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AUTHORITARIAN COLLABORATION INDEX

OCTOBER 2026 TRENDS REPORT



The Authoritarian Collaboration Index (AuthCollab Index) is a first-of-its-kind, machine-assisted database that systematically detects, tracks, and categorises transnational collaboration events between authoritarian regimes, authoritarian-leaning governments, and authoritarian-leaning parties globally.

Expanding on the companion analysis published in March alongside the Index's launch, which evidenced the scale of China and Russia's global authoritarian network, the following report tracks key trends and developments for the period 1 April to 1 October 2026. Analysis of this six-month period highlights several structural developments. Authoritarian-leaning parties in democracies – including Reform UK, the National Rally, and Alternative for Germany – are conducting foreign policy in advance of power, pre-agreeing policy with foreign partners, and lending each other political cover so that their partnerships are ready to activate on accession. Regime security is also increasingly becoming a traded commodity, with Russia expanding its offer in Africa. The institutionalisation of authoritarian collaboration is deepening further, as standing bodies and treaties give policing, transnational repression, media, and technology cooperation a permanent footing, and the Alliance of Sahel States builds confederal machinery. Regime-to-regime and regime-to-party learning is becoming more layered: China still dominates this space, in the exporting of doctrines and planning; however lower-tier regimes are also now generating exportable models of their own, from El Salvador's mega-prison to Gabon's coup-to-candidate transition. And security crises, including the Iran war, are acting as accelerants and converting long-standing transactional ties into formal alliances within months, as evidenced by the formation of the Mecca Defence Alliance between Türkiye, Pakistan, and Saudi Arabia.

KEY CONCLUSIONS

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The Index combines the precision of political science typology with natural language processing (NLP), large language models (LLMs), and high-frequency open-source monitoring to map the infrastructure of global authoritarian entanglement. Covering 1 January 2024 onwards, the Index now includes more than 100,000 collaboration events extracted from over 600 million articles, analyses, press releases, communiqués, conference proceedings, and investigative reporting in over 100 languages, using scalable automated workflows. Daily automatic updates provide near-real-time tracking of authoritarian collaboration globally.

From this edition, and reflected in data recorded from 1 October 2026 onwards, the Index monitors 139 actors, classified using the Human Rights Foundation’s (HRF) Tyranny Tracker, a qualitative index that rates the world’s countries and territories as democratic, hybrid authoritarian, or fully authoritarian. Conceived to monitor the expansion and interaction of autocratic networks, the Index tracks collaboration between and among three categories of actors: authoritarian regimes, classified as “fully authoritarian” by the Tyranny Tracker; authoritarian-leaning governments, classified as “hybrid authoritarian”; and authoritarian-leaning political parties operating within otherwise democratic states, identified through the Authoritarian Populism Index and the Populism and Political Parties Expert Survey. This scope captures state-to-state cooperation between established autocracies alongside the increasingly consequential links between authoritarian regimes and sympathetic political forces inside democracies.

The Index tracks these dynamics across seven categories of collaboration:



The Index exists because democracies cannot counter what they cannot see. Authoritarian actors now coordinate across borders as a matter of routine, yet democratic responses still treat each sham election or dissident extradition as a separate crisis. By converting scattered, often foreign-language open source data into structured, source-traced information, the Index lets analysts follow collaboration as it happens and compare it across actors and regions. Its purpose is to move democratic strategy towards network-aware prevention: identifying the repeat players and chokepoints that hold the system together, and disrupting transfer mechanisms before they harden into standard practice.

KEY TREND 01

Reform UK and National Rally Formalise Bilateral Relations in Anticipation of Power

Authoritarian-leaning parties in democracies are increasingly formalising their cross-border ties before they reach power. These partnerships run on reciprocity: each side lends the other external legitimacy, and the policy commitments often matter less than the validation they confer. Between 1 April and 1 October 2026, this trend was visible across Europe, particularly in the formalisation of ties between Reform UK and France's National Rally.



National Rally president Jordan Bardella (left) and Reform UK leader Nigel Farage (right) sign a memorandum of understanding at the Reform UK Party Conference, Birmingham, 4 September 2026.

Photo: Raşid Necati Aslım / Anadolu Agency (AA)

On 4 September, Reform UK leader Nigel Farage and Jordan Bardella, president of National Rally, signed a [memorandum](#) of understanding on Channel small-boat crossings at Reform's an-

[nual conference](#) in Birmingham. The agreement follows the two leaders' first meeting - a [lunch](#) in London in December 2025 - and is the first formal pact between Reform and a foreign party recorded in the AuthCollab Index. Under its terms, a Reform government in the United Kingdom would intercept boats launched from France upon entry to British territorial waters and return those aboard to be repatriated under French expulsion law. The commitments bind the two parties alone and would take effect only if both come to govern, with France electing a president in 2027 and Britain going to the polls by 2029. Farage [hailed](#) the text as a new "Entente Cordiale", [presenting](#) it as an accord between their next governments.

The pact followed a rebuff from the French state to Reform's "Operation Fortress" plan, [launched](#) on 3 August, which centred on deploying the Royal Navy to the Channel to intercept all migrant boats and return them to France or Belgium. This plan was [rejected](#) by the French interior ministry as a breach of French sovereignty and international law.

// The partnership allows both parties to present themselves as competent enough to strike deals on the international stage, and signals to their voters that they belong to a transnational movement on the rise. Showcasing joint planning lends each the image of a government-in-waiting, set against a political establishment they portray as adrift.

By subsequently turning instead to the French opposition, Reform has found a more accommodating partner in National Rally, which does not yet face the constraints of governance. The deal and deepening of ties with the National Rally mark a sharp reversal for Farage, who in 2014 [refused](#) to ally with Marine Le Pen's then National Front, citing its antisemitism, and who as recently as 2024 [dismissed](#) National Rally's economic programme as a "disaster". The memorandum, as signed, also makes no reference to an existing bilateral arrangement between the current governments of France and the UK - including a 2025 'one-for-one' treaty - which has seen Paris accept some returns in exchange for Britain admitting an equal number from France.

According to the agreed text, both parties [affirm](#) that international law, including the European Convention on Human Rights, must not constrain sovereign nations from securing their borders. They also commit to detaining and deporting arrivals who have no ability to claim asylum. In effect, the two parties have jointly committed their prospective governments to placing sovereign border control above international human rights obligations.

The relationship also serves as a source of mutual legitimation. Reform arrived at its annual conference in a weakened position. In July, its polling average [fell](#) to its lowest level since March

2025. Earlier in the year, Farage had [resigned](#) his Clacton seat amid scrutiny of an undeclared £5 million gift from crypto billionaire Christopher Harborne, before [winning](#) it back in an August by-election in which the other main political parties (Conservative, Labour, Liberal Democrats, and Green Party) refused to partake. On the eve of the conference, an undercover Channel 4 News [investigation](#) captured senior aides discussing how a proposed £500,000 donation from a US-based donor could be declared in the name of his UK-based son. The donation was never made, but the sting also [revealed](#) that a U.S. company had paid £32,500 for three polls commissioned by Reform. On 9 September the Metropolitan Police [added](#) the resulting reports to its ongoing criminal investigation into donations to Reform.

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Bardella closed ranks, [dismissing](#) the scandal as “A smokescreen, of the kind that exists in all democracies against patriotic parties”, while Reform [cast](#) the sting as a hoax orchestrated by foreign-funded climate activists. Farage, in turn, publicly [validated](#) National Rally’s claim to have broken with its extremist past, praising Marine Le Pen for having purged the party of “extreme elements” despite his earlier refusal to cooperate with it over its antisemitic history. Bardella displayed a similar reflex at home: when Mediapart [attributed](#) antisemitic messages to him on 28 September, which he [denies](#), he [told](#) National Rally deputies the outlet was waging a “total war”. Each leader thereby lends external validation to the other’s grievance narrative, recasting domestic scrutiny as hostile attack.

Against this backdrop, the partnership allows both parties to present themselves as competent enough to strike deals on the international stage, and signals to their voters that they belong to a transnational movement on the rise. Showcasing joint planning lends each the image of a government-in-waiting, set against a political establishment they portray as adrift.

Interestingly, the two parties also stand together on one of the sharpest divides within the European far right: their support, or lack thereof, for the Alternative for Germany (AfD). That fault line runs through Patriots for Europe, the European Parliament group Bardella [chairs](#). When the AfD [came first](#) in Saxony-Anhalt on 6 September with around 44 per cent of the vote, short of an absolute majority, the leaders of two Patriots member parties, [former](#) Hungarian Prime Minister [Viktor Orbán](#) and the Dutch Freedom Party’s [Geert Wilders](#), were amongst those who congratulated it. [National Rally](#) and [Farage](#) stayed silent.

However, the union between Reform and the National Rally remains fragile, above all on the French side. The French version of the memorandum omits the English text’s commitment that France will “ordinarily accept” returnees. Bardella, moreover, signed as a diminished figure.

