With trilateral talks on hold, Trump & Putin talk by phone and U.S. announces 30-day waiver on Russian oil sanctions.

UK Defence Intelligence update on battlefield situation in Ukraine as of Mar. 13, 2026.

As today's British Defence Intelligence map of the battlefield situation in Ukraine indicates, this week the Russian forces continued to attack in the area southeast of Sudzha toward Sumy and at a number of points along the contact line between the Russian and Ukrainian forces in eastern and southeastern Ukraine from the area south and east of Kupiansk to the area south of Siversk toward the cities of Sloviansk and Kramatorsk in the northern portion of Donetsk region, toward the area around Pokrovsk in the western portion of that region, and at several locations along the contact line between the forces in the Zaporizhzhia and Kherson regions of southeastern Ukraine. One notable change in today's map from the previous weekly updates issued by UK Defence Intelligence is the inclusion of a green arrow indicating a Ukrainian attack against the Russian forces at the southeastern corner of the region of Dnipropetrovsk.

While the Russian forces continued to attack the Ukrainian forces defending the cities and towns of northeastern and eastern Ukraine, Russia also continued its air war against the people of Ukraine last week. On Friday night and early Saturday morning, for example, Russia fired two Zircon hypersonic missiles, 13 Iskander ballistic missiles, 14 Kalibr cruise missiles, and 480 drones at Kyiv, Kharkiv, and more than twenty other locations in Ukraine and killed or injured a number of Ukrainian citizens. For example, one of the missiles hit an apartment building in Kharkiv and killed seven residents and injured ten others.

While Russia's war against Ukraine continued both on the ground and in the air last week, there was an effort to resume the talks between the delegations of American, Ukrainian, and Russian officials that had taken place in Abu Dhabi in January and February. In late February, a delegation of Ukrainian officials headed by Rustem Umerov, the Secretary of Ukraine's National Security and Defense Council, met in Geneva with an American delegation headed by presidential envoys Steve Witkoff and Jared Kushner and discussed the details of a possible postwar recovery plan for Ukraine as well as preparations for another trilateral meeting of the American, Ukrainian, and Russian negotiating teams.

The next trilateral meeting had been planned for this week in Abu Dhabi, but on Monday President Zelenskyy said in a post on X that the meeting had been postponed at the request of the U.S. because of the ongoing war in the Middle East. He said Ukraine is ready for a meeting "at any moment, in a format that can help and that will be realistic in terms of ending the war." He added that "I held a meeting with our negotiating team. I instructed the team to once again communicate with the American negotiators in order, first, to reiterate our readiness for strategic joint work for security and, in particular, protections against strike drones, and second, to once again confirm our readiness to work substantively toward ending Russia's war against Ukraine. It is important that we are in communication with the American side virtually 24/7. At the moment, the partner's priority and all attention are focused on the situation around Iran, and because of this the meeting that had been planned for this week is being postponed at the proposal of the American side. However, Ukraine is ready for a meeting at any moment, in a format that can help and that will be realistic in terms of ending the war."

On Monday evening, President Trump telephoned President Putin. Later that evening, Russian Presidential Aide Yury Ushakov posted a commentary on the conversation on Putin's site. In it, he said, "Donald Trump telephoned Vladimir Putin to discuss a number of highly important issues related to the current international situation. Naturally, particular attention was given to the situation surrounding the conflict with Iran, as well as to the ongoing trilateral negotiations on the Ukrainian settlement involving representatives of the United States. I would note at the outset that the conversation was businesslike, frank and constructive, as is typically the case in dialogue between the Russian and American leaders. They had not spoken by telephone for quite some time; their previous conversation took place at the end of December 2025. Today's call, incidentally, lasted about an hour. The US President noted that, as previously agreed, such contacts should take place on a regular basis, and both leaders confirmed that they are ready for this."

