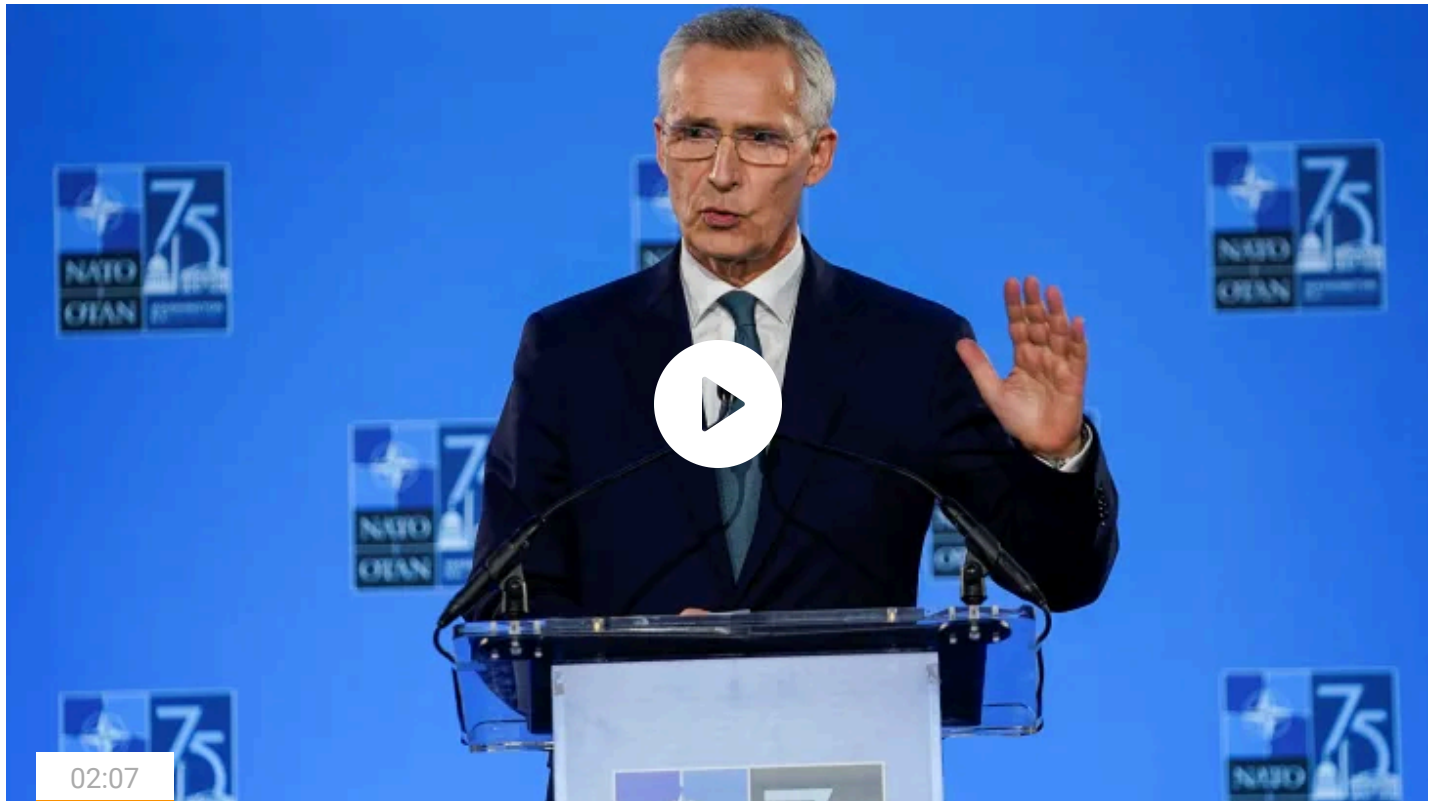


## EXPLAINER

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## Why are NATO and China facing off over Ukraine?