Marine Le Pen's July appeal [ruling](#) made her eligible to run in 2027, [returning](#) Bardella to the role of prospective prime minister. The pact then drew fire from across French politics: former Prime Minister Édouard Philippe [called](#) it a U-turn for National Rally, while Gabriel Attal accused the party of submission to other powers. Le Pen herself [told](#) French television she would discuss the pact when she chose to.

Reform's courtship of foreign partners is also following a comparable pattern to the U.S. White House under Donald Trump. On 10 August, Farage [proposed](#) that foreign prisoners serve their sentences abroad, naming El Salvador as a possible destination, and said party [chairman](#) Lee Anderson would lead a delegation there to explore a deal with Nayib Bukele's government. At the time of Farage's announcement, El Salvador's government had [not confirmed](#) plans for such talks.

The National Rally's international network runs deeper. On 12 October, Bardella set out his immigration proposals from Ceuta alongside Vox leader Santiago Abascal, where more than 70,000 people had crossed irregularly into the enclave from Morocco on 30 and 31 July. Abascal endorsed Bardella as France's future prime minister, and Bardella urged Spaniards to vote for Vox in the 29 November snap election. The visit caps a year in which Bardella shared a Milan stage with Geert Wilders at Matteo Salvini's invitation on 18 April and praised Giorgia Meloni.



Vox leader Santiago Abascal and National Rally president Jordan Bardella at a joint appearance in Ceuta on the Día de la Hispanidad, 12 October 2026.

Photo: Vox España / Flickr (CC0 1.0)

These political ties overlap with a history of financing from Russian and Hungarian government-linked banks. National Rally borrowed approximately €9.4 million from Moscow-based First Czech Russian Bank in 2014, repaying the debt in September 2023, while Le Pen's 2022 presidential campaign secured approximately €10.7 million from Hungary's MKB Bank, a lender closely linked to Viktor Orbán. Vox likewise borrowed €9.2 million in 2023 from Hungary's MBH Bank, formed through a merger that included MKB.

Taken together, these moves show authoritarian-leaning opposition parties building the scaffolding of intergovernmental cooperation from outside government, pre-agreeing policy and lending each other political cover so that their partnerships are ready to activate on accession to power.

KEY TREND 02

AfD Deepens Kremlin Ties as It Edges Closer to Government; Courts Nord Stream Restart Through Putin's Envoy

02

Another party in the ascendant, and which is tightening its ties with like-minded allies, is Germany's far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD). Alice Weidel's party currently leads national opinion polls, but, unlike Reform and the National Rally, its chosen foreign partner in the past six months has been the Russian state.

The AfD's ties to Moscow long predate its rise. A 2017 paper for Vladimir Putin's administration [cast](#) deputy parliamentary group leader Markus Frohnmaier as Moscow's "absolutely controlled MP", and prosecutors [suspect](#) MEP Petr Bystron of taking cash from the pro-Kremlin Voice of Europe in exchange for speaking and voting in the Russian government's interest.

Russia has also campaigned for the party directly: leaked files [show](#) the Social Design Agency, a Kremlin-directed propaganda firm, aiming to lift AfD support to 20 per cent, and German security sources [linked](#) fake videos alleging fraud against the AfD before the 2025 election to the Russian network Storm-1516.



The relationship, long marked by political contacts and symbolic gestures, is now moving toward direct policy bargaining as the AfD surges in national opinion polls and is widely tipped to form Germany's next government.

AfD figures have courted Moscow for a decade. Frauke Petry [met](#) Duma speaker Vyacheslav Volodin in 2017, MEP Marcus Pretzell reportedly travelled to Crimea in 2016 with Russian [fund-ing](#), and, in November 2025, three AfD politicians [attended](#) a Russian-organised symposium in Sochi.

The party has also [lent cover](#) to the Kremlin's territorial claims, vis-a-vis the Crimean Peninsula, and its hosting of sham elections. Bundestag MP Ulrich Oehme ["observed"](#) the 2018 presidential election in Crimea on a trip paid for by the Russian parliament. In 2020, AfD MPs [praised](#) the plebiscite that reset Putin's term limits, and every German politician EPDE identified ["observing"](#) the 2021 Duma elections came from the AfD.

The relationship, long marked by political contacts and symbolic gestures, is now moving toward direct policy bargaining as the AfD surges in national opinion polls and is widely tipped to form Germany's next government. The clearest sign of a shift is in who manages this relationship on the AfD side: less than a year after Weidel publicly criticised colleagues for travelling to Sochi, she and Chrupalla are now slated to meet Dmitriev to discuss Nord Stream. Demands for renewed Russian



Audience at the plenary session of the 29th St Petersburg International Economic Forum (SPIEF), 5 June 2026.

Photo: Kremlin.ru (CC BY 4.0)

gas supplies have also moved beyond slogans towards concrete proposals. With the meeting contingent on a Russia-Ukraine peace framework, the AfD appears to be positioning itself to press for sanctions relief as soon as a settlement puts it on the table. Weidel's claim that both sides regard the party as "the only reliable partner left in Germany" reinforces that positioning, casting cheap Russian gas as a promise its domestic rivals cannot credibly offer.

According to tracked collaborations within the dataset of the AuthCollab Index, groundwork for a deepening of this relationship was laid at the St Petersburg International Economic Forum (SPIEF), [held](#) under Vladimir Putin's [patronage](#) from 3 to 6 June 2026. Four AfD figures [attended](#): deputy parliamentary group leader Markus Frohnmaier, Bundestag MP Steffen Kotré, Saxony party leader Jörg Urban and MEP Petr Bystron. Germany's Federal Foreign Office had [explicitly advised](#) against the trip, warning against participation in "state-organised propaganda events". AfD co-leader Alice Weidel [backed](#) the visit, a shift from November 2025 when she had openly [questioned](#) the purpose of Steffen Kotré and others' trip to a conference in Sochi.

On 3 June, Frohnmaier [met](#) Gazprom chief Alexei Miller and Kirill Dmitriev, Putin's special envoy for investment and economic cooperation. Dmitriev [said](#) they discussed restarting a Russia-Germany-US business dialogue, and he [posted](#) that he looked forward to "building a great future together with AfD". Frohnmaier later [told Reuters](#) that Miller had put the timeframe for resuming gas supply at three months. At the forum Frohnmaier [called](#) Western sanctions "completely absurd", and on a panel he [told](#) the audience it was not in Germany's national interest to stop trading with Russia. Dmitriev, moderating, [praised](#) the delegation's courage. Putin went further. [Meeting](#) the heads of international news agencies on the forum's sidelines on 4 June, he said the party's leaders set out German interests clearly and were not afraid to fight for them, which he said showed in its ratings. Russia welcomed any German party seeking better relations,

“Alternative for Germany, or any other party”, he added: “We will work with everyone who wants to work with us.”



Vladimir Putin addresses the plenary session of the 29th St Petersburg International Economic Forum (SPIEF), 5 June 2026.

Photo: Kremlin.ru (CC BY 4.0)

The AfD was not alone. SOS Romania leader Diana Șoșoacă, an MEP, also [attended](#). On 4 June she and Luxembourg MEP Fernand Kartheiser [joined](#) Leonid Slutsky, chair of the Duma's International Affairs Committee, in a “St Petersburg Declaration” [pledging](#) to “continue and to [deepen](#)” cooperation between the two parliaments’ members and [offering](#) to help appoint a negotiator to revive EU–Russia dialogue. The text made no mention of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. European Parliament President Roberta Metsola [asked](#) the Parliament’s Advisory Committee on the Conduct of Members to examine whether Kartheiser had breached its code. She noted that the version he published carried no signatures, and [warned](#) that it risked creating the false impression of an unofficial channel between the Parliament and the Duma.

In a Reuters [interview](#) published on 30 June, Weidel called for an end to Germany’s boycott of Russian oil and gas. She described cheap Russian energy as the secret of “Made in Germany” and said: “We need it back.” She [predicted](#) the AfD would hold the chancellery after the next federal election or the one after. The Saxony-Anhalt election on 6 September brought that prospect closer as the AfD [won](#) 43.8 per cent and 39 of 83 [seats](#). Its candidate, Ulrich Siegmund, will [seek](#) election as minister-president in December.

Within days of the election, Moscow had begun to move. On 9 September Dmitriev [proposed](#) a Russia–Germany–US business forum with the AfD for 2027, calling it “Germany’s common-sense party”. Two days later he [claimed](#) the AfD itself had suggested the forum. The day after that he [said](#) more than 20 German companies had already applied. On 18 September Reuters [reported](#) that Dmitriev, Weidel and Tino Chrupalla were preparing a meeting, possibly in March 2027, on

resuming Russian gas supplies through Nord Stream. The meeting is [contingent](#) on a Russia-Ukraine peace framework.

The next day, on the eve of the election in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, where Nord Stream makes landfall, Dmitriev [wrote](#) that the state would “thrive again when affordable, reliable Nord Stream gas returns through joint work with AfD”. On 21 September Weidel [said](#) the party wanted to open a dialogue channel with Russia, jointly with Washington, including on gas supplies. She claimed both sides now regarded the AfD as “the only reliable partner left in Germany”. One week later, Frohnmaier [confirmed](#) the party was in contact with Dmitriev and would raise Nord Stream at the forum.

