

Research Briefing

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By Claire Mills

# Ukraine and Russia: A shift in US policy



## Summary

- 1 A new direction under President Trump
- 2 A reset in US-Russian relations
- 3 A US divergence from Europe?
- 4 What does this mean for peace in Ukraine?

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## Summary

President Trump said during the 2024 US election campaign that [a negotiated peace between Ukraine and Russia would be a priority](#) for his administration.

US efforts to achieve an interim 30-day ceasefire are underway and the US view is that [a longer-term peace agreement can only be negotiated once hostilities have ceased](#).

Initial US diplomatic efforts appear to have prioritised a reset of relations with Russia, while increasing pressure on Ukraine to come to the negotiating table and potentially accept peace terms that may be less favourable to Ukraine than those President Zelenskyy had previously been pushing for in his [2022 Peace Formula](#) and his October 2024 [Victory Plan](#).

In recent weeks, the US administration has suggested Ukraine's aims for NATO membership are unrealistic as part of any peace agreement and that it must be ["prepared to do difficult things"](#), which has been [widely interpreted as ceding territory](#). Many of the [comments made by senior Trump administration officials](#) since early February 2025, seem to align with [the demands set out by President Putin in June 2024](#), when he said that Ukraine and its allies must accept the new territorial realities on the ground and that Ukraine must renounce its ambitions to join NATO.

In early March 2025, the US temporarily suspended military assistance to, and intelligence sharing with Ukraine, accusing Ukraine of [a lack of commitment to "any sort of peace process"](#).

## A reset of US-Russia relations

During a telephone conversation on 12 February 2025, [President Trump and President Putin agreed to reset US-Russian relations](#) and re-establish dialogue on "topics of mutual interest", including the possible settlement of the Ukraine conflict.

[The first round of bilateral talks](#) took place in Saudi Arabia on 18 February 2025 and was the first meeting between US and Russian officials in over three years. Both sides agreed to take steps to normalise diplomatic relations and to appoint high-level teams to begin working on a Ukraine peace agreement.

The US had faced criticism prior to the meeting for the absence of Ukrainian or European representation at the talks. President Zelenskyy said that [Ukraine would not accept any agreements made without the country's involvement](#) and warned against trusting "Putin's claims of readiness to end the war". EU

High Representative Kaja Kallas, accused President Trump of [appeasing Russia](#).

The Trump administration has also appeared to soften its approach to Russia in other areas, moving to [disband various taskforces](#) combating Russian disinformation, preventing sanctions evasion by Russian oligarchs and [investigating war crimes in relation to the Ukraine conflict](#). The US Department of Defense has also [suspended offensive cyber operations](#) against Russia.

A summit meeting between President Trump and President Putin is expected to happen as a direct result of this reset in relations, although a timeframe is not yet clear.

## A US divergence from Europe?

The Trump administration's approach to Ukraine and its increasing rapprochement with Russia has been in stark contrast to the approach of most European leaders (with the exception of Hungary) and the European Union who have continued to express [unwavering support for Ukraine](#) in the face of Russian aggression. The UK and the EU have also continued to adopt [sanctions against Russia](#).

The increasing divergence between the US and Europe over Ukraine policy was evident at the United Nations in February 2025, when the US voted with Russia in two votes marking the third anniversary of the Russian invasion. Prior to the UN votes, President Trump had caused prior consternation among allies by [refusing to refer to Russia as the aggressor](#) in statements marking the third anniversary of the conflict, and by suggesting that Ukraine had started the war.

The US's rapprochement with Russia also comes at a time when [the US commitment to European security has been questioned](#). The response by European nations has been to begin the process of increasing defence spending, [find innovative ways to continue supporting Ukraine](#) and to start making [plans for European rearmament](#).

## Europe explores a 'coalition of the willing'

Although not part of formal diplomatic talks over a possible ceasefire or peace agreement in Ukraine, European leaders, led by the UK and France, have also been working on plans for [a 'coalition of the willing'](#), to provide Ukraine with security guarantees that will ensure any eventual peace agreement.

[The US has said it will not deploy troops to Ukraine as part of any security guarantee](#). Instead it has argued that an agreement between the US and Ukraine over access to Ukraine's vast reserves of rare earth minerals and

other critical raw materials would give the US [a vested economic interest in the future of the country](#) and would be a better security guarantee for Ukraine than any form of military commitment. Russia has also [categorically rejected the deployment of European peacekeepers in Ukraine](#).

