
International Briefs

Foreign Ministers Meet in India, Plan July Heads of State Summit

Foreign ministers of the eight member states of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) met May 4–5 in Panaji, in the Indian state of Goa, to discuss pressing regional and international problems, especially foreign policy coordination, and the need to strengthen the United Nations central coordinating role of “reliable global security and sustainable economic growth,” TASS reported May 4. The situation in Afghanistan was a major topic of discussion as member nations, many of them neighbors of Afghanistan, are concerned about any spillover of instability or terrorist activity from Afghanistan into the region.

One of the meeting’s main purposes was to prepare the agenda for the July 3–4 SCO heads of state summit in New Delhi which will formalize Iran’s membership and promote the process of Belarus’ admission as well. SCO expansion was a key topic of discussion. Memoranda of understanding were also issued on granting SCO dialogue-partner status to Bahrain, Kuwait, Myanmar, the Maldives, and the United Arab Emirates.

On economic matters, the transition to national currencies in mutual settlements was a key point of discussion, for which the Organization is working on a roadmap, according to SCO Deputy Secretary General Grigory Logvinov.

Several bilateral meetings were held on the sidelines of the ministerial. Host, Indian External Affairs Minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar, met with

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov to discuss the two nations’ “special and privileged strategic partnership,” the Ukraine situation, bilateral cooperation, and their coordination within the SCO, G20, and the BRICS. Lavrov also had a productive meeting with his Chinese counterpart Qin Gang, including a discussion on the Ukraine situation and China’s advocacy of a peace plan.

For the second time in two months, Jaishankar met with Qin Gang to discuss, among other things, how they might resolve their ongoing border dispute along the Line of Actual Control in eastern Ladakh. They also discussed their participation in the SCO, the BRICS, and the G20, according to the *Times of India*.

NATO Provocatively Setting Up Liaison Office in Tokyo Next Year

To extend its reach into the Asia-Pacific, NATO is provocatively planning to set up a liaison office in Tokyo next year, purportedly to coordinate with its “close partners” across the Indo-Pacific, according to *The Guardian* May 4. This is the first office of its kind in Asia, which NATO says will allow it to upgrade its cooperation with Japan in such areas as cyberthreats, “disinformation,” and disruptive technologies.

NATO spokesperson Oana Lungescu told *The Guardian* that NATO and Japan “share the same values, interests and concerns, including supporting Ukraine and addressing the security challenges posed by authoritarian regimes, and our partnership is getting stronger.” Nikkei Asia reports

that NATO has already circulated a draft proposal among its 31 members regarding the opening of the one-man office.

Responding to a question about this at the May 4 Chinese Foreign Ministry press briefing, spokeswoman Mao Ning [replied](#):

“Asia is an anchor for peace and stability and a promising land for cooperation and development, not a wrestling ground for geopolitical competition. NATO’s continued eastward foray into the Asia-Pacific and interference in regional affairs will inevitably undermine regional peace and stability and stoke camp confrontation. This calls for high vigilance among regional countries.”

Iranian President Gets Hero’s Welcome in Syria

Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi, accompanied by a large ministerial delegation, arrived in Damascus May 3 to a hero’s welcome. Syrian President Bashar al Assad greeted Raisi at the Presidential Palace where they both made public remarks on the last four decades of the Iran-Syria relationship.

“The joint vision of the two countries has proven to be based on correct and firm foundations, based on values, principles and beliefs, and most importantly, on the interests of the peoples and on their sovereignty and independence,” Assad said, Syria’s press agency, SANA, reported. Raisi replied that “Syria, Government and People, have gone through large difficulties, and today we can say that you have surpassed all these problems and achieved victory despite the threats

and sanctions imposed on you.”

The two presidents signed a memorandum of understanding for a bilateral comprehensive long-term strategic cooperation plan. Their delegations also signed about a dozen other cooperation agreements covering, among others, fields such as agriculture, aviation, earthquake research, and energy.