Like the Reform-National Rally memorandum, this is foreign policy conducted in advance of power: a negotiating track opened without a mandate. The AfD holds no federal power, and both the pipeline and the fund run by the man brokering its return are under EU sanctions. Since July 2025, EU sanctions have [prohibited](#) transactions related to the completion, operation, maintenance or use of Nord Stream 1 and 2, as well as transactions with Dmitriev’s Russian Direct Investment Fund, subject to limited exceptions.



An opposition party and the Kremlin have publicly committed to the same outcome, the return of Russian gas, before any German voter has given the AfD a mandate to seek it.

Berlin treats the AfD’s Moscow ties as a security risk. Marc Henrichmann, who chairs the Bundestag’s intelligence oversight committee, [warned](#) during the forum that Russian services use SPIEF to gather information and recruit. In July, Defence Minister Boris Pistorius [cited](#) individual AfD figures’ closeness to Russia when he said an AfD role in a state government would force a review of what classified material its members could see. The federal government is now [reportedly](#) weighing how to withhold Germany’s classified OPLAN defence plan from an AfD-led Saxony-Anhalt government. Lower Saxony is reviewing whether to keep sharing espionage and sabotage intelligence with the state.

The method mirrors Reform and National Rally’s, but the stakes are graver. An opposition party and the Kremlin have publicly committed to the same outcome, the return of Russian gas, before any German voter has given the AfD a mandate to seek it.

KEY TREND 03

Russia Expands 'Regime Security as Product' Offer in Africa; Leverages Reciprocal Fake Observer Circuit

Between April and October 2026, the AuthCollab Index records Russia widening its offer of regime security as a product for sale in Africa. Weapons and training come packaged with deployments that physically protect incumbents against armed challenges ranging from coup attempts to insurgencies, backed where necessary by an economic lifeline. The offer has been on the market for years. The Wagner Group [arrived](#) in the Central African Republic in 2018 to train the army and shield President Faustin-Archange Touadéra, paid largely in mining [concessions](#), and [deployed](#) to Mali in late 2021 under a reported \$10 million monthly [deal](#). After Yevgeny Prigozhin's death in August 2023, Russia's Ministry of Defence [absorbed most](#) of these operations into the Africa Corps, which now binds the package together.

The past six months extended its reach. Togo became a new [deployment](#) and a logistics [hub](#), opening a coastal supply line for Russian forces in the Sahel. In Niger, Africa Corps moved from [training](#) and counter-insurgency support to defending the junta against its own [mutinous](#) soldiers. In Madagascar, Russian assistance [deepened](#) from arms deliveries to training the presidential guard and reportedly protecting the country's leaders. Moscow also [formalised](#) its partnership with the Alliance of Sahel States and [recommitted](#) to arming and training Mozambique's forces, six years after Wagner [pulled](#) out of the country following heavy [losses](#).

In the Sahel, the offer is being formalised, mirroring the wider institutionalisation recorded in our previous report. In Niamey on 8 July, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov and his counterparts from the Alliance of Sahel States (AES), the confederation [formed](#) by the Malian, Burkinabè and Nigerien juntas, [signed](#) a memorandum on ministerial consultations with a plan for 2026–2027. In a joint statement, Russia [pledged](#) to keep strengthening the AES armed forces and their Unified Force. On 29 August, [around 200](#) Africa Corps troops [helped](#) Niger's presidential guard retake Air Base 101 from mutineers, extending Russian protection to cover threats inside the junta's own military.

The template is travelling beyond the Sahel. Africa Corps has [guarded](#) Congo-Brazzaville's President Denis Sassou-Nguesso since January 2025 and has [operated](#) in Equatorial Guinea since August 2024. The April to October 2026 window brought a new development in

Madagascar, where Russian assistance moved from equipment deliveries to protection of the regime itself. Madagascar has been [ruled](#) by Colonel Michael Randrianirina since a military takeover in October 2025. In December 2025, a Russian delegation of around 40 [flew in](#) with weapons. RFE/RL, [citing](#) a flight manifest, reported that it was led by a senior general of the GRU, Russia's military intelligence agency, and included Africa Corps personnel. Two Mi-8 helicopters [followed](#) in the wake of Cyclone Gezani in February, then [armoured vehicles](#) and small arms on 1 April. On 5 May, Africa Corps instructors [graduated](#) 127 Malagasy soldiers, among them members of the presidential guard and special forces. Russian personnel have also [re-reportedly provided](#) personal security to National Assembly Speaker Siteny Randrianasoloniaiko, with one [report](#) identifying them specifically as Africa Corps members. Le Monde has [reported](#) that the Africa Corps also provides close protection to Randrianirina himself.



Vladimir Putin and Mali's transitional president Assimi Goïta during Goïta's official visit to Russia, Kremlin, Moscow, 23 June 2025.

Photo: Kremlin.ru (CC BY 4.0)

Further south, Lavrov [confirmed](#) in Maputo on 9 July that Russia was supplying weapons and training personnel to help Mozambique combat the insurgency in its north, while [signalling](#) Moscow's willingness to provide further assistance.

Togo shows Russia's offer acquiring a logistics centre. Bordering Burkina Faso and serving as a key [port](#) for the landlocked AES states, it now anchors a coastal supply line for Russia's Sahel deployments. Africa Corps officers [arrived](#) in Lomé in January 2026 to prepare a deployment, and around 300 to 350 Russian soldiers are now reported in the capital and at bases in the north, where they train local forces and gather intelligence. On 9 July, the US-[sanctioned](#) cargo ship Mikhail Britnev, [escorted](#) through the English Channel by a Russian warship, [docked](#) in Lomé with armoured vehicles loaded at Baltiysk. Matching vehicles were shown arriving in Bamako by convoy on 25 July. President Faure Gnassingbé's family has [ruled](#) since 1967, and he

faced mass [protests](#) in 2025 after taking a new executive post with no term limits. For him, the partnership also offers a [hedge](#) against domestic and international pressure. Lomé denies the deployment.

// Moscow trains and funds African electoral bodies, and their officials return to lend international credibility to a vote held partly on occupied territory and closed to credible monitors.

Russia complements hardware with political technology, and in doing so feeds the reciprocal circuit of sham election observation documented in the Index's March report. Moscow [paid](#) for senior officials of South Sudan's National Elections Commission to train in Russia and [offered](#) support to Madagascar's electoral commission. The Malagasy commission's chairman, Thierry Rakotonarivo, [joined](#) the opening panel of a two-day conference in Moscow on 14 and 15 April that [launched](#) a Moscow-backed observer association. Ella Pamfilova, head of Russia's Central Election Commission, [spoke](#) at the event, while Lavrov addressed it by video. The association [marks](#) the Kremlin's shift from ad hoc political tourism towards a permanent infrastructure for legitimising managed elections both across the Global South and in Russia itself, with the September Duma vote as its first test.



Vladimir Putin meets Faure Gnassingbé, President of the Council of Ministers of Togo, Moscow, 19 November 2025.

Photo: [Kremlin.ru](#) (CC BY 4.0)

African partners returned the favour at those elections, which Russia's Central Election Commission [said](#) drew observers from a record 133 countries. Russia again [declined](#) to invite observers from the OSCE's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), and for the first time [staged](#) Duma voting in the occupied Ukrainian regions of Donetsk, Luhansk, Kherson and Zaporizhzhia. The [vice-president](#) of Madagascar's electoral commission [praised](#) the vote's transparency while ballots were still being cast. Delegates from Algeria, Burundi, Comoros and Cameroon [reported](#) no irregularities after spending around an hour at a single Moscow polling station. Brahim Fomba, a rapporteur of Mali's Independent Electoral Management Authority, [told](#) the Russian state news agency TASS that the fairness of the vote could not be called into question, crediting Russia's digitalised voting and counting systems. The exchange completes the circuit: Moscow trains and funds African electoral bodies, and their officials return to lend international credibility to a vote held partly on occupied territory and closed to credible monitors.

Russia does not have this market to itself. Türkiye supplies the drones that Sahelian juntas prize, while Mali [took delivery](#) of a new batch of Akinci combat drones at a handover ceremony at Sévaré on 30 July. On 4 June, Niger's military leader, General Abdourahamane Tiani, [chose](#) Ankara for his first official visit outside Africa, where he and President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan [discussed](#) military training and intelligence cooperation, following an April [protocol](#) that sends Turkish instructors to Niger. Chinese systems have surfaced without official confirmation of purchase, from Yitian-L air-defence units in a Bamako convoy [video](#) posted on 9 April to a launcher [consistent](#) with Norinco's Sky Dragon 30 in a Burkina Faso presidency video of 1 September. Chad, which already flies Turkish drones, [appears](#) to have acquired at least four Chinese CH-4 combat drones, seen at Abéché, while Niger's interior minister [discussed](#) stronger security cooperation with China's ambassador in July. Neither supplier yet matches Russia's offer of personnel who fight alongside a regime and guard its leaders.

// Weapons and training come packaged with deployments that physically protect incumbents against armed challenges ranging from coup attempts to insurgencies, backed where necessary by an economic lifeline.

