korea's unprecedented violations of nuclear non-proliferation elucidates the rising tension and destabilization of the Korean peninsula. Yoon's Presidency is conservative and therefore what can be concluded after a year in office is that he has taken an aggressive front, much similar to the US narrative in dealing with the North Korean missile tests. Earlier this month, President Yoon appointed a new minister for Unification to only tighten aid for North Korea. [1]

[1] Hyunsu Yim, Reuters (2023), "South Korea's Yoon Tells Unification Ministry To Be Less Soft On North" [Online: Web] URL: <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/south-koreas-yoon-tells-unification-ministry-be-less-soft-north-2023-07-02/>



Source: KCNA



Source: NK News

Back in the North, Kim Jong Un has remained determined for nuclear proliferation and rather legitimised these missile tests through the state ideology of *Juche*. The Korean War that broke out in June 1950, marked its 73rd year; meaning no truce for the two Koreas. Domestically, Kim Jong Un through *Juche* has been able to garner the trust of his people and see these tests as a way of defending the country's national interests. Huge demonstrations broke out last month to show the North Korean fervour for Anti-Americanism. [2]

The US-Japan-South Korea trilateral cooperation in the region may guide and further incentivize US's ambition to contain China in the region and create a free and prosperous Indo-Pacific, but the agenda for North Korea remains fairly unsolved with no pragmatic resolution. It is indeed noteworthy that North Korea despite economic sanctions and a closed economic structure has been able to fulfil its goal of nuclear weaponisation. It also hints that a powerplay for regionalism is emerging between US-Japan-South Korea and China-Russia-North Korea. The US response to North Korea's nuclear tests stressed on the need for diplomacy and dialogue. However, the possibility to contain North Korea as had been initially designed by the US and its allies appears fairly bleak vis a vis the present context. Additionally, South Korea must recognize the North Korean dilemma from a more open and domestic perspective rather than aligning itself with the Western narrative.

Presidents Of South Korea And Poland Hold Talks On Security, War In Ukraine And Business Cooperation

<https://apnews.com/article/south-korea-poland-security-weapons-ukraine-0d67168a268e7b69b82916f606c3d2b5>

WARSAW, Poland (AP) — The presidents of South Korea and Poland on Thursday pledged to strengthen their security, business and trade relations. South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol and his delegation met with his Polish host, President Andrzej Duda and government members at the Presidential Palace. "With President Duda, we discussed in depth the development of the strategic relations between the two countries," Yoon said after the talks.

[2] The Associated Press, (2023), "Thousands Of North Koreans March In Anti-U.S. Rallies As Country Marks Korean War Anniversary" [online: web] URL: <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/thousands-north-koreans-march-anti-us-rallies-country-marks-korean-war-rcna91103> Accessed 13 July 2023



Source: AP News

COMMENTS

Amidst the peak of the Ukraine War, South Korea and Poland are forging stronger ties of economic and military interests. The relations between Seoul and Warsaw had existed since the Cold War politics and today, when a similar situation has surfaced, both the countries are using it to create a resilient economic architecture in Europe and Asia. Poland has emerged as one of the top importers of the South Korean's arms industry and several business cooperation on the same have been signed.

Poland's interests in Ukraine have been supported by South Korea by constantly delivering arms to the former. So far, Poland has imported Korea's K9 howitzers, K2 tanks, Chunmoo missile launchers and FA-50 training and fighter jets.

President Yoon Seok Yeol's promise to Poland in several post war reconstruction projects in Ukraine is a highlight of a similar experience that South Korea endured right after the July Armistice of 1953. Additionally, South Korea is also emerging as a reliant arms supplier in the European market that will further incentivise its indigenous industries to meet the demands from the European market in the backdrop of the Ukraine War.

Furthermore, it also provides an impetus for South Korea to push its agenda for regional security against unprecedented North Korean threats creating stronger military alliance with Poland and beyond.

South Korea's President Yoon In Ukraine To Meet Zelensky

<https://www.reuters.com/world/south-korea-president-yoon-makes-surprise-visit-ukraine-yonhap-2023-07-15/>

SEOUL, July 15 (Reuters) - South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol was visiting Ukraine on Saturday for talks with President Volodymyr Zelenskiy, the South Korean presidential office said.

The surprise trip came after Yoon attended a NATO Summit in Lithuania and visited Poland this week, where he expressed solidarity with Ukraine and explored ways to support its fight against Russia's invasion. Yoon visited the site of mass killings in Bucha near the capital Kyiv, before visiting Irpin, a residential area that received large-scale missile attacks. He was expected to hold a summit with Zelenskiy afterward, his office said.