*NATO allies accuse China of being a ‘decisive enabler’ of Russia’s war on Ukraine at their Washington, DC, summit.*



By Sarah Shamim

11 Jul 2024



Leaders of NATO nations have described China as a “decisive enabler” of [Russia’s war on Ukraine](#) in the sharpest criticism levelled yet by the alliance at Beijing over the conflict.

While NATO members and China have traded barbs before, this statement – part of a communique issued on Wednesday by the alliance during its [75th anni-](#)

[versary summit](#) in Washington, DC – the alliance had earlier refrained from such explicit allegations against Beijing on the Ukraine war.

Here is more about the allegations made by NATO allies against China, how Beijing has responded and what's next:

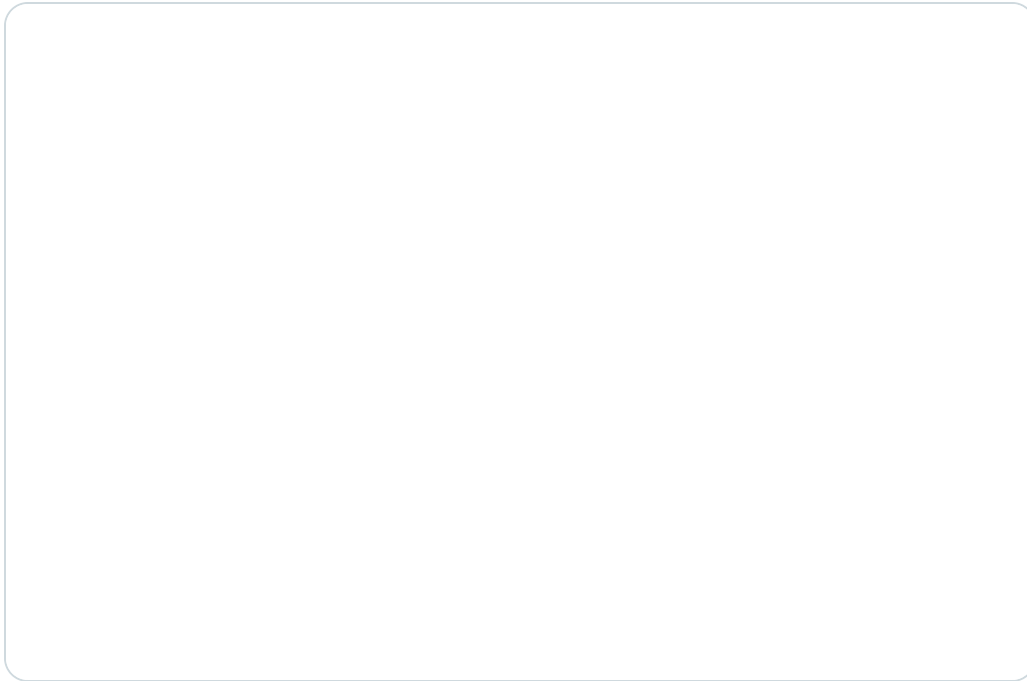
## What has NATO accused China of doing in Ukraine?

- During the NATO summit, which started on Tuesday and ends on Thursday, leaders from all [32 NATO members](#) signed off on a 38-point declaration.
- The document accuses China of enabling the war in Ukraine through its [“no limits” partnership](#) and support for Russia’s defence industry.
- The [no-limits partnership](#) was announced in February 2022 after a meeting between Chinese President Xi Jinping and his Russian counterpart, Vladimir Putin, days before Russia launched a full-fledged invasion of Ukraine. It declares that there are “no limits” to the friendship between the two countries and there are “no ‘forbidden’ areas of cooperation”.
- The NATO declaration explicitly requests China to “cease all material and political support to Russia’s war effort”, including the supply of [dual-use materials](#) that can be used in weapons.
- “The PRC [People’s Republic of China] cannot enable the largest war in Europe in recent history without this negatively impacting its interests and reputation,” the communique reads.