For African incumbents facing insurgency or challenges from within their own ranks, regime security has become an imported service with more than one supplier. Russia remains the most comprehensive vendor, pairing physical protection with political legitimisation. Its losses in northern Mali, however, show that the product does not always perform as advertised.



KEY TREND 04

Authoritarian Best Practices Continue to Proliferate

The AuthCollab Index's previous report traced authoritarian learning along a continuum, from passive imitation of ready-made templates to active training programmes that professionalise illiberal rule. At the passive end, it documented how Russia's 2012 "foreign agent" law became a template adopted or attempted from Georgia and Hungary to Kazakhstan and Nicaragua, and how bans on "LGBT propaganda" spread through a peer group of authoritarian-leaning states, most recently to Kazakhstan. At the active end, it highlighted Chinese-backed party schools training ruling-party cadres in Tanzania and Zimbabwe, alongside Vietnam's capacity-building programmes for Angola's MPLA and Mozambique's FRELIMO.

Data recorded between April and October 2026 show activity intensifying at both ends. Regimes continue to borrow models from their peers, whilst a widening circle of governments now runs teaching programmes of its own, converting domestic governance experience into an exportable asset.

Since April, Belarus and Nicaragua have turned admiration for Beijing's party-state into formal party-to-party ties with the CPC, Gabon has become the reference case for coup leaders seeking electoral cover, and San Salvador has begun offering its mega-prison model as technical assistance. Chinese exports have taken an explicitly doctrinal turn, with Africa's first research centre for Xi Jinping Thought now operating inside a party school.

Belarus illustrates how quickly admiration can harden into institutional ties. Days after the January 2025 presidential election, election commission head Igor Karpenko [praised](#) the Chinese political system as "more honest" with its citizens than Western multi-party democracy, and opened the door to selecting the president through the All-Belarusian People's Assembly rather than by direct vote, an idea Alexander Lukashenko had first [floated](#) in 2022. That admiration has since acquired institutional form. In April, the Academy of Public Administration under the President of Belarus [signed](#) a memorandum with the Central Party School of the Communist Party of China (CPC), which in turn [invited](#) mid-level and senior Belarusian civil servants to its short-term courses. The exchange runs in both directions: a Belarusian professor was [billed](#) to lecture in Beijing on implementing Lukashenko's 2025 [direct-](#)

[ive](#) on state ideology. Three weeks later, presidential administration chief Dmitry Krutoi [told](#) Li Xi, a member of the CPC's Politburo Standing Committee, that Belarus stood ready to learn from China's experience in state governance and party building. Days later, Krutoi [signed](#) a cooperation memorandum with the CPC International Department, the party's channel for relations with foreign political parties.



Belarusian President Aleksandr Lukashenko and Chinese President Xi Jinping meet in Beijing, 29 June 2026.

Photo: Press Service of the President of the Republic of Belarus(president.gov.by)

Belarus is not alone in looking to Beijing's party-state. In July, Nicaragua's Co-President Daniel Ortega [declared](#) that there would be no further elections through which the opposition could take power. In September, the National Assembly [approved](#) in first reading a constitutional reform that bars "traitors to the homeland" from standing for office and [extends](#) the terms of elected officials and armed forces chiefs. If ratified in January 2027, the reform would in practice establish a [single-party system](#) under the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN). Exiled opposition leader Juan Sebastián Chamorro [likens](#) it to the internal selection systems of China, Cuba and North Korea. Party channels give the comparison substance: in May, a delegation of [20](#) to [30](#) FSLN cadres travelled to China for exchanges with the CPC, which in July [said](#) the two parties had deepened their sharing of experience in governance and state administration.

Gabon has emerged as a reference case for coup leaders seeking to convert military takeovers into electoral mandates. In June, Madagascar's military leader, Colonel Michael Randrianirina, spent two days in Libreville to [learn from Gabon's transition](#), a trip local press described as "benchmarking". He must hold elections to end his transition in 2027 and [may stand](#) in them. Guinea had [sent](#) a delegation of judicial and media-regulatory officials and electoral [technicians](#) in November 2025 to study how Gabon ran its transition elections. Weeks later, Mamady Doumbouya, freed by a September referendum from the post-coup bar on junta members standing, [won the presidency](#) with 86.7 per cent of the vote. Multilateral bodies help broker

these lessons. An African Union envoy [accompanied](#) the Guinean delegation, and in July a joint AU and UN mission [visited Libreville](#) to draw lessons from Gabon's transition for Madagascar. Such endorsement lends the coup-to-candidate path a respectability that other military rulers will find useful.

Legal templates travel along similar channels. Russia's [2012 "foreign agent" law](#) remains the [canonical model](#) for stigmatising foreign-funded civil society, with variants adopted or attempted in [Georgia](#), [Hungary](#), [Kyrgyzstan](#), [Kazakhstan](#), [El Salvador](#), and [Nicaragua](#). Its logic transfers easily: independent NGOs and media are redefined as foreign-directed political actors, then subjected to reporting burdens, labelling requirements, penalties or dissolution. The template continues to spread. In May, Uganda's parliament [passed](#) a sovereignty bill whose original provisions Human Rights Watch had [compared](#) to Russia-style foreign-agent legislation.

“ Such endorsement lends the coup-to-candidate path a respectability that other military rulers will find useful.

In March, Amnesty International [documented](#) shared patterns in anti-NGO laws adopted or reformed in Ecuador, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Paraguay, Peru, and Venezuela. Since then, Bolivia's right-wing government has [empowered](#) a vice-ministry to assess whether NGO projects align with national development plans and to order unspecified “corrective measures”. Officials [invoked](#) Financial Action Task Force (FATF) anti-money-laundering standards; Human Rights Watch [found](#) that the decree goes well beyond what transparency and anti-money-laundering require, and Amnesty [placed](#) it squarely within the pattern its earlier report identified.

Coercive models spread in the same way. El Salvador's Terrorism Confinement Centre (CECOT), a mega-prison [billed](#) as holding 40,000 inmates and the emblem of President Nayib Bukele's war on gangs, has become a regional brand. In Ecuador, the government [transferred](#) its first inmates in November 2025 to the Cárcel del Encuentro, an 800-capacity maximum-security prison [modelled](#) on Bukele's approach. In April, the interior minister [said](#) a far larger facility for 15,120 inmates would take 15 to 18 months to build; President Daniel Noboa had earlier [described](#) it as medium security.

San Salvador now promotes the model. Shortly before taking office, Bolivian President Rodrigo Paz [asked](#) Bukele for help with the country's prisons, and Salvadoran Vice-President Félix Ulloa [offered](#) technical assistance in prison management. A Bolivian vice-minister has since [said](#) the government is working towards prisons on the Salvadoran model. In Peru, Keiko Fujimori [campaigned](#) on *mano dura* (“iron fist”) security policies, and as president-elect [pledged](#) five new prisons, to be built faster than Bukele's eight months. Now in office, she [announced](#) in late September that she would visit El Salvador at Bukele's invitation at the end of October, on an [itinerary](#) that includes CECOT and meetings with Salvadoran ministers.



Salvadoran President Nayib Bukele during a visit to the Terrorism Confinement Centre (CECOT), El Salvador, 28 September 2023.

Photo: Casa Presidencial El Salvador / Wikimedia Commons (CC0 1.0)

At the active end of the continuum, China continues to [use](#) Xinjiang as a venue for presenting securitised minority governance as exportable expertise, through [study tours](#) and “counter-terrorism” seminars for foreign officials. On 4 August, Beijing [hosted](#) the International Seminar on Counter-Terrorism 2026 in Ili, in northern Xinjiang, the [fourth edition](#) of the series. [As in 2025](#), the seminar was [co-organised](#) with the World Muslim Communities Council, a body [chaired](#) by an Emirati [parliamentarian](#), and [drew](#) some 100 officials and scholars from 24 countries and regional organisations, including the UAE, Egypt, Russia and the African Union. The co-organiser’s profile is telling: an ostensibly Muslim platform lends cover to Beijing’s repression of Uyghur Muslims, echoing the pattern of Gulf complicity documented in the Index’s previous report.

Chinese diplomats also export planning doctrine. In August, a seminar [co-hosted](#) by the Chinese consulate in Johannesburg promoted China’s 15th Five-Year Plan as a planning reference for the Global South. South Africa’s Deputy Minister of Public Service and Administration attended, and the fifth volume of Xi Jinping’s *The Governance of China* was on display.

The Index’s March report traced China’s support for party schools in Africa, anchored by the Mwalimu Julius Nyerere Leadership School in Tanzania. That infrastructure has since taken on an explicitly doctrinal character: in May 2026, the school opened a Research Centre for Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era, which the Communist Party of China’s International Department [hailed](#) as the first of its kind in Africa. In July, the centre hosted a symposium at which China’s ambassador [presented](#) Xi Jinping Thought on Party Building as a reference for political parties worldwide.