COMMENTS



Source: The Hill

President Yoon’s visit to Ukraine surprisingly coincides at a time when South Korea is under a huge pressure to supply lethal arms to Ukraine. However, the visit by the South Korean President is a guarantee for Ukraine that Seoul will continue providing humanitarian aid.

After a successful meeting with NATO leaders in Vilnius, Yoon’s visit to Ukraine is significant in terms of Seoul’s promise to assist Kyiv with more humanitarian aid and support for reconstruction projects. Further, Yoon becomes the second leader from Asia to visit Ukraine, succeeding Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida. Although the visit has been seen as one of ‘show of support’, geopolitically it sends out a bold statement against the China Russia nexus against Ukraine.

The NATO Summit may have raised ambiguity for Ukraine, but President Yoon’s visit has reminded Zelensky of Seoul’s support to his country. No arms deal was discussed.

US Central Command Says It Killed ISIS Leader In Eastern Syria

<https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/us-central-command-says-they-killed-isis-leader-usamah-al-mahajir-eastern-syria-2023-07-09/>

The U.S. Central Command said it conducted a drone strike on July 7 that killed an ISIS leader in Eastern Syria. It used the same MQ-9 drones in the attack that had "earlier in the day been harassed by Russian aircraft in an encounter that had lasted almost two hours", it said in a statement. "U.S. Central Command conducted a strike in Syria that resulted in the death of Usamah al-Muhajir, an ISIS leader in eastern Syria," it said without giving any more details on al-Muhajir.

COMMENTS



Source: Deccan Herald

US and Coalition forces are in Syria in an ongoing effort to fight ISIS. To avert blunders or disagreements, both these groups and the Russian troops in Syria have kept the communication channels open, particularly for air operations. Earlier, Russia had stated that American planes operated recklessly close to the Russian jets, allegedly "activating" their armament systems. The Pentagon categorically rejected this assertion. [1] Russia has flagged to the US-led alliance fighting ISIS the "provocative actions" by US forces in Syria. Reports allude that the US military expressed concerns regarding Russian provocations over northern Syria, as "systematic violations of protocols" meant to prevent military encounters.

Hundreds of ISIS members are stationed in isolated regions overrun by neither the US coalition nor by the Russia-Turkey-Syria allied troops. Russia, which is conducting joint military operations in Northern Syria has settled on designated zones wherein the US coalition troops are permitted to operate. Despite these agreements, Iran-backed militias have repeatedly attacked the US led coalition troops.

[1]<https://english.alarabiya.net/News/middle-east/2023/06/07/In-Syria-Russia-has-stopped-adhering-to-safe-air-protocols-US-Air-Force>

Since the militant organisation lost its final foothold in 2019, to a military campaign spearheaded by the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) and supported by the US-coalition troops, ISIS militants have made targeted attacks on civilians, foreign troops, the SDF and the Kurdish-led Rojava. America has increased operations targeting ISIS members in Syria, killing and detaining several of its commanders who had sought refuge in regions controlled by rebels with support from Turkey. Following the killing of previous ISIS leader Abu Bakr al Baghdadi, who proclaimed his identity as the "caliph of all Muslims," the United States has subsequently hunted the group's remaining leaders, who have pioneered and plotted terror attacks worldwide.

Turkey Agrees to Back Sweden's NATO Bid in Boost to Alliance

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2023-07-10/turkey-agrees-to-advance-sweden-s-nato-bid-official-says#xj4y7vzkg>

Turkey agreed to support Sweden's NATO bid in a major breakthrough for the military alliance's push to strengthen its defenses following Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Turkey will ask its parliament to advance Sweden's membership in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization "as soon as possible," alliance chief Jens Stoltenberg told reporters Monday in Vilnius.



Source: Bloomberg

COMMENTS

Erdoğan urged Sweden's admission in exchange for Turkish long-sought status in the EU, with Sweden addressing Turkish security issues effectively. The NATO bulletin also contained content against terrorist groups, who represent an imminent danger to Turkey. For Turkey, it is additionally favourable to observe that NATO would put in place a counterterrorism coordinating structure for the first time.

Erdoğan and the Turks have frequently reiterated their support for expanding NATO. They have previously endorsed Ukraine and Georgia, granted Finnish membership and now backed Sweden—provided that the country's infamously lenient counterterrorism legislation are properly enforced.

In June, for getting accepted into NATO, Sweden finally started the process of passing an anti-terrorism law. The addition of Sweden will strengthen the Alliance's transatlantic perspective, with military capabilities to fulfill military obligations, security and stability across the Baltic Sea and North Central Europe.

