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RUSSIA AND CHINA – HOW DEEP DO RELATIONS GO?

On 20 March, China's President Xi Jinping arrived in Moscow for talks with Vladimir Putin. As with their meeting in Beijing in February last year, during which the two presidents declared their 'no limits friendship', the atmospherics were warm and friendly. The West worries that China could eventually provide more support for Russia's invasion of Ukraine, and perhaps quietly hopes that Beijing could do something to convince Moscow to find a way out of the war. Bobo Lo provides a useful [analysis](#) of the state of the Sino-Russian Partnership for the French Institute for International Relations. He argues that for both sides, the relationship is too important to fail, but that it is also clear that the balance of power favours China. Lo urges Western governments not to fall into the trap of believing that policies designed to confront or compete with one can simply be applied to the other. Although China and Russia are likely to work together for the foreseeable future, they ultimately pose different challenges for the US, UK, Europe and their allies.

THE UKRAINE WAR IN NUMBERS

More than one year after Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the [Atlantic Council](#) has collated eight figures to highlight the profound impact of the war over the past 12 months – on Ukraine and Russia, but also on the rest of the world. The team at the Washington-based think tank finds that some 52 per cent of Russia's tank arsenal has been destroyed in Ukraine, and notes that Russia is forecast to reach a 60.2 per cent budget deficit by January next year. More than eight million Ukrainians have been driven from their homes and country, with three million finding refuge in Poland, Germany and the Czech Republic alone. The US and the EU have mobilised enormous resources to support Ukraine (the EU alone has sent some €50 billion worth of assistance), but at least 35 countries appear to have adopted a non-aligned position towards Russia and the war.

ZEITENWENDE ONE YEAR ON

Days after Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz (right) declared that the war marked a Zeitenwende – a turning point – for European and global security, and for German foreign and defence policy, in particular. One year on, various German observers have reflected on what has – and what has not – changed since Scholz's speech in Parliament. The consensus seems to be that it is too early to declare the Zeitenwende a failure. [Susan Stewart](#) explains the gap between rhetoric and action and argues that while metrics like defence expenditure have often received the most attention, Zeitenwende should instead be understood as a fundamental shift of political and strategic culture in Germany – which understandably takes time. [Aylin Matle](#), meanwhile, takes a closer look at the Bundeswehr and outlines the work now ahead for recently appointed Defence Minister Boris Pistorius. Finally, [Jannik Hartman and several others](#) write in *Internationale Politik Quarterly* about the international dimensions of the Zeitenwende, reviewing how the US and countries across Europe have reacted to the war.



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IRAQ WAR ANNIVERSARY

The 19th March marked the 20-year anniversary of the beginning of the Iraq War. It is no exaggeration to say that the war has fundamentally shaped the international relations of the Middle East; the US, UK and other countries that were part of the coalition; and, ultimately, the world. To mark the occasion, Chatham House has published a collection of [essays](#) – penned by pre-eminent analysts – about the war and the two decades of state-building and conflict that followed. Renad Mansour, Director of Chatham House's Iraq Initiative, has also appeared on the [Arab Digest](#) podcast, reflecting on where Iraq stands today, what lessons have been learned, and what might lie ahead.

CHINA BRINGS SAUDI ARABIA AND IRAN TOGETHER

On 11th March, Saudi Arabia and Iran announced that they have agreed on a roadmap to normalise their diplomatic relations. The deal was the result of several years of on-again-off-again talks hosted by the Iraqi and Omani governments, but it was brought over the line by China following several days of intensive negotiations in Beijing. The agreement has spawned a flurry of analysis pieces, with some declaring the end of US dominance in the Gulf, and others already discussing how Saudi Arabia and Iran will work together to reshape the Middle East. [Michael Stephens](#), writing in *The Telegraph*, takes a more sober view, explaining why China's foray into Gulf geopolitics is significant, but should also not be overstated. [Cinzia Bianco](#), at the European Council on Foreign Relations, and RUSI's [Tobias Borck](#) provide additional perspectives that explore what the deal – and especially China's role in it – could and should mean for Europe and the UK, respectively.

AUKUS

The announcement of the trilateral security pact between Australia, the UK, and the US (AUKUS) in September 2021 caused quite a stir, not least in Anglo-French relations. Then it went relatively quiet. But in mid-March, President Joe Biden, Prime Minister Rishi Sunak, and Prime Minister Albanese finally put some more meat on the bone. Meeting in San Diego, they set out a plan that will see Australia take delivery of the first US Virginia-class submarines in the early 2030s, but that includes a number of forward-basing, training, and integration arrangements in the meantime. This [analysis](#) by Nick Childs and Euan Graham at the IISS in London puts the phased approach into context, but also notes key challenges to implementation. Writing for the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington, [Charles Edel](#) addresses five critical challenges to AUKUS going forward. [Lydia Khalil](#) at the Lowy Institute in Sydney sees AUKUS as a manifestation of a return of ideology in global politics.