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Below the two global anchors, mid-tier regimes run teaching and network circuits of their own. In August, Vietnam [hosted](#) the fourth edition of a training programme for young leaders of the Vietnamese, Lao and Cambodian ruling parties, following the [third edition](#) in Laos in 2025. Party networks offer a further channel. In late April, A Just Russia, a party [created](#) with Kremlin backing, [launched](#) Sovintern in Moscow, a left-wing international whose founding event drew more than 100 groups from over 70 countries, by organisers’ count. Belarus, itself a student of Beijing, practises the same party diplomacy: in May, the pro-Lukashenko party Belaya Rus [signed](#) cooperation agreements with Zimbabwe’s ZANU-PF, the Lao People’s Revolutionary Party (LPRP) and Uzbekistan’s Liberal Democratic Party at a sovereignty conference in Brest.

Collectively, these developments point to a layered system of authoritarian learning. Regional regimes absorb know-how from Beijing and Moscow and relay it to partners of their own, whilst some, such as El Salvador and Gabon, now generate exportable models in their own right.

KEY TREND 05

Authoritarian Media and Technology Infrastructure Expands Unabated

The AuthCollab Index's March report traced how authoritarian information cooperation was hardening into standing institutions. We showed how standing media alliances and recurring expert platforms lower the transaction costs of cooperation and give regimes regular venues in which to align narratives and diffuse authoritarian norms. TASS and Xinhua anchored the network, co-hosting the 2024 BRICS Media Summit and accelerating a 2025–2030 cooperation plan within the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO). TV BRICS and the Belt and Road Journalists Network systematised exchange between outlets and journalists, whilst the SCO Media and Think Tank Summit gave aligned experts a recurring venue.

Between April and October 2026, the network's commitments became more explicit, with new agreements and institutions now underpinning the authoritarian international's media and technology collaborations. SCO media and think tanks adopted a consensus calling for a synchronised “true narrative”, and the Bishkek summit produced an intergovernmental information-sphere memorandum. Chinese platforms now carry content from EU-sanctioned Russian outlets and distribute CPC doctrine in partner-state languages. Technology cooperation has gained institutions of its own, most prominently the China-founded World AI Cooperation Organization (WAICO).

At the core of the network, Russia and China added a further layer of media agreements. Vladimir Putin's 19–20 May visit to Beijing [produced](#) four agreements between Xinhua and Russian state and state-aligned media. Alongside a [memorandum](#) with TASS, Xinhua signed a news-exchange agreement with National Media Group (NMG), a holding that controls 28 Russian outlets and has been [under EU sanctions](#) since December 2022. Xinhua also [concluded](#) a memorandum on media personnel training with Gazprom-Media.

NMG [struck](#) a deal with China Daily covering content exchange and joint reporting, as well as promotion of the English edition of Izvestia, whose broadcasting the EU [suspended](#) in May 2024. In practice, an outlet barred from European airwaves now has a route to international audiences through a Chinese state platform. The traffic runs in both directions. Reporters Without Borders [found](#) in July that Chinese media were expanding their presence in occupied

Ukraine and repeating Kremlin narratives, albeit on a limited scale, whilst RT and Sputnik content was being actively promoted in China's information space.



TASS Director General Andrei Kondrashov (left) shows Vladimir Putin and Xi Jinping the TASS-Xinhua photo exhibition 'Unbreakable friendship of great peoples, strategic partnership of great powers', Great Hall of the People, Beijing, 20 May 2026.

Photo: Kremlin.ru (CC BY 4.0)

The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation's recurring venues also reconvened, and their output moved closer to explicit narrative alignment. The SCO Media and Think Tank Summit [opened](#) in Bishkek on 27 July, [co-hosted](#) by Xinhua and Kyrgyzstan's state news agency Kabar, and drew about 260 representatives from nearly 150 media organisations, think tanks, government departments and the SCO Secretariat. Delegates [adopted](#) a consensus document, reported as the "Bishkek Consensus", that calls on the bloc's media and think tanks to present a synchronised "true narrative" of the SCO. The document is [built](#) around Beijing's Global Security, Global Development, Global Civilisation and Global Governance Initiatives, and enlists media and think tanks in aligning members' national development strategies with the Belt and Road. It [builds](#) directly on the 2025 Zhengzhou Consensus, under which SCO media and think tanks [committed](#) to implementing three of the same initiatives and pledged to "jointly amplify" the bloc's "propositions and actions".



In practice, an outlet barred from European airwaves now has a route to international audiences through a Chinese state platform.

Party doctrine travels through the same channel. The summit [released](#) “Contemporary Features and Global Significance of Xi Jinping Thought on Party Building”, a report by the think tanks of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Party School and Xinhua, in Kyrgyz and Russian. Rossiya Segodnya and Xinhua again jointly [opened](#) the SCO Expert Forum, [repeating](#) their 2025 Zhengzhou format and [fulfilling](#) a memorandum signed during Putin’s May visit. The forum thus confirms the pattern showcased in our previous report: a standing venue for coordinating language among aligned experts and officials, which now also distributes CPC ideology in partner-state languages.

On 30 August, China Media Group [launched](#) international distribution of “Classics Quoted by Xi Jinping” through media partners in all nine other SCO member states, including Pakistan’s PTV, Iran’s IRNA, Russia’s Rossiyskaya Gazeta and two Indian outlets. Coordinated broadcasting followed. The programme is [produced](#) by China Media Group (CMG), the parent of CCTV and CGTN. Kyrgyz President Sadyr Japarov [marked](#) the launch with a congratulatory letter. The heads-of-state [summit](#) in Bishkek on 1 September then placed this alignment on an intergovernmental footing. Members’ authorised agencies [signed](#) a memorandum on cooperation in the information sphere. The summit [declaration](#) warned of “growing threats” to information security and cast the protection of human rights as a “pretext” for interference in other states’ internal affairs.



Leaders’ group photograph at the 26th Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) Summit, Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, 1 September 2026.

Photo: Prime Minister’s Office, Government of India (GODL-India)

Beyond the SCO, bilateral and regional instruments accumulated in parallel, with Africa a particular focus. The 7th China–Africa Media Cooperation Forum, [held](#) in Beijing from 19 to 21 August, [brought together](#) some 400 representatives from China and 45 African countries. The forum’s joint declaration [commits](#) partners to jointly presenting China–Africa development to international audiences. On its margins, Burkina Faso’s communications minister and a vice-minister of China’s broadcasting regulator [agreed](#) to explore broadcasting programmes between the national broadcaster RTB and a Chinese state broadcaster, with a formal convention to follow. Meanwhile, 23 Burkinabè media professionals [attended](#) a training programme in Beijing. Earlier, on 21 April, Xinhua had [signed](#) a news-exchange agreement with Mozambique’s national broadcaster TVM during President Daniel Chapo’s state [visit](#).

Beijing is also building a standing structure for the Asia-Pacific. At the Asia-Pacific Media Forum in Shenzhen, co-organised by the CPC Central Committee’s Publicity Department, 16 founding organisations [formed](#) a preparatory committee on 5 September for an Asia-Pacific Media Partnership Programme. Formal establishment is [planned](#) within the year, with the secretariat to sit at Xinhua. Eight Chinese party and state outlets were [joined](#) by foreign members including Russia’s TASS, Vietnam News Agency, Indonesia’s Antara, Malaysia’s Bernama, Peru’s Andina, Cambodia’s AKP and the Pakistan Broadcasting Corporation.

Russia and regional powers extended their own networks over the same period. On 8 July, RT [signed](#) a content-exchange and joint-coverage partnership with Tafouk TV, the confederal channel of the Alliance of Sahel States (AES), the bloc formed by the military governments of Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger. In Nicaragua, presidential accords of 13 May [authorised](#) the signing of media agreements with Russia’s digital development ministry and with outlets in the occupied Ukrainian regions of Luhansk, Donetsk, Zaporizhzhia and Kherson. On 28 September, Co-President Rosario Murillo [announced](#) that RT en Español would broadcast free-to-air in the country. Türkiye, for its part, [signed](#) a disinformation memorandum with Algeria on 7 May, accompanied by television and radio protocols between the state broadcaster TRT and Algeria’s public broadcasters. These build on Anadolu Agency’s existing [partnership](#) with Algeria’s APS.

// The forum thus confirms the pattern showcased in our previous report: a standing venue for coordinating language among aligned experts and officials, which now also distributes CPC ideology in partner-state languages.

Moscow’s alternative fact-checking apparatus also acquired a new international foothold. On 22 September, at the “Dialogue about Fakes 4.0” forum in Moscow, Vladimir Tabak, president of the Russian-founded Global Fact-Checking Network (GFCN), [announced](#) plans to open the network’s first international office, in Dubai. Tabak had himself been [sanctioned](#) by the EU in

July over the role of ANO Dialog, the Kremlin-linked organisation he heads, in Russian influence operations.