Turkey is a key ally in West Asia, but since the Western block refuses to engage in an equitable cooperation with Turkey, Ankara raised the standards to safeguard its own interests. Turkey is an important actor in settling the ongoing Russo-Ukraine war and any ceasefire in line eventually will materialise because of its closeness, power, and links to Ukraine and Russia.

Despite Russia's strong reaction post Sweden's recent acceptance within NATO, there won't likely be much of a negative impact on its ties with Russia. It is important to note that both Russia and Turkey may disagree on several key issues, yet when their interests coincide, they are willing to cooperate.

It's crucial to keep in mind that Erdogan's declaration did not constitute approval of the proposal; rather, it was an intention to refer the authorization issue to the Turkish parliament, under the stewardship of Erdogan's party. Thus, if Sweden delays implementing counterterrorism measures or if the US backs out of the F-16 contract, he still has the power to veto or postpone admittance. Hence as to "quid pro quo," there is only room for a deal on F-16 fighter jets in addition to possibly greater strategic cooperation by America and counter-PKK pledges by Swedish govt.



Source: Bloomberg

China Urges Netherlands To Not Abuse Export Control Measures

<https://www.reuters.com/technology/china-urges-netherlands-not-abuse-export-control-measures-2023-07-01/>

The Dutch government on Friday announced new restrictions on exports of some semiconductor equipment, boosting a U.S.-led drive to curb supplies of high-tech components to China.

COMMENTS

ASML, a Dutch company, holds a monopoly in the market for building chip manufacturing companies. Chinese, US and Taiwan companies are dependent on ASML technology. The Netherlands placed export restrictions on advanced semiconductor equipment where companies would need to get a license to export advanced equipment overseas, these will come into effect from 1st September, it would limit China's ability to import chip manufacturing capabilities.

The law does not rule out any single country, but it is clear that it intends to go against China. US in their efforts to reduce China's role in chip manufacturing, opened the TSMC factory in the USA. By taking Netherlands on its side, export of the most advanced immersion DUV lithography systems will be scrutinized under the new rules and regulations.

China responded angrily to this development, accusing the Netherlands and US for compromising the trade market. The Chinese embassy in the Netherlands condemned its actions, asking them to correct their actions. As it hinders Chinese manufacturing units, its already burdened economy will get severely affected. Its exercises over Taiwan strait can get reduced, supply chain disruption will pose a significant threat to Chinese technology infrastructure.

China adopted a tit-for-tat approach to tackle the situation by restricting exports of gallium and germanium which is a highly used component in semiconductors, and electric vehicles, creating trouble for US, Germany, Netherlands who are biggest importers of these metals.

Trade between China and Netherlands includes computers, photo lab equipment, China exported products of \$88.3B to the Netherlands whereas the latter exports to former accounts to \$16.3B in 2021, semiconductor exports accounts for \$44.5M.[1] It is worth noting that 45% of ASML revenue comes from EUV technology.[2] It seems that chip war will be prolonged affecting trade, technology and defense services.

[1] OEC - the Observatory of Economic Complexity. "China (CHN) and Netherlands (NLD) Trade | OEC," n.d. [https://oec.world/en/profile/bilateral-country/chn/partner/nld#:~:text=Bilateral%20Trade%20by%20Products,%23permlink%20to%20section&text=\(%245.81B\).-,During%20the%20last%2026%20years%20the%20exports%20of%20China%20to,exported%20%2416.3B%20to%20China.](https://oec.world/en/profile/bilateral-country/chn/partner/nld#:~:text=Bilateral%20Trade%20by%20Products,%23permlink%20to%20section&text=(%245.81B).-,During%20the%20last%2026%20years%20the%20exports%20of%20China%20to,exported%20%2416.3B%20to%20China.)

[2] Statista. "ASML System Sales Revenue Worldwide 2017-2022, by Technology," February 23, 2023. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1100183/net-system-sales-of-asml-by-technology/>.

China On Brink Of Consumer Deflation

<https://www.ft.com/content/b684bf72-1aaf-46ac-9cc2-ea765395aa03>

The consumer price index was flat year on year and declined 0.2 per cent compared with the previous month, while factory gate prices fell at the fastest pace since 2016 as demand for consumer and manufactured products softened.

China's export slide steepens in June

China's June exports had the biggest fall since February 2020 as sluggish overseas economies struggling with inflation and rising interest rates buy up fewer goods from Chinese factories.

