Defense Ministers of "Coalition of the Willing" meet and discuss plans for post-ceasefire "reassurance force"

From left: Rustem Umerov, Minister of Defense; Ukraine; Adm. Sir Tony Radakin, Chief of Defence, UK; John Healey, Secretary of Defence, UK: Sébastien Lecornu, Minister of Armed Forces, France; and Gen. Thierry Burkhard, Chief of Defense, France, at yesterday's meeting of Coalition defense ministers at NATO headquarters in Brussels.

Yesterday British Defense Minister John Healey and French Defense Minister Sébastien Lecornu hosted a meeting at NATO headquarters in Brussels of the defense ministers of the governments participating in the Coalition of the Willing that hopes to ensure a lasting peace in Ukraine, once a ceasefire is agreed by all including Russia, by deploying a "reassurance force" to thwart any resumption of the war by Russia. The meeting followed up on the decision of President Macron and Prime Minister Starmer, the co-organizers of the Coalition, after the March 27 meeting of the leaders of the 31 governments participating in the Coalition and the planning meetings of the governments' senior military officers, to have their military chiefs – Adm. Sir Tony Radakin, Chief of the Staff of the British Armed Forces, and Gen. Thierry Burkhard, Chief of the General Staff of the French Armed Forces – meet in Kyiv with the top leadership of the Ukraine Armed Forces to discuss the future deployment of a "deterrent force" that could assist the Ukrainian military in protecting the country and preventing a subsequent resumption of Russian military operations once a ceasefire is agreed.

On March 2, Starmer and Macron hosted a summit meeting in London of European leaders and officials to discuss how to bring about an end to Russia's

war in Ukraine and guarantee Ukraine a lasting peace. The meeting was attended by President Zelenskyy and the leaders of a number of European states as well as NATO and EU officials. On March 15, Starmer organized a virtual follow-up meeting of more than two dozen government leaders to discuss their participation in the Coalition if and when Russia accepted the 30-day ceasefire agreed by the U.S. and Ukraine in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. that would take effect if and when Russia accepted it. Subsequently, senior military officers of the 31 countries participating in the Coalition met on several occasions at the Northwood military base outside London to discuss plans for an international peacekeeping force that would provide a security guarantee for Ukraine if and when a ceasefire was agreed and implemented.

On March 27, the leaders of the countries participating in the Coalition met again in person in Paris to "fine-tune" their plan for providing a "credible security guarantee" for Ukraine. At that meeting, Starmer presented the outcomes of the planning meetings that had taken place at the Northwood base. The meetings, he said, had involved more than 200 military planners, had considered in detail the structure of a force that would ensure that Ukraine would be able to defend itself from future Russian aggression, the full range of European military capabilities, including aircraft, tanks, troops, intelligence and logistics capabilities that would be needed for such a force, and had considered how the participating countries could contribute to such a force. He said the discussions would continue in regard to the military planning of air, sea and land forces that would be required to support a lasting peace in Ukraine.

Following that meeting, Macron said France and the UK would continue planning the deployment of troops from the participating countries to defend a peace agreement in Ukraine if and when one is agreed. They would, he said, consist of "reassurance forces" from "several European countries" and would be based in "certain strategic locations." He noted that, while most of the leaders supported the plan, support was not unanimous. On the other hand, he also noted that, "We do not need unanimity to achieve it." Starmer, who co-hosted the meeting, said, "It is now over two weeks since Ukraine agreed to an immediate 30-day ceasefire. That offer is still unanswered. It is over a week since Putin agreed to an energy and infrastructure ceasefire. Since then, Russia has hit energy infrastructure in cities across Ukraine. They've increased their bombardment. Firing over 1,000 long-range drones at the country. Hitting homes, schools and hospitals with widespread civilian casualties. Then, this week we saw the agreement on a ceasefire in the Black Sea…But within a few minutes of the announcement, Russia set out new conditions and delays. Now President Trump has rightly called them out for dragging their feet. And we agreed here in Paris today that it's clear the Russians are filibustering. They are playing games and playing for time. It is a classic from the Putin playbook. But we can't let them drag this out while they continue prosecuting their illegal invasion. Instead, we should be setting a deadline of delivering real progress. And we should hold them to that deadline. So

