As the war continues, more talks about talks. Rubio & Lavrov talk in Manila. Trump & Zelenskyy will talk in DC tomorrow.

Today's UK Defence Intelligence update on the battlefield situation in Ukraine.

As today's British Defence Intelligence map of the battlefield situation in Ukraine indicates, the Russian forces continue to attack, as they have in recent weeks, toward the city of Sumy in northeastern Ukraine and at a number of points along the contact line between the forces in eastern and southeastern Ukraine from the area south of Kupiansk to the city of Kostyantynivka and toward the cities of Sloviansk, Kramatorsk and Druzhkivka in the northern portion of Donetsk region, toward the area along the eastern boundary of Dnipropetrovsk region between Pokrovsk and Dobropillia, and in the area near the junction of Dnipropetrovsk, Zaporizhzhia, and Kherson regions in southeastern Ukraine. As the green arrow indicates, the Ukrainian forces continue to attack the Russian forces at the southeastern corner of Dnipropetrovsk region. But it should be noted that both sides also attack at a number of other locations along the contact line between the forces. It should also be noted that the Defence Intelligence map has not changed at all over the past month.

As the war continued on the ground and in the air, last Wednesday President Zelenskyy said in a post on X that he had just spoken by phone with President Trump's envoys Steve Witkoff and Jared Kushner: "It was a good, important conversation on how to reinvigorate diplomacy and bring peace closer. Peace is needed – peace with dignity, and Ukraine has long been ready for it. Our teams keep staying in close contact, including to follow up on everything we have discussed. I thank Steve and Jared for their personal efforts to advance peace. We are grateful to President Trump and the American people for their unwavering support." President Zelenskyy will be in Washington tomorrow for the funeral of Sen. Lindsey Graham and will meet with President Trump while he is there.

Last Thursday, Secretary of State Rubio met with Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov on the sidelines of the annual meeting in Manila of the foreign ministers of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). Rubio said the Trump administration is poised to help end the "senseless war" in Ukraine but acknowledged there is no quick path to a deal, saying diplomacy will require sustained effort and new ideas. He acknowledged the U.S.-mediated talks have stalled and called them "unsuccessful or at least unfruitful" in the past. But he said President Trump is committed to continuing them "if conditions and factors have changed to make that possible." He said the challenge is agreeing on "an end that both sides can accept. We've tried and we'll continue to try to see if we can, you know, find a middle ground that brings this about. And we're prepared to play that role if the opportunity presents itself."

After the meeting, the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs issued the following press release about the meeting: "On July 23, Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov held a meeting with US Secretary of State Marco Rubio on the sidelines of ASEAN ministerial meetings in Manila. The sides held an in-depth exchange of views on a broad range of bilateral and international issues in follow-up to the recent high-level contacts. When talking on the Ukraine issue, Sergey Lavrov informed his American colleague about the real situation on the contact line, highlighting the inadmissibility of the continued supply of weapons to the Kiev regime and the destabilizing activities of European countries, which are still seeking to inflict a "strategic defeat" on Russia. Sergey Lavrov reaffirmed Russia's readiness for a political and diplomatic settlement in Ukraine and its commitment to the proposals advanced by the United States at the meeting of President Vladimir Putin and US President Donald Trump in Anchorage, which the Russian leader has accepted. They also talked about regional and international issues, including the situation in Persian Gulf…. They also discussed the normalization of conditions for the functioning of Russian and US diplomatic missions. An agreement was reached to maintain contacts between the two foreign policy agencies, including in the framework of the two countries' activities at international organizations."

David R. Cameron
July 27, 2026