Change in dollar-denominated exports and imports (Y/Y)



Source: Reuters

COMMENTS

With the world seeing a dip in China's Consumer Price Index and Producer Price Index, it is evident that the Chinese economy is close to deflation. Since inflation has reached 0% in China, reducing the prices of goods and services, it may seem good at first, but deflation is worse than inflation. 0% inflation marks a slowdown in the country's economic growth. Reduction of prices leads to deflation which in turn reduces market demand further reducing the production of products, leaving workers with unemployment. Bank debt increases as fewer people apply for loans putting additional strains on the economy. The Chinese economy is heavily dependent on local manufacturing units, foreign investing firms and exports of commodities. With the increasing pressure on consumers, local manufacturing units have slowed down. The Deputy Governor of People's Bank of China says that the economy will improve in the second half of the year. A Reuters news says China is looking forward to inviting foreign investors to a rare economic symposium[3], even as China's exports fell down by 12.4% this quarter.[4]

Because of the huge role played by foreign investment firms, China's economy is dominated by the US dollar while Renminbi is losing its value. Consequences of deflation can be unemployment, debt, and deflation spiralling which can lead to recession and depression. Economists are advocating for a stimulus package backed by the government whose focus should be on consumers rather than big infrastructure projects. It is worth noting that despite a closed and restricted economy, its loopholes are now out in the world though the world still doesn't know the exact details but doubt over China's economic muscle. The ongoing chip war, Taiwan crisis, and border disputes with India and other neighbouring countries exhibit various challenges that loom over China slightly fading its image as a dragon power. If China's economy can keep up with the demand, then it will make China even more powerful but if the Chinese economy recedes further then internal and external challenges will gripple China. China's huge economic projects like BRI, CPEC will be affected in the long run, regional spillover is obvious in this globalized world. Will the economy have any effect on military capabilities in open to speculation along with the future of China's economic trajectory?

[3] Xie, Yu, and Julie Zhu. "Exclusive: China Invites Global Investors for Rare Meeting as Economy Sputters." Reuters, July 14, 2023. <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/china-invites-global-investors-rare-meeting-economy-sputters-sources-2023-07-14/>.

[4] Cash, Joe, and Ellen Zhang. "China's Exports Fall Most in Three Years as Global Economy Falter." Reuters, July 13, 2023. <https://www.reuters.com/markets/asia/chinas-june-exports-fall-124-imports-drop-68-2023-07-13/>.

PM Modi visits France: Celebrates 25 years of Strategic Partnership

<https://www.ptinews.com/news/international/pm-modi-arrives-in-paris-on-official-visit-to-boost-strategic-ties-with-france/607693.html>

Paris, Jul 13 (PTI) Prime Minister Narendra Modi was on Thursday accorded a red-carpet welcome as he arrived in Paris on a two-day visit during which he will hold wide-ranging talks with President Emmanuel Macron and join him for the French National Day celebrations as the Guest of Honour.

"Landed in Paris. Looking forward to boosting India-France cooperation during this visit. My various programmes today include an interaction with the Indian community later in the evening," Modi tweeted soon after his arrival here. In a special gesture, French Prime Minister Elisabeth Borne received Prime Minister Modi at the airport. A ceremonial welcome and Guard of honour were accorded to Prime Minister Modi upon his arrival.

COMMENTS

PM Modi's visit to Paris will celebrate the 25 years of strategic partnership with France. He was also the Guest of Honour for the Bastille Day parade, where the Tri-Services of Indian Armed Forces marched along with the French soldiers during the ceremony. PM Modi was conferred with France's highest civilian award, the Grand Cross of the Legion of Honor by President Emmanuel Macron. Until now India has signed more than 35 strategic partnerships with France, with the first ever being in 1998 with President Jacques Chirac. In the same year, when the West sanctioned India for conducting its second nuclear test Pokhran II, France was the only country to refrain from joining the others in sanctions.



Source: Money Control

LIST OF AGREEMENTS REACHED BY INDIA AND FRANCE:

Defence Cooperation: These included an agreement for the construction of three additional Scorpene submarines, joint development of a combat aircraft engine, industrial cooperation for motorization of heavy-lift helicopters under the Indian Multi Role Helicopter (IMRH) programme with Safran Helicopter Engine, collaboration on a surface ship meeting India's and international naval forces' requirements, a roadmap on Defence Industrial Cooperation and Setting up a technical office of the DRDO at India's embassy in Paris.

Unified Payment Interface (UPI) System: Agreement to roll out UPI in France and Europe, with the Eiffel Tower as the first merchant to accept UPI.

Civil Nuclear Cooperation: Discussions on cooperation regarding small and advanced modular nuclear reactors.