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Given that 32 countries have to agree to the text, unusually sharp language on China in this NATO summit declaration (as well as, less surprisingly, harsh words for North Korea and Iran)

China "has become a decisive enabler of Russia's war against Ukraine" NATO allies state



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## How has China responded?

- A spokesperson from the Chinese mission to the European Union released a statement on Thursday in response, saying the communique is full of “Cold War mentality and belligerent rhetoric”.
- Additionally, the spokesperson said the content of the communique pertaining to China is rife with “provocations, lies, incitement and smears”.

- “China’s core position on the Ukraine issue is to promote peace talks and political settlement, which has been widely recognized and appreciated by the international community,” according to the spokesperson.
- In February 2023, China put forth a [12-point plan](#) to end the Ukraine war. While Russia has since described it as a potential roadmap for negotiations to end the war, Ukraine has rejected the Chinese proposal.

## What else has NATO accused China of?

- NATO also accused China in its summit communique of posing “systemic challenges to Euro-Atlantic security” through cyber- and hybrid activities, including disinformation.
- The alliance has accused China of working in concert with Russia to “undercut and reshape the rules-based international order”, calling this a “cause for profound concern”. Russia and China have long accused the West of hypocrisy when it comes to the implementation of international law.
- At the summit, NATO also accused China of engaging in “coercive tactics and efforts” to divide the alliance.
- While the communique does not flesh out that allegation, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has said in recent days that Ankara is eager to join the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), a security forum led by China and Russia. Turkey, a NATO member, has been an SCO dialogue partner since 2012.
- On Tuesday, Xi also [met with](#) Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban to discuss an end to the Russia-Ukraine war. Hungary is a NATO member.
- The NATO allegations that Beijing is attempting to hurt the alliance and its members come as a result of the “hot box of low-intensity operations that China is waging against the West”, Mathieu Boulegue, a consulting fellow at the London-based Chatham House think tank, told Al Jazeera.

- Boulegue said China appears to be using the same tactics, such as spying and economic subversion, as Russia although at a lower intensity for now.

## Why are NATO-China tensions escalating now?

- While NATO's rebuke of China "very well could've happened last year", there are also new reasons behind the intensifying spat, said Boulegue, who has researched Russia-NATO relations and Russia-China defence relations.
- Boulegue said NATO had been showing growing interest in expanding its mission, including by increasing its geographic influence. To this end, NATO is seeking collaboration with Asia Pacific nations that are allies of the West.
- "One good entry point for NATO to look at China's relationship with the Indo-Pacific is to look at its involvement with Russia's war against Ukraine," Boulegue said. There is also more evidence of China's involvement in Russia's war in Ukraine this year, he said.
- This isn't the first time that NATO has accused China of supporting Russia's war. But previously, that allegation has come from individual leaders — not in a document signed by each of the alliance's 32 member states. On May 31, NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg accused China of "propping up Russia's war economy".
- On May 25, Stoltenberg told a German newspaper: "China says it wants to maintain good relations with the West. At the same time, however, Beijing is fuelling the war in Europe. You can't have it both ways."

## What could be the next frontier for NATO-China tensions?

- NATO on Thursday hosted the leaders of New Zealand, Japan and South Korea as well as Australia's deputy prime minister for a meeting aimed at

strengthening the alliance's relationship with its allies in the Asia Pacific and, in effect, its footprint in a region where China has long been dominant.

- The summit communique details NATO's plans to launch four projects in collaboration with the Asia Pacific partners to back Ukraine, strengthen cyberdefence cooperation, counter disinformation and work on artificial intelligence.
- On Wednesday, a spokesperson for the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs said Beijing opposes "NATO acting beyond its characterisation as a regional defensive alliance". The spokesperson [accused NATO](#) of "inserting itself into the Asia Pacific to incite confrontation and rivalry and disrupting the prosperity and stability in this region".
- At the same time, China this week held military exercises in Belarus near the border of NATO ally Poland – war games that Warsaw said it was watching closely.
- Boulegue said the summit's declaration represented an incremental change in the equation between NATO and China. That's a rift that analysts said is only expected to deepen.

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