WIDER LISTENING

At the frontline of Russian-NATO tensions, the Baltic states are perhaps the key focal points of any military escalation that could spread from Ukraine outwards. In this 30-minute podcast for the Foreign Policy Research Institute – entitled *The Baltic States as NATO heavyweights* – Tomass Pildegovičs, a PhD candidate at the University of Cambridge, dives into the dynamics of small state positioning within larger multilateral organisations. He outlines the concerns of the small Baltic states, and their fears about the future of Ukraine, which directly impacts their own. As a result their needs for security from NATO have grown. But the Baltics have gone on the front foot, steering NATO policy in their favour and growing their voice. By dedicating one per cent of their respective GDPs to arm Ukraine, and showing the rest of the alliance what needs to be done to protect Ukraine's integrity, they have driven forward policy in a way that greatly exceeds their collective weight. This is an excellent podcast that analyses the history underpinning the Baltics' security concerns, and drills down into how they see NATO as a vehicle for their security and foreign policy goals.



NEWS STORIES TO WATCH OUT FOR

As the war in Ukraine and its multi-dimensional repercussions continue to dominate headlines, here are some other topics to keep an eye on:

In Kenya, protests called for by opposition leader Odinga, who lost last year's election, [could escalate into violence](#).

French and American hostages held by rebel and extremist groups in [Mali and the surrounding region](#) for several years were freed in mid-March.

The [potential stop-over visit](#) by Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-wen in the US raised tensions between Washington and Beijing.

Colombian President Petro has [suspended a ceasefire](#) with the country's largest criminal network, raising fears of renewed violent escalation.

In Pakistan, the [political crisis](#) triggered by former Prime Minister Khan's toppling last April continues.

TikTok usership continues to grow amid discussions in Washington and other Western capitals to ban the Chinese social media app over [national security concerns](#).

Israeli Minister Smotrich further [ratchets up anti-Palestinian rhetoric](#), increasing fears of new clashes in the West Bank and Gaza.

Turkey's opposition has picked [Kemal Kilicdaroglu](#) to run against President Recep Tayyip Erdogan in May's crucial elections.

The EU has backed a new deal to bring down [tensions between Serbia and Kosovo](#), but questions over its implementation remain.

SIPRI DATA

The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) has published its survey of arms imports and exports by countries around the world between 2018-2022. It shows that the US (by some distance), Russia, France, China, and Germany remain the world's top exporters. Meanwhile, India, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Australia, and China were responsible for the highest shares of global arms imports. Notably, India accounted for some 31 per cent of Russia's total arms exports (and Russian arms made up 45 per cent of Indian imports), while the Gulf and wider Middle East remain key destinations for US and European arms (e.g. 19 per cent of US arms exports went to Saudi Arabia and 18 per cent of German exports went to Egypt). Overall, SIPRI records a 5.1 per cent decline in international arms transfers between 2018-2022 compared to the previous five years, but it also notes that Europe and East Asia, arguably the hotspots of geopolitical tension, have seen significant increases in arms imports.



NORTH KOREA KEEPS FIRING MISSILES

North Korea fired a record 70 missiles in 2022, but already this year that number looks set to be beaten. With seven missiles fired in March alone, further escalation off the Korean peninsula is a dangerous prospect. Both Japan and South Korea have expressed deep concern at North Korean escalation, labelling the missile tests as "provocations". In response the United States and South Korea have held more joint naval exercises this month. Yet it is these exercises (and previous ones) that Pyongyang has claimed is unnecessarily causing tension, and that its recent missile tests are designed to respond to. This [analysis](#) from the Associated Press outlines the problems of North Korea's increasingly assertive missile posture, which, combined with a more aggressive nuclear doctrine, make the current tensions extremely concerning.

ISRAEL'S POLITICAL CHALLENGES AND THEIR IMPACT ON DEFENCE

Since Benjamin Netanyahu resumed his position as Prime Minister after an 18 month hiatus, Israel has seen an unprecedented level of political uncertainty and disruption in the face of his attempts to drive through judicial reform. Ministers on the hard right have used the opportunity to strengthen their hand on the levers of state. Particularly Bezalel Smotrich, the finance minister who caused regional consternation when giving a speech in front of a map depicting Jordan and parts of Syria as part the State of Israel. Smotrich will now operate as civilian minister inside the defence ministry, overseeing "civilian" matters inside the West Bank. This [piece](#) outlines what amounts to a radical shake up of defence policy, and suggests some of the tensions that may arise from the intersection between politics and defence becoming ever more blurred.

OUT NOW...

● "Why does public release of intelligence work as a means of strategic communication in the 21st century? It works like a vaccine; it 'pre-bunks' dis- and mis-information in advance rather than trying to disprove a message after it has landed. In a world of cognitive overload and fake news, our prehistoric brains are seeking something we can trust." – Major Luke Turrell on the pros and pitfalls of 'sharing'. Read his [In-Depth Briefing](#) and [CHACR's library of commentaries and articles at \[chacr.org.uk\]\(http://chacr.org.uk\)](#)

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BEILARUS: PUTIN'S ACHILLES' HEEL?

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THE STRONGMAN & THE SECURITY BLOC

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'RICOCHETS & REPEATERS'

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