LNG. Agreement between Indian Oil and France's Total company for the supply of LNG.

Space Cooperation: Agreements on satellite launch services, measuring land and sea temperatures, weather monitoring, and the making of the Trishna satellite.

These agreements add substance to the strategic partnership between India and France. The most anticipated deal on the procurement of Rafale-M was not agreed upon during the visit. Maybe this deal would require more discussions and negotiations. An important aspect of India-France strategic partnership is that it is only limited to developing each other's military-industrial complex. At a time of uncertainty India will also require the political support of France on issues of UNSC reforms. To conclude the official visit and discussions between India and France, an outcome document was released by the Ministry of External Affairs of India. The document consists of two major strategic outlooks for Indo-French partnership, first the Roadmap on Indo-French Strategic Partnership Horizon 2047 and India-France Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific.

KEY TAKEAWAYS FROM “HORIZON 2047: 25TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE INDIA-FRANCE STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP, TOWARDS A CENTURY OF INDIA-FRANCE RELATIONS”

Partnership for security and sovereignty: Building sovereign defence capabilities together, including co-development and co-production of advanced defence technologies, strengthening defence industrial partnership and collaborating on projects such as combat aircraft engines and submarine fleet development.

Concrete solutions for the Indo-Pacific: To work together to ensure economic and security interests, equal and free access to global commons, and partnerships of prosperity and sustainability in the Indo-Pacific region; To establish the Indo-Pacific Triangular Cooperation (IPTDC) Fund to support climate and SDG-focused innovations and startups in the region.

Space cooperation at the core: Deepening cooperation in the space sector, including scientific and commercial partnerships between CNES and ISRO, and collaboration on space exploration, maritime monitoring, and launch services; To strengthen synergies for sovereign access to space and developing forward-looking technologies for resilience.

Fighting terrorism and ensuring internal security: To strengthen cooperation in counterterrorism efforts, including operational cooperation, countering online radicalization, and combating financing of terrorism; Enhancing cooperation on internal security, technology utilisation, and cooperation between the National Security Guard (NSG) of India and the Groupe d'intervention de la Gendarmerie nationale (GIGN) of France.

Promoting a renewed and effective multilateralism: Supporting the reform of the UN Security Council to enlarge membership, including the G4 countries. Advocating for better representation from Africa and discussions on the regulation of veto use. Supporting the Paris agenda for development and environment.

Science, technology, and academic cooperation: Establishing an India-France Joint Strategic Committee for scientific cooperation and issuing calls for projects on priority themes. Collaborating on advanced digital technologies, including supercomputing, cloud computing, AI, and quantum technologies. Strengthening cooperation in the field of health and medicine, including digital health, AI for healthcare, and medical waste treatment technology. To establish the Indo-French Campus on Health for the Indo-Pacific to strengthen bilateral cooperation and research in the health field. Cooperation on cybersecurity, digital regulation, digital public infrastructure, and promoting startups and digital skills development.

Strengthening Energy Security and Climate Objectives: Collaborating on the transition to a low-carbon economy and increasing the use of clean energy sources. Fostering cooperation in nuclear energy, decarbonated hydrogen, renewable energies, hydropower, and energy efficiency.

Jointly Addressing Climate Change, Biodiversity Loss, and Pollution: Working together to mitigate climate change and raise climate ambitions for achieving carbon neutrality. Promoting sustainable building practices, circular economy initiatives, reducing plastic pollution, and conserving biodiversity. Cooperating on public health, marine research, and sustainable fisheries management.

Supporting Urban and Ecological Transitions and Social Inclusion: Partnering on integrated waste management, sustainable transport, and urban mobility solutions. Supporting sustainable development in cities and promoting financial inclusion for women and vulnerable populations.

Strengthening Trade and Facilitating Investments for Sustainable Growth: Creating favourable conditions and policy exchanges to develop resilient value chains. Enhancing bilateral trade dialogue, resolving market difficulties, and facilitating cross-investment.

Promoting Exchanges, Particularly for Youth: Enhancing mobility through the Partnership Agreement on Migration and Mobility. Fostering partnerships between educational institutions, promoting language training, and mutual recognition of diplomas. Encouraging student mobility and strengthening academic ties.

Promoting Regular Dialogue Between Cultures: Collaborating on museums, heritage preservation, and cultural projects. To Support exports and co-productions in the film industry, facilitating filming in both countries. Encourage artistic and literary cooperation, providing residencies for professionals, and promoting linguistic cooperation.

Enhancing Consular Services and Commercial Relations: To open the Indian Consulate General in Marseille, France and establish the "Bureau de France" in Hyderabad, India.