According to SANA, Assad and Raisi discussed how to further develop bilateral relations in various fields. They also addressed the latest developments in the Southwest Asian region, discussing the effects of global changes on the region and what can be made to ensure these changes will benefit both countries and the people of the region.

Lavrov: We Will Respond to Attack on Kremlin with ‘Concrete Actions’

Speaking May 5 on the sidelines of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) Foreign Ministers’ meeting in Goa, India, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov warned that Russia would respond to Ukraine’s May 3 drone attack on the Kremlin, which was an attempt on the life of President Vladimir Putin: “We will respond not with talk about whether or not this is a *casus belli*. We will respond with concrete actions.” Lavrov reported that his SCO colleagues had condemned Kiev’s drone attack on the Kremlin.

A day earlier, Lavrov had indicated:

“The severity of this crime is aggravated by the fact that the Kremlin is the residence of the head of the Russian state, and the special cynicism of the actions of the neo-Nazi Ukrainian authorities lies in the fact that an attempt on the life of the President of Russia was made on the eve of Victory Day and the May 9 Parade, which will be attended by veterans of the Great Patriotic War who shed blood in the

fight against Nazism and fascism, including on the territory of Ukraine.”

“It has long been no secret to the world community that the Kiev regime is supported by Western countries that supply it with weapons, intelligence, train its militants and point them to targets. The silence of the ‘collective West’ testifies to its indulgence in the terrorist methods of the neo-Nazi and extremist regime in Kyiv.

“We confirm that the Russian side reserves the right to take retaliatory measures against egregious attempts at terrorist acts. Russia will respond in accordance with the assessments of the threat that Kyiv has created for the leadership of our country.”

In his comments in Goa, Lavrov explained there could be no solution to the Ukraine crisis by “freezing” the line of engagement in the Donbas. Everyone, he said, “clearly understands the inherent geopolitical nature of what has taken place.”

Brazil’s Lula Looks to China, New Development Bank To Aid Argentina

The four-hour May 2 meeting in Brasilia between Argentine President Alberto Fernández and Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva, which Lula described as “long and difficult,” did not produce a plan by which the Brazilian central bank will extend credit lines to domestic exporters to finance their exports to Argentina. This proposal to bypass the use of dollars, by allowing Argentine importers to pay in pesos, to be later converted into Brazilian reals, will require more work, Lula explained, and “many more meetings.”

During the week of May 7–13, Argentina Finance Minister Sergio Mass and his staff will hold follow-up meetings in Brazil with relevant authorities. During their post-meeting joint press conference, President Fernández

announced that Lula had asked him to address problems on the Argentine side, where financial warfare and market speculation have savaged the peso and roiled the markets. The country’s multiple exchange rates for different categories of trade are also a complicating factor.

The Brazilian President is nonetheless determined to assist Argentina. That includes, he said, intervening with the IMF to “remove the knife the [Fund] has at Argentina’s neck.” Referencing the \$45 billion the Fund lent Argentina in 2019, for the sole purpose of bolstering the re-election bid of the thuggish former President Mauricio Macri, Lula pointedly charged: “The IMF knows how [Argentina] became indebted and to whom it lent the money,” so it “can’t continue to pressure a country that only seeks to grow, create jobs and improve the lives of its people.”

Brazil’s Finance Minister Fernando Haddad will be intervening at the IMF on Argentina’s behalf, he reported.

Lula has also suggested that the BRICS, of which Brazil is a member, and its New Development Bank (NDB), whose new president is former Brazilian President Dilma Rousseff, might help with the Argentine case. “I’ve already spoken with the BRICS and we’re going to continue talking to see how we can help,” Lula said May 2. The NDB, he added, might get involved by providing guarantees for financing Brazilian exporters. “We don’t want them to lend money to Argentina. We want them to give us guarantees which would greatly facilitate Brazil’s relations with Argentina,” *O Globo* reported him saying. Lula also reported he had spoken with Rousseff right after his meeting with Fernández, and she said that Chinese Finance Minister Qin Gang had traveled to Shanghai specifically to discuss with her possible options for helping Argentina through the NDB.