Across the same period, institution-building also extended into technology governance in several cases. On 16 July, China [founded](#) the World AI Cooperation Organization (WAICO) in Shanghai with 29 signatories. WAICO [gives](#) Beijing standing infrastructure for diffusing its sovereignty-first model of AI governance, part of a wider effort to shape global AI norms in the image of the CPC's domestic controls. Its founders [include](#) China, Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Pakistan, Oman, Algeria, Cuba, Nicaragua, Venezuela, Serbia, Kenya and Mozambique, alongside five ASEAN states: Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia and Myanmar. Membership [reached](#) 37 by the end of July, as Iran, Vietnam, Brunei, Sudan, Togo, Tanzania, Georgia and Dominica [signed](#) on 30 and 31 July. The SCO moved in step. At the Bishkek summit, members [signed](#) an AI cooperation memorandum and [approved](#) a concept for regional data centres and AI industry development. They also [extended](#) their 2021 international information security plan to cover 2026–2028.

Collectively, these developments show authoritarian institutional collaboration in media and technology expanding through established venues and newly founded bodies alike. However, at this stage, several instruments remain only declaratory. The Asia-Pacific programme awaits formal establishment, Burkina Faso's convention is pending, Nicaragua's agreements are authorisations to sign, and WAICO has yet to [publish](#) its decision-making procedures or budget.

KEY TREND 06

Transnational Repression and Policing Cooperation Infrastructure Grows, Underpinned by Repressive Technology Export

06

Transnational repression, the pursuit of dissidents, exiles and targeted minorities beyond a regime's borders, is often understood as a unilateral act by the origin state. Our March report highlighted that many of the most consequential cases in fact rely on the active cooperation of other authoritarian and authoritarian-leaning governments, which provide the territory, paperwork, custody or policing access needed to make repression portable. We traced how routine migration and policing tools were repurposed into reciprocal repatriation circuits, with forced returns becoming a currency of authoritarian solidarity from East Africa to Central Asia.



Inaugural conference of the International Alliance Combating Telecom and Cyber Fraud, chaired by Chinese Minister of Public Security Wang Xiaohong, Lianyungang, Jiangsu, China, 10 September 2026. Delegations from 46 founding states, 34 observer states and four international organisations, including the UN and INTERPOL, attended.

Photo: Ministry of Public Security of Viet Nam (bocongan.gov.vn)

This capacity is increasingly acquiring institutional form. Our previous report documented how the UAE [circulated](#) an arrest warrant through the Arab Interior Ministers Council, a regional security body, to secure the extradition of Abdulrahman al-Qaradawi from Lebanon. Between April and October 2026, several more standing bodies and compacts advanced, with China's Ministry of Public Security at the centre of this emerging architecture.

On 10 September, a China-initiated intergovernmental alliance against telecom and cyber fraud was [launched](#) at the ministry's Lianyungang forum, a venue it has [previously used](#) to coordinate the arrest and return of fugitives abroad. The ministry's agents have also [pursued](#) targets overseas through coercion and unilateral renditions. The alliance's [stated purpose](#) is to combat genuine crime. Safeguard Defenders, however, has [documented](#) China's anti-fraud campaigns being used for "persuasion to return" operations, some involving overseas police stations, that also [reach](#) dissidents. Several [founding members](#), including Kenya, Cambodia and Vietnam, have previously [deported](#) Taiwanese fraud suspects to China under pressure from Beijing, in deference to the Communist Party of China's sovereignty claim over Taiwan. At the same forum, a counter-terrorism sub-forum [released](#) a Global Counter-Terrorism Partnership Action Plan (2026), and on the sidelines Azerbaijan's State Security Service [signed](#) a security cooperation agreement with the ministry. Three days earlier, Central Asian interior ministers [attended](#) the unveiling of a China-Central Asia law-enforcement training base. That day, Minister of Public Security Wang Xiaohong [told](#) Kyrgyzstan's interior minister that China would deepen cooperation on safeguarding "political security", the Party-state's [term](#) for regime security.

“ Their counter-terrorism and anti-crime remits give governments respectable grounds to join, whilst leaving each member free to decide who counts as “extremist” or “wanted”.

Regional organisations are building parallel structures. On 1 September, the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) [approved](#) the regulations for its Universal Centre for Countering Security Challenges and Threats, the permanent body members agreed in 2025 to create on the basis of the SCO's Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure in Tashkent. Türkiye, meanwhile, has [proposed](#) TURKPOL, a policing mechanism for the Turkic states, building on a planned Organisation of Turkic States (OTS) Council for Combating Crime. Türkiye's interior minister [said](#) the council would enable joint efforts to identify wanted individuals.

Formal agreements extend the reach of these bodies. Under a pact [reported](#) on 30 September, the prosecutors general of Russia, Belarus and four Central Asian states agreed to exchange information on organisations and individuals each considers "terrorist" or "extremist", labels routinely applied to regime critics. The potential pool is large: Russia's own register of terrorists and extremists [lists](#) more than 23,000 people. Moscow is also embedding its law-enforce-

ment presence in the region. Under an agreement Russia [ratified](#) in May, staff of the reciprocal interior-ministry offices in Russia and Tajikistan [receive](#) diplomatic privileges and immunities. In Bishkek, Russia's interior-ministry office, previously confined to migration matters, will now [handle](#) wider law-enforcement issues and exchange information with Kyrgyzstan's interior ministry, with its staff likewise [granted](#) diplomatic immunity.



Quadruped 'POLICE' robots on display at the Third Public Security Tech Expo, held alongside the 2026 Global Public Security Cooperation Forum in Lianyungang, Jiangsu, China, September 2026.

Photo: Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Tajikistan (vkd.tj)

Bilateral compacts carry similar commitments. The China-Vietnam joint statement of 17 April [commits](#) both sides to cooperate in safeguarding each other's "political security" and in pursuing fugitives. It records Vietnam's intention to formally join the Lancang-Mekong Integrated Law Enforcement and Security Cooperation Centre, and repeats a pledge to exchange experience in countering "colour revolutions", language that [appeared](#) in the two sides' joint statement of October 2024. China and Vietnam [pioneered](#) a 3+3 dialogue of foreign, defence and public security ministers, which held its first ministerial meeting in March, and Cambodia is now adopting the template. Its first 2+2 dialogue with China, held on 22 April, [agreed](#) to expand into a 3+3 format bringing in Cambodia's Interior Ministry and China's Ministry of Public Security. Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi [said](#) Beijing wanted to develop the mechanism into a platform for political and defence security cooperation. Moscow's bilateral meetings over the period, by contrast, mostly reaffirmed existing commitments. When the Russian and Vietnamese interior ministers [met](#) on 26 May, they reviewed cooperation that included tracking and arresting wanted fugitives, a commitment their ministries had already made in May 2025. On 6 June, the

Russian and Pakistani interior ministers [signed](#) agreements on curbing illegal immigration and repatriating citizens.

Hardware travels alongside these agreements. Under a memorandum signed on 8 May, China [agreed](#) to supply Tajikistan's Interior Ministry with 52 million yuan of intelligence, police and counter-terrorism equipment, including 34 intelligence devices, and to send eight specialists to install it and train Tajik personnel. In late August, Bloomberg [reported](#) that Huawei, partnering with the US-blacklisted surveillance firm iFlytek, had bid to build AI data centres for the Egyptian government for military and surveillance use. Days later, during Xi Jinping's state visit to Cairo, he and President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi [witnessed](#) the signing of cooperation documents on artificial intelligence, and the two sides [committed](#) to accelerating consultations on an extradition treaty. In Iran, a member of the Supreme Council of Cyberspace [said](#) Chinese hardware was already in the country to make internet throttling permanent, with tightly monitored access reserved for select users.

Taken together, these developments show the shared enforcement capacity we identified in March hardening into permanent architecture, built chiefly around China's Ministry of Public Security and Russia's post-Soviet policing channels. Their counter-terrorism and anti-crime remits give governments respectable grounds to join, whilst leaving each member free to decide who counts as "extremist" or "wanted".

KEY TREND 07

Saudi Credit Buys Pakistani Protection

Iranian strikes on the Gulf in 2026 scaled up and formalised a long-standing exchange of Saudi money for Pakistani soldiers. Pakistani forces have been [stationed](#) in Saudi Arabia in various capacities since 1982, largely through logistical arrangements and training missions. The war turned that presence into a Saudi-financed combat-capable deployment and then into a treaty alliance. The case shows how financial and military collaboration compound once a security crisis raises the price of protection.

On 11 April the Saudi defence ministry [announced](#) that Pakistani fighter jets and a military force had arrived at King Abdulaziz Air Base in the kingdom's Eastern Province under the September 2025 Strategic Mutual Defence Agreement. The announcement came days after an Iranian strike on the Jubail petrochemicals complex [raised fears](#) in Pakistan that Saudi retaliation could jeopardise the Iran peace talks Islamabad was hosting. In mid-May Reuters [reported](#) the scale of the package: a squadron of around 16 aircraft, mostly JF-17s dispatched in early April, two drone squadrons, around 8,000 troops and Chinese-made HQ-9 air defence systems, operated by Pakistanis and financed by Riyadh. The force supplemented the thousands of Pakistani troops already in the kingdom under earlier agreements, and a source who had seen the confidential pact [said](#) it allows for up to 80,000.