FIVE KEY TAKEAWAYS FROM THE INDIA-FRANCE COOPERATION ROADMAP

Joint Strategic Vision: In 2018, India and France agreed on a 'Joint Strategic Vision of India-France Cooperation in the Indian Ocean Region.' Now, they are ready to extend their joint efforts to the Pacific, indicating a comprehensive partnership between the two countries.

Shared Principles and Objectives: India and France both advocate for a free, open, inclusive, secure, and peaceful Indo-Pacific region. They aim to secure their economic and security interests, ensure equal and free access to global commons, promote partnerships of prosperity and sustainability, advance the rule of international law, and establish a balanced and stable order with respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Comprehensive Cooperation: The bilateral cooperation between India and France covers various domains, including defence, security, economy, connectivity, infrastructure, sustainability, and human-centric development. Their cooperation extends from the seabed to space, encompassing maritime cooperation, military exchanges, and defence industrial capabilities.

Regional Engagement: India and France are committed to extending development cooperation to countries in the Indo-Pacific region, including Africa, the Indian Ocean Region, South Asia, Southeast Asia, and the Pacific. They emphasise strengthening plurilateral agreements with countries like Australia and the UAE, as well as enhancing collaboration in regional forums and organisations such as the Indian Ocean Rim Association, Indian Ocean Naval Symposium, and others.

Common Initiatives: The document highlights several common initiatives and areas of collaboration between India and France, such as the International Solar Alliance, Indo-Pacific Parks Partnership, Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure, and Indo-French Health Campus. These initiatives focus on renewable energy deployment, conservation efforts, disaster resilience, and health research, demonstrating a commitment to sustainable development and regional cooperation.

Royal Canadian Navy Ships Leave Halifax To Join NATO In Baltic Mission

<https://atlantic.ctvnews.ca/royal-canadian-navy-ships-leave-halifax-to-join-nato-in-baltic-mission-1.6465448>

Two Royal Canadian Navy vessels set off out of Halifax harbour on July 3, destined for the Baltic region and a NATO mission to prevent Russian aggression. As part of Operation Reassurance, the warships HMCS Shawinigan and HMCS Summerside will assist NATO forces with mine-hunting and disposal in the North Atlantic. Rear Admiral Josee Kurtz, commander of Joint Task Force Atlantic, said, "Even if NATO is not directly involved in what's happening in Ukraine with Russia, the fact that we are positioning the alliance to be ready to react, if called upon, is very important."



COMMENTS

With the recent development, Canada sending Ships on July 3 to deter Russia may put Canada in direct confrontation with Russia, as the placements come right after Russia's Air military exercise over the Baltic and Black seas. On June 27, Russia conducted tactical fighter aircraft drills over the Baltic Sea with the objective of evaluating the country's defence preparedness to undertake combat and other special operations.[1]

The main goal of the exercise was to test the flight crew's readiness to perform combat and special tasks as intended, according to Russia's defence ministry. Russia said last year that it had deployed jets armed with cutting-edge Kinzhal hypersonic missiles to the Chkalovsk airfield in Kaliningrad, a key Baltic naval facility, as part of its "Strategic Deterrence." [2] Canada has contributed over \$1 billion in military aid to Ukraine since February 2022 and is still going. Ottawa is still actively looking for ways to help Ukraine, and sending ships for Operation Reassurance is one of them. Moreover, Canada agreed on July 10 to increase its NATO-mandated presence in Latvia by up to 1,200 personnel in order to protect the fragile Baltic area against Russian aggression. [3] "We are going to more than double our presence... to serve and defend democracy and the rule of law," said Justin Trudeau, after signing an agreement, with his Latvian counterpart Krisjanis Karins at the Adazi military facility in Latvia on July 10. [4] This is Canada's greatest foreign military deployment, and its only goal is to prevent and restrain Russia which may prove effective. Also, Minister Anita Anand, Defence Minister of Canada maintains frequent communication with Ukrainian officials both through the Ukraine Defence Communication Group and bilaterally. They continue to collaborate closely with NATO allies and partners to assist Ukraine in defending its sovereignty and security during this crisis and balance out the power play.

[1] Russian fighter aircraft hold combat drills over Baltic Sea | Military News | Al Jazeera. "Russian Fighter Aircraft Hold Combat Drills over Baltic Sea," June 27, 2023. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/6/27/russian-fighter-aircraft-hold-combat-drills-over-baltic-sea>.