here in Paris we agreed that we must go further now to support the peace process. Support Ukraine and increase the pressure on Russia to get serious. That means – first – stepping up the military pressure. So the Defence Secretary will chair the next Ukraine Defence Contact Group on 11 April, to marshal more military aid and keep Ukraine in the fight. Because peace comes through strength. That was one of the main messages reasserted today and emphasized today all around the table. Second, it means increasing the economic pressure on Russia – accelerating new, tougher sanctions, bearing down on Russia's energy revenues – and working together to make this pressure count. We also discussed how we can support the implementation of a full or partial ceasefire, when it is in place, and how we can build efforts towards negotiations on a just and lasting peace. That remains our shared goal. And that is what the Coalition of the Willing is designed to support. The political will from partners here today was clear. And this week in London we hosted over 200 military planners from 30 countries. Coming forward with contributions on everything from logistics and command and control to deployments on land, air and sea. That work continues at pace. We will be ready to operationalize a peace deal whatever its precise shape turns out to be. And we will work together to ensure Ukraine's security so it can defend and deter against future attacks. This is Europe mobilizing together behind the peace process on a scale we haven't seen for decades. Backed by partners from around the world, we are determined to deliver a just and lasting peace. Because we know it is vital for Ukraine and Europe as a whole and I am clear that it is vital for Britain."

Meanwhile, anticipating that, despite Putin's refusal to agree to a ceasefire, sooner or later there will in fact be one, Macron and Starmer, following up on the March 27 meeting of the leaders of the governments participating in the Coalition, arranged for their military chiefs – Gen. Thierry Burkhard, Chief of the General Staff of the French Armed Forces, and Adm. Sir Tony Radakin, Chief of the Staff of the British Armed Forces – to meet in Kyiv last Friday with the top leadership of the Ukraine Armed Forces to discuss the future deployment of a "deterrent force" to assist the Ukrainian military in protecting the country and preventing a resumption of Russian military operations if and when a ceasefire is agreed.

At yesterday's meeting, the British and French defense ministers convened their counterparts from 30 countries along with representatives of the EU Council and Commission and NATO and briefed them on the meetings their military chiefs had in Kyiv last week and the current state of the planning for assembling and deploying the "deterrent force" in Ukraine. In a joint statement following the meeting, Healey and Lecornu made it clear that Ukraine's security is inseparable from Euro-Atlantic security and that only a lasting peace that safeguards the strength, security and sovereignty of Ukraine will deter Russia from further aggression in the future. They noted the detailed military planning being led by the British and French military chiefs, supported by hundreds of military planners from across Europe and beyond and said the planning had looked across the full range of military capabilities from Europe and beyond and how the participating

countries could contribute their own capabilities to ensure Ukraine's security, whether by strengthening Ukrainian capacity or by direct contributions. While being discrete about specific details, they made it clear they were making "solid progress, as a Coalition, on building a multi-national effort to support Ukraine's transition to peace time in a position of strength." And they said, "President Putin must prove he is serious about peace and sign up to a full and unconditional ceasefire, as Ukraine has done. We are working very closely with Ukraine on developing these future plans, as well as NATO to ensure that our collective support to Ukraine strengthens the wider European-Atlantic security architecture." In closing, they said, "This Coalition will continue to meet regularly to drive progress and generate firm commitments in pursuit of a just and lasting peace in Ukraine."

Today, while attention remained focused on NATO headquarters in Brussels, the focus shifted from yesterday's meeting of the defense ministers of the Coalition of the Willing to today's meeting of the Ukraine Defence Contact Group (UDCG), which consists of 51 countries and partners. At the UDCG meeting, hosted by British Defense Secretary Healey and German Minister of Defense Boris Pistorius, it was announced that UDCG has contributed another €21 billion in new military support for Ukraine. Mark Rutte, the Secretary General of NATO, welcomed the military assistance the UDCG has provided Ukraine, much of which is now delivered through the NATO Security Assistance and Training of Ukraine (NSATU) command in Wiesbaden. Rutte applauded the European Allies for stepping up their military aid to Ukraine in 2025 and encouraged nations to continue their contributions, including through NATO's Comprehensive Assistance Package (CAP) for Ukraine, and underlined the importance of providing continued support for Ukraine as efforts to negotiate a just and lasting peace continue.

And in the meantime, the war goes on, with no end in sight.

David R. Cameron
April 11, 2025