Financial flows moved in step with the deployment. By early April the UAE had [declined](#) to roll over its deposits with Pakistan for the first time in seven years and demanded repayment, catching Islamabad by [surprise](#). The request came days before Pakistan helped secure the US-Iran ceasefire, and Pakistan's foreign ministry [described](#) it as a routine financial transaction. Riyadh filled the gap, [depositing](#) \$3bn in two tranches on 15 and 20 April and extending an existing \$5bn deposit so that it no longer requires annual rollover. The Saudi deposits [helped offset](#) the loss of UAE financing, as Islamabad completed repayment of \$3.45bn to the UAE on 23 April. Saudi money also shapes where Pakistani weapons go. When Riyadh [withdrew](#) financing in March for a \$1.5bn arms and jet deal with Sudan's army and asked for it to be terminated, Islamabad put the deal on hold. A \$4bn deal with the Libyan National Army was likewise in jeopardy as the Saudis reconsidered their strategy.

The Saudi model soon attracted imitators across the region. In July Kuwait was [reported](#) to be seeking Pakistani troops, fighter jets, drones and air defence in exchange for energy cooperation and investment, while Bahrain and Jordan expressed interest in similar arrangements, though a Pakistani official said deploying combat troops was not under consideration at that stage. Ambition outpaced delivery. On 27 August Kuwait [signed](#) a more modest protocol to a 2023 cooperation agreement covering training, capacity building and border management. The UAE moved in the opposite direction. As the Gulf state hit hardest by Iran, it [received](#) an Iron Dome battery and Israeli operators during the war and built on a January [letter of intent](#) with India towards a strategic defence partnership. The UAE was [absent](#) both from the founding group of Saudi Arabia's new maritime coalition and from the subsequent trilateral defence pact with Pakistan and Türkiye.

// The war turned that presence into a Saudi-financed combat-capable deployment and then into a treaty alliance. The case shows how financial and military collaboration compound once a security crisis raises the price of protection.

These arrangements quickly hardened into institutions, converting wartime improvisation into durable infrastructure for collaboration. After the Houthis [declared](#) a naval blockade of Saudi ports on 20 July, Saudi Arabia and its partners [announced](#) a Riyadh-headquartered maritime coalition on 30 July, backed by 14 states including Pakistan. On 7 August Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and Türkiye [signed](#) the Mecca Defence Alliance, under which an attack on one is [an attack on all](#). Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan [described](#) it as technically similar to NATO's Article 5, while noting that the form of assistance would depend on the nature and scale of an attack. On 13 August members [agreed](#) that its first deputy commander would be Pakistani.

The pact began [acquiring](#) a standing bureaucracy within weeks. Its first Strategic Political and Defence Committee [met](#) in Istanbul on 31 August and agreed to establish a secretariat in Saudi Arabia, with Pakistan supplying the first secretary-general for three years; Fidan [said](#) it would sit in Riyadh. Egypt [said](#) it was seriously reviewing membership and Bangladesh [signalled](#) openness, although Pakistan's foreign minister [said](#) on 2 October that new members could not be considered until the pact was fully operational, which would take at least a year. The war accelerated a project long under discussion: Pakistan's defence production minister [disclosed](#) a tri-lateral draft in January 2026 after nearly a year of talks, while Fidan said he had been [discussing](#) broader regional security arrangements with the signatories and other partners for two years and eight months.

Pakistan's value to the bloc lies in its ability to face both ways, and the reporting period showed how difficult that posture is to sustain. Islamabad helped [broker](#) the 7 April US-Iran ceasefire

and [hosted](#) the first round of talks on 11 April. With Qatar as co-mediator, it then [produced](#) the June Islamabad memorandum, which collapsed within a month; President Trump [declared](#) it over on 8 July. Even as it built the Saudi pact, Pakistan kept economic channels to Tehran open. On 25 April it [opened](#) six road routes for Iran-bound goods, as thousands of containers sat stranded at Karachi under the US blockade of Iranian ports. Engagement deepened over the summer: in June Islamabad [agreed](#) with Tehran to accelerate a joint border economic zone, and in early August, days before signing in Mecca, it [pressed](#) for a free trade agreement with Iran. Fidan, for his part, [insisted](#) the alliance was not aimed at Iran.



Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan (left), Pakistan's Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar (centre) and Saudi Foreign Minister Faisal bin Farhan (right) at the Strategic Political and Defence Committee meeting under the Mecca Agreement for Joint Defence, Riyadh, 5 October 2026.

Photo: Mustafa Hatipoğlu / Anadolu Agency (AA)

Houthi strikes on southern Saudi cities in early September, which [injured](#) 73 people, supplied the pact's first test, and rhetoric outran operations. Pakistan's Defence Minister Khawaja Asif [said](#) the pact could become operational, and Islamabad [reportedly passed](#) a Saudi warning to Tehran to rein in the Houthis – a report the foreign office [dismissed](#) as unverified. Yet, on 9 September, Saudi and Pakistani officials [reportedly agreed](#) that their forces would not enter Yemen and that any response would be launched from Saudi territory. The following day the foreign office [called](#) the pact an “umbrella agreement” whose mechanisms had yet to be established. A week later the director-general of Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR), the military's media wing, [said](#) Pakistani forces were already deployed to protect the kingdom and its holy sites. On 29 September, days after the chiefs of the three armies [met](#) in Riyadh, Asif [declared](#) any enemy of Saudi Arabia an enemy of Pakistan, though he declined to say whether Pakistani forces had joined strikes in Yemen.



These arrangements quickly hardened into institutions, converting wartime improvisation into durable infrastructure for collaboration.

The outcome echoes 2015, when Pakistan's parliament unanimously refused Riyadh's request for troops, warplanes and ships for Yemen while pledging to stand with Saudi Arabia if its territory or holy sites were threatened. By 1 October the operational line was unchanged: defend the kingdom from within and stay out of Yemen. Saudi financing had enabled a substantially larger version of Pakistan's long-standing commitment to defend the kingdom, now anchored in a tri-lateral treaty and an emerging permanent secretariat.

KEY TREND 08

Russia and North Korea Deepen Their Alliance

08

Russia and North Korea now maintain one of the closest relationships in the authoritarian international, [reviving](#) the Cold War alliance once held. The Soviet Union [installed](#) Kim Il Sung, and a 1961 treaty committed Moscow to [automatic](#) military assistance. Ties cooled after 1991: the treaty was [terminated](#) in 1996, and its 2000 successor [omitted](#) the defence clause. Russia voted for successive UN [sanctions](#) on Pyongyang's nuclear programme until 2017. The war in Ukraine reversed that course. North Korean [shells](#) and, from December 2023, ballistic [missiles](#) reached Russian forces, and Moscow [vetoed](#) the UN sanctions panel's renewal in March 2024. A June 2024 treaty [restored](#) mutual defence. That autumn, up to 12,000 North Korean troops [deployed](#) to fight in Kursk, a role both governments [confirmed](#) in April 2025.

Between April and October 2026, the partnership gained physical infrastructure and a Russian pledge to sign a five-year military cooperation plan. Over the same period, North Korean missiles and personnel took on a more visible role in Russia's war against Ukraine.

The partnership is increasingly embedded in bricks and mortar. On 7 September, the Khasan-Rason road bridge [opened](#) as the first road link across the two countries' border. A Russian operator [plans](#) to launch a regular bus service between Vladivostok and Rason, a North Korean port and special economic zone, around the end of 2026. On 22 April, Russia's health and natural resources ministers [led](#) the Russian delegation at the groundbreaking of a DPRK-Russia Friendship Hospital in the Wonsan Kalma coastal tourist zone.

Military integration runs deeper still. On 26 April, Defence Minister Andrei Belousov [travelled](#) to Pyongyang for the opening of a museum honouring North Korean troops who fought in Russia's Kursk region. There, he [told](#) Kim Jong Un that Russia was ready to sign a military cooperation plan for 2027–2031 before the end of 2026. South Korea's Unification Ministry [noted](#) that there appeared to be no precedent for such a medium-term plan between the two countries. The battlefield dimension has intensified in parallel. On 30 July, a missile identified by Ukrainian officials as a North Korean [KN-23](#) [killed](#) at least six members of one family, including children, near Kryvyi Rih, the [first confirmed use](#) of a North Korean missile against Ukraine in almost a year. In August, Ukraine's military intelligence agency (HUR) [reported](#) that Pyongyang had delivered a

fresh batch of 40 KN-23 and KN-24 missiles. It added that around 90 North Korean personnel would join Russia's 112th Missile Brigade in Voronezh region, which could receive up to 120 missiles and six launchers. HUR later [reported](#) that Moscow had requested the more powerful KN-30. Figures [released](#) by HUR a week earlier appeared to count KN-30s among Russian stocks, although the agency said no transfer had been recorded. South Korea's Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) [estimates](#) that Pyongyang has supplied Russia with the equivalent of more than 15 million 152 mm artillery shells.



A handshake marks the joining of the spans of the Yakov Novichenko road bridge over the Tumen River between Russia and North Korea, then under construction, 21 April 2026.