[2] Russia deploys hypersonic missiles to its Baltic exclave - The Hindu. "Russia Deploys Hypersonic Missiles to Its Baltic Exclave," August 18, 2022. <https://www.thehindu.com/news/international/russia-deploys-hypersonic-missiles-to-its-baltic-exclave/article65784138.ece>.

[3] Defence, National. "Canadian Military Support to Ukraine - Canada.ca." Canadian military support to Ukraine - Canada.ca, n.d. <https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/campaigns/canadian-military-support-to-ukraine.html>.

[4] Sytas, Andrius. "Canada Pledges to Double Its Troops for Latvia in NATO Reinforcement." Reuters, July 10, 2023. <https://www.reuters.com/world/canada-latvia-sign-agreement-increase-troops-baltics-2023-07-10/>.

China Is Using Coercive Business Practices For Economic Advantage: US

<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/world/us/china-using-coercive-business-practices-for-economic-advantage-us/articleshow/101799438.cms?from=mdr>

China is using coercive economic practices to achieve worldwide dominance over America, US lawmakers accused. The accusations came at a hearing of the House Select Committee on Strategic Competition Between the United States and the Chinese Communist Party days after Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen met with Chinese officials in Beijing to discuss the nations' economic relationship.

COMMENTS

China's use of coercive business practices for economic advantage has been a topic of concern. US lawmakers have accused the Chinese Communist Party of using coercive economic practices to achieve worldwide dominance over America. These practices include the threat of seizing assets, intellectual property theft, and a restrictive business environment. The accusations were made during a hearing of the House Select Committee on Strategic Competition Between the United States and the Chinese Communist Party.

Chinese Communist Party is accused of using coercive economic practices:

China's legislations, such as the counterespionage law, data security law, and anti-foreign sanctions law, allow the Chinese government to seize assets, swipe data, and take intellectual property as it wishes. The US companies operating in China are facing threats and challenges and the restrictive environment, which is supposedly led from the top down, is making it increasingly difficult for American businesses to operate. European Concerns: A survey by the European Union Chamber of Commerce in China reported that doing business in China in 2022 became more difficult for 64% of surveyed European companies based in China. "Brain-Drain" of the Chinese Business People: China's restrictive environment is also leading to a "brain-drain" of its own business people. Wealthy individuals are reportedly leaving China due to concerns about the Communist Party's ability to arbitrarily seize assets. This trend has made China the top country in the world for the departure of wealthy individuals. Chinese Foreign Affairs Ministry's Response: The Chinese Foreign Affairs Ministry responded to criticism of China's business practices by stating that China is committed to the rule of law. They argued that security reviews of foreign companies are conducted in accordance with the law and welcomed people and businesses from all countries to come to China. They also highlighted instances of the US refusing visas for Chinese students and smearing China's efforts to repatriate corrupt fugitives.

If China is able to achieve its goal of worldwide dominance, it will have a significant impact on the way that the global economy operates. This could lead to higher prices for consumers, less innovation, and a decline in economic growth. The Chinese business practices are not only unfair, but they also pose a threat to the global economy. The USA and other countries need to take a stand against China's coercive economic practices. This could include imposing sanctions on Chinese companies that engage in these practices, or working to build a coalition of countries that must collectively oppose China's actions.

SCO Summit 2023 At A Glance

1. <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/sco-summit-live-updates-july-4/liveblog/101473995.cms>
2. <https://www.thehindu.com/news/international/worldview-with-suhasini-haidar-sco-summit-missed-opportunity-for-india/article67053442.ece>

India, Pakistan, Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan are all members of the SCO, a security organisation for Eurasia that was established by China and Russia in 2001. Iran is now the organisation's ninth formal member and Belarus has signed a pact that will pave the road for its admission by 2024. The SCO summit was virtually hosted by India this year. Collectively, the SCO opposed ideological and bloc-based approaches to the security issues. The shortages of food, fuel, and fertilisers were noted by this year's host India and on the other hand Xi and Putin talked about increasing local trade in local currencies.

India's 2017 SCO membership was a reaffirmation of its desire to strengthen its long-standing ties with the region. Since becoming a full-fledged Member State of the organisation in 2017, India has continued to participate with it actively. The SCO Council of Heads of Government, the second-highest decision-making body of the organisation, met in India for the first time in 2020. The following significant event is India's first-ever one-year term as Chairman of the SCO Council of Heads of State, starting in September 2022. The summit's timing is definitely extremely important considering the Russia-Ukraine war and China's concerns about India's growing partnership with the west.