Continuing, Ushakov said, "The President of Russia set out a number of considerations aimed at achieving a prompt political and diplomatic settlement of the Iranian conflict, including in light of the contacts he has recently held with leaders of the Gulf states, with President of Iran Masoud Pezeshkian and with the leaders of several other countries. For his part, the US President shared his assessment of developments

in the context of the ongoing US-Israeli operation. I would note that a very substantive – and, I believe, useful – exchange of views took place on this matter."

"President Trump once again expressed interest in bringing the conflict in Ukraine to an end as soon as possible by achieving a ceasefire that would open the way to a long-term settlement. On our side, a positive assessment was given of the mediation efforts undertaken by Donald Trump's team and by him personally. An assessment was also provided of the current situation along the line of contact, where Russian forces are advancing successfully. As was noted, this is a factor that should compel the Kiev regime to finally move towards a negotiated settlement of the conflict. The leaders also touched upon the issue of Venezuela, primarily in the context of the situation on the global oil market. Overall, I would reiterate that the conversation was highly substantive and will undoubtedly have practical significance for further cooperation between the two countries across various areas of international policy."

On Tuesday, Zelenskyy spoke by phone with Turkish President Erdoğan, who urged that the ongoing war between the U.S. and Israel against Iran not disrupt the effort to bring an end to the war between Russia and Ukraine and, toward that end, offered to host the next round of the trilateral talks involving Ukraine, Russia and the U.S. Erdoğan underscored the fact that safe navigation in the Black Sea is of critical importance for Türkiye and added that a ceasefire that would protect energy infrastructure and ports could build confidence between Russia and Ukraine. He said Ankara is ready to provide whatever support is needed toward that end. Hopefully, Ukraine will take Erdoğan's advice and will agree to continue the trilateral talks with the U.S. and Russia in Istanbul.

Yesterday, the U.S. Treasury Department announced a 30-day waiver on Russian oil sanctions, which will free up Russian cargoes stranded at sea and ease the supply shortages being caused by the war against Iran that have driven the price of crude to more than $100 a barrel. The waiver allows countries to purchase Russian crude and petroleum products that were already stranded at sea as of yesterday and ease the supply shortages, reflected in the price of a barrel of oil, that now exist. The waiver will remain in effect until April 11, 2026. Announced yesterday by Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent, the waiver is designed as a short-term measure to lower the sharply rising energy prices caused by the de facto closure of the Strait of Hormuz and allows countries to purchase Russian crude oil and other petroleum products.

Needless to say, President Zelenskyy objected strenuously to the measure, saying the waiver is "not the right decision and won't bring about an end to the war." At a press conference with President Macron today, Zelenskyy said, "This easing alone by the U.S. could provide Russia with about $10 billion for the war. This certainly does not help peace. I believe that lifting sanctions will, in any case, lead to a strengthening of Russia's position. It spends the money from energy sales on weapons, and all of this is then used against us. Therefore, ultimately lifting sanctions only so that more drones will later be flying at you is, in my opinion, not the right decision."

European leaders likewise condemned the decision. European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said it was a mistake and one that makes Europe “vulnerable and weaker.” EU Economic Commissioner Valdis Dombrovskis warned that easing the restrictions would be “self-defeating” and would reinforce Russia’s ability to continue waging its war against Ukraine. German Chancellor Friedrich Merz said the decision was “wrong” and expressed his frustration that the U.S. adopted the waiver despite the fact that the other six G7 leaders had discussed the issue of Russian oil and liquefied natural gas supplies with President Trump earlier in the week. And President Macron said that rising energy prices do not justify lifting the sanctions on Russia and said the U.S. move is “limited,” was taken on an “exceptional basis,” and “does not broadly or permanently roll back the sanctions that they themselves decided to apply.” He said the U.S. decision was “wrong” and that the problem in the energy market is a pricing problem not a supply problem. The question today is what, if anything, did Trump get from Russia in exchange for the 30-day waiver on Russian oil sanctions

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