Photo: Rosavtodor.ru (CC BY 4.0)

On the ground, North Korean personnel are taking on more specialised roles. HUR [put](#) the deployment at around 8,500 in late August, concentrated in Kursk region and largely reinforcing Russian rear positions. That figure includes some 1,000 engineers and deminers and 400 drone operators. Cumulatively, HUR estimates that around 25,000 North Korean troops have been deployed or rotated since October 2024. South Korea's DIA [put](#) the total above 16,000 and saw no sign of an imminent new deployment.



Sculpture with Russian and North Korean flags at the Memorial Complex and Museum of the Military Deeds of the Heroes of the Foreign Military Operation, Pyongyang, April 2026. The complex commemorates North Korean troops deployed to Russia's Kursk region.

Photo: Duma.gov.ru (CC BY 4.0)

Moscow, in turn, provides diplomatic cover for Pyongyang's nuclear arsenal. On 22 July, Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov [reiterated](#) that Russia does not support North Korea's denuclearisation and backs its defence build-up. At the Review Conference of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), a paragraph on North Korea's illicit weapons programme was [dropped](#) from the draft outcome document, apparently over Russian objections. The 20 May Xi-Putin joint statement likewise [opposed](#) sanctions and pressure against North Korea. Beijing's support is otherwise quieter. Public [readouts](#) of

Xi's 8 June state visit to Pyongyang, his first in seven years, [made no reference](#) to denuclearisation. China nonetheless [joined](#) Russia in voting against the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) General Conference resolution on North Korea, which passed by 103 votes to 6 on 17 September.



Moscow thus presents itself as a custodian for one non-compliant NPT state while shielding the arsenal of a nuclear-armed state that left the treaty.

Russian assistance may extend to the weapons programme itself. A Spanish investigation, details of which were [reported](#) in May, concerns the Ursa Major, a cargo ship that sank off Spain in December 2024. The vessel was owned by Oboronlogistics, a company linked to Russia's defence ministry. Its captain told investigators the ship was carrying components for two submarine-type nuclear reactors, which he believed were bound for Rason. The same month exposed the selectivity of Moscow's non-proliferation posture. On 9 May, Putin [offered](#) to take custody of Iran's enriched uranium. Moscow thus presents itself as a custodian for one [non-compliant](#) NPT state while shielding the arsenal of a nuclear-armed state that left the treaty.

The relationship nonetheless remains bilateral and light on leader-level contact. Kim's 14 September letter to Putin [invoked](#) their alliance relations, and North Korean troops [marched](#) on Red Square on 9 May. Kim's long-trailed return visit to Russia, however, had not materialised by October. This was despite Foreign Minister Choe Son Hui's [meeting](#) with Putin on 19 July and speculation that a visit might coincide with the [Eastern Economic Forum](#) or the [bridge opening](#). Pyongyang has also kept its distance from Moscow-backed multilateral initiatives. Pyongyang [co-signed](#) the February statement launching consultations on a Eurasian Charter, but was [not among](#) the nine states that signed the September declaration opening formal negotiations on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly.

North Korea's hedging instead runs towards Beijing, with Xi's June visit the clearest signal. For now, the partnership's depth lies in military and logistical integration, with little sign yet of a wider diplomatic bloc forming around it.



KEY TREND 09

Alliance of Sahel States (AES) Institutionalising

09

The military juntas of Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger have turned the Alliance of Sahel States (AES) from a declaration of solidarity into a functioning confederation. [Founded](#) in September 2023 as a mutual defence pact and [upgraded](#) to a confederation by treaty in July 2024, after the three states [announced](#) their exit from the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the AES spent the period between April and October 2026 building standing joint institutions in both the security and civilian spheres. Over the same period, regional and global powers increasingly dealt with the confederation as a single actor.

The confederation's military pillar has taken shape under fire. In mid-April, the three states [agreed](#) to expand the AES Unified Force to 15,000 troops. Days later, an offensive by the al-Qaeda-affiliated Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM) and the separatist Azawad Liberation Front (FLA) [killed](#) Mali's Defence Minister, Sadio Camara, and [seized](#) the northern city of Kidal. According to Niger's government, the Unified Force [responded](#) with air campaigns in northern Mali. The juntas cast the attacks as an assault on the confederation as a whole: Niamey [blamed](#) France, and Burkina Faso's Defence Minister, Célestin Simporé, who led the AES delegation to Camara's funeral, [attributed](#) the attacks to "foreign state sponsors" and, [speaking](#) for the confederation at the ceremony, vowed to [hunt down](#) the assassins.

Formalisation followed in quick succession. A [decree](#) issued on 29 May by Mali's junta leader, General Assimi Goïta, named Brigadier General Makan Alassane Diarra as the force's commander, and Diarra [took up](#) his post at Air Base 101 in Niamey on 19 June. On 10 July, AES defence ministers [met](#) in Ouagadougou to validate the agreement on the force's status, which Burkina Faso's defence ministry [described](#) as the final text of its legal framework. Training capacity is being pooled as well. In April, 36 Nigerien soldiers [completed](#) a commando instructor course at Burkina Faso's Pô training centre, filling a gap left by the absence of any equivalent facility in Niger.

Civilian institutions advanced in parallel, giving the confederation the outward trappings of shared statehood. In April, the three governments [signed](#) the founding act of a joint airline, and in June an umbrella body for the confederation's local authorities was [installed](#) in Niamey. In

mid-July, Niger became the last member to [roll out](#) the common AES biometric passport, with its junta leader, General Abdourahmane Tiani, the first to [enrol](#). The same month, the three states [declared](#) a joint candidacy to host the 2032 Africa Cup of Nations.

// The result is a parliamentary façade that borrows the vocabulary of representative government whilst leaving decision-making firmly with the three juntas.

The confederation is also acquiring its own media infrastructure. In July, the [Malian](#) and [Burkinabè](#) legislatures approved the accords establishing the confederal broadcaster Tafouk TV and the radio station Daandè Liptako. Burkina Faso's prime minister [told](#) the radio's board that neutrality would not be the yardstick by which the station was judged; its measure would be how well it carried the cause of the AES peoples. The remark casts confederal media as an instrument of regime legitimisation, consistent with the approach to state media documented elsewhere in the Index.

On 24 August, the Confederal Sessions of the AES Parliaments [opened](#) in Niamey, installing 45 deputies by acclamation, with the speakers of Chad's and Togo's parliaments attending as guests. None of their members hold an electoral mandate. Instead, the body is [drawn](#) from the countries' appointed national assemblies, whose heads serve as its president and vice-presidents, and its role is to [submit](#) proposals to the college of heads of state. The result is a parliamentary façade that borrows the vocabulary of representative government whilst leaving decision-making firmly with the three juntas.

Outside actors have increasingly engaged the AES as a single counterpart, most visibly the regional bodies that once suspended or sanctioned the three regimes. In April, Togo [hosted](#) AES foreign ministers and ECOWAS negotiators in Lomé, and the African Union (AU) chair, Burundi's President Évariste Ndayishimiye, [visited](#) Ouagadougou and presented himself as a bridge between the AU and the confederation. On 25 May, ECOWAS's chief negotiator, Lansana Kouyaté, made his [first official visit](#) to Burkina Faso, [opening](#) the operational phase of talks. At its 19 July summit, ECOWAS [reaffirmed](#) that it would negotiate with the three only as a unified bloc and extended Kouyaté's mandate to December. It also



Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov with the foreign ministers of the Confederation of Sahel States at the second Russia-AES ministerial consultations, Niamey, 8 July 2026.

Photo: Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation (mid.ru)

instructed members to refrain from separate bilateral agreements that threaten the community's cohesion, and directed the President of the ECOWAS Commission to deepen engagement with the AES towards a security cooperation mechanism. By insisting on bloc-to-bloc negotiation to protect its own cohesion, ECOWAS has in effect reinforced the confederation's.



Lamine Zeine Ali Mahaman, Prime Minister of Niger, addresses the general debate of the 81st session of the UN General Assembly, New York, 25 September 2026.

UN Photo/Loey Felipe

Russia has moved to formalise its relationship with the bloc. On 8 July in Niamey, Moscow [signed](#) a memorandum with the three foreign ministers establishing permanent diplomatic consultations, and RT [agreed](#) a content-exchange partnership with Tafouk TV. The pattern carried into the UN General Assembly in September. Ndayishimiye [received](#) the three foreign ministers on 23 September, and they [met](#) Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov the following day. On 25 September, the UN Special Representative for West Africa

and the Sahel, Leonardo Santos Simão, and the AU envoy for Mali and the Sahel, Mamadou Tangara, [attended](#) the confederation's side event. Three days later, Burkina Faso's foreign minister [addressed](#) the General Assembly on behalf of the confederation.

AES spent the period between April and October 2026 building standing joint institutions in both the security and civilian spheres. Over the same period, regional and global powers increasingly dealt with the confederation as a single actor.

Each new confederal body binds the three unelected regimes more tightly together, yet the confederation's own capacity remains thin. When Air Base 101 mutinied, it was Moscow that came to the junta's [rescue](#). Even so, every outside power that signs with the bloc lends it the standing of a single international actor, and that standing is itself a resource the juntas can convert into legitimacy at home and leverage abroad.



Authoritarian Collaboration Index

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