"We do not see this area as an "extended neighbourhood", but as an "extended family," Prime Minister Narendra Modi said.[1] India has always worked to develop multifaceted collaboration in its capacity as the SCO Chair. All of India's efforts are based on the "Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam" and " SECURE" as its core principles. Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam literally translates as "the world is one family." The second tenet stands for environmental conservation, security, connectivity, economic growth, unity, and respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity.[2] The theme of India's chairmanship and its aspirations for the SCO are reflected in it, the Indian prime minister said in his speech.



Source: The Mint

[1] "English Translation of Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi's Remarks at the 23rd SCO Summit." Accessed July 14, 2023. <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleaseframePage.aspx?PRID=1937353>

[2] "English Translation of Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi's Remarks at the 23rd SCO Summit." Accessed July 14, 2023. <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleaseframePage.aspx?PRID=1937353>

With this in mind, India has created five new SCO cooperation pillars: startups and innovation, traditional medicine, youth empowerment, digital inclusion, and shared Buddhist heritage.[3]

The SCO's member states reaffirm that the organisation is not hostile to other nations or international organisations and that it is open to broad cooperation with them in accordance with the objectives and tenets of the UN Charter and that they intend to further their cooperation in the areas of politics and security, trade, economy, finance, and investments in the joint statement of the SCO. The joint statement also mentions the fight against terrorism and the situation in Afghanistan.

COMMENTS

This body, which was established jointly by China and Russia, gave some insight into how a regional group which was considered to be established to resist Western influence is trying to balance its own conflicting interests. All Member States, with the exception of India, have renewed their support for China's BRI project, demonstrating the clear lack of unanimity among the States. While praising the gathering as "an important platform" for world peace and development, Mr. Modi urged the attendees to denounce nations that 'use terrorism as an instrument of their policy.'" The comment was made in reference to Pakistan, which India claims supports militants in India's Kashmir region.

India has a stake in the forum notwithstanding these differences. New Delhi's interest primarily lies in the area of energy supplies, aspects regarding terrorism and to retain influence in Afghanistan, which unduly irks Pakistan, for this it depends on Central Asian nations. This summit was meant for Russian President Vladimir V. Putin projecting strength in the wake of the Wagner mercenary group's insurrection and claiming international support for his war in Ukraine. The summit provided Xi Jinping, the top leader of China, with yet another occasion to criticise the United States by demanding an end to "hegemonism" and "power politics."

[3]"English Translation of Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi's Remarks at the 23rd SCO Summit." Accessed July 14, 2023. <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleaseframePage.aspx?PRID=1937353>

Uzbek President Re-elected For Seven-Year Term In Snap Election

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/7/10/uzbek-president-re-elected-for-seven-year-term-in-snap-election>

Uzbekistan held snap Presidential elections on June 9, 2023. Shavkat Mirziyoyev emerged victorious with a tally of 87.1% votes. He has been in power since 2016 after the death of longtime autocratic leader Islam Karimov.

COMMENTS

President Shavkat Mirziyoyev is back in power after a constitutional amendment raised the presidential term limit to seven years and further raised the term count for him to two more terms. He can therefore stay in power until 2037.

Shedding some light on his background, he had served as Prime Minister for 13 years under President Islam Karimov. Upon his election as President in 2016, he initially introduced some reforms in regards to human rights, igniting hopes of resolving the authoritarian nature of the state and further solving the human rights issue. He can be credited for bringing some long-awaited reforms since the independence of the country, for instance, the abolishment of forced labour in cotton fields, opening the country to tourism and investment, and ensuring limited media freedoms.

There is great speculation in regards to his overwhelmingly unquestioned victory, as he was able to secure 87.1% of total votes, with the next highest-securing candidate at just 4.43%. The incumbent President faced very lenient competition, as reports have suggested that the campaigning was rather low-key by Mirziyoyev, and as for the other three opposition candidates, they were largely silent, eluding from any sort of campaigning, posing a big question mark for the public since the three opposition leaders were largely unpopular and unknown. The one legitimate opponent who goes by the name Xidirnazar Allaqulov was barred from contesting the elections; allegedly, his efforts to establish a political party were thwarted repeatedly and violently by the authorities.

These elections were yet another indication that Uzbekistan's journey towards attaining democracy would be a difficult one, as the country is still under the clutches of an authoritarian form of government, leaving very little room for improvement.

As for India, Uzbekistan's foreign policy didn't change an inch, and hence India can expect to expand its strategic partnership with Uzbekistan and enable further economic ties. Since Mirziyoyev's first Presidential term in 2016, both countries have cooperated on various issues like trade, defence, security, space, health, education, etc., while their most important regional cooperation was in regards to Afghanistan and counter-terrorism.