## What does this mean for peace in Ukraine?

Concerns have been expressed that the US' approach of putting maximum pressure on Ukraine and softening its rhetoric towards Russia will result in [a "weak" peace deal that largely favours Russia](#) and provides little in the way of security guarantees for Ukraine against future Russian aggression.

[President Zelenskyy has accepted US proposals for a 30-day interim ceasefire](#) and to begin talks immediately on "an enduring peace that provides for Ukraine's long-term security". In response, US military assistance and intelligence sharing with Ukraine was immediately reinstated.

The United States has made clear that Russian reciprocity is crucial to achieving peace. In a televised press conference on 13 March, however, President Putin said that [while Russia supported the US ceasefire proposal, there were issues, or "nuances", that needed to be discussed first](#).

President Trump said that President Putin's position was "promising but incomplete" and that he would welcome the opportunity to talk to, or meet with, President Putin directly. He said that resolving the situation "shouldn't be very complicated" and that [if Russia did not engage it would be "a very disappointing moment for the world"](#).

A telephone call between President Trump and President Putin on 18 March 2025 [is not considered to have offered the breakthrough](#) that President Trump was hoping for. President Putin did not agree to the full ceasefire proposed by the US, although he did [agree to an interim proposal to halt strikes against energy infrastructure](#) for a period of 30 days and to begin negotiations on a maritime ceasefire in the Black Sea. [Russia also reiterated its conditions for moving negotiations on a full ceasefire forward](#), including the need to "eliminate the root causes of the crisis" and for a halt to foreign military aid to Ukraine.

President Zelenskyy said [President Putin's response was "highly predictable and manipulative"](#) and that Russia was "surrounding the ceasefire idea with such preconditions that it either fails or gets dragged out for as long as possible".

## An energy infrastructure moratorium and a Black Sea ceasefire?

Efforts to achieve a 30-day moratorium on targeting energy infrastructure have been undermined, by both sides, as [attacks on infrastructure have continued](#).

Talks held in Saudi Arabia at the end of March 2025 sought to get firm commitments from Russia and Ukraine on observing the energy infrastructure moratorium, along with progress toward a maritime ceasefire in the Black Sea.

[Agreements were reportedly reached on both elements](#). After talks concluded, however, Russia outlined its demands for sanctions relief, which it said would be [a prerequisite for any maritime ceasefire](#) in the Black Sea to take effect.

President Zelenskyy [accused President Putin of manipulation](#), while UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer questioned Russia's [commitment to the peace process](#).

### What next?

Decisions on providing sanctions relief to Russia, and specifically Russia's demand for the Russian Agricultural Bank to be reconnected to the SWIFT international payments system, are not decisions that the United States can take unilaterally and will require the agreement of the EU. On 26 March a European Commission spokesperson said [sanctions would not be lifted](#) until Russia unconditionally withdraws its military forces from the entire territory of Ukraine. The US has said that it is currently [evaluating Russia's latest demands](#).

At the time of writing, further talks on a settlement in Ukraine have yet to be confirmed. US frustration with Russia has surfaced after President Putin went on to suggest on 28 March that a UN-supervised [interim government be installed in Ukraine](#), which could then hold elections for a more "capable government" with which Russia could begin peace talks.

President Trump expressed his anger, saying that such proposals were ["not going in the right location"](#) and suggested, not for the first time, that the US would consider imposing sanctions in response.

In an interview on 1 April, Deputy Foreign Minister, Sergey Ryabkov went a step further and said Russia [could not accept the US proposals as they currently stand](#), as they fail to address what Russia has referred to as "the root causes of the conflict".

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# 1 A new direction under President Trump

## 1.1 Prioritising a Russia-Ukraine peace agreement

President Trump has been vocal in his [opposition to further US military assistance to Ukraine](#) and said during the US election campaign that a negotiated peace would be a priority for his administration.<sup>1</sup>

While initially suggesting that [a ceasefire agreement could be reached within 24 hours](#), the Trump administration's nominated special envoy to Ukraine, Keith Kellogg, said in early January that the aim was to reach an agreement within 100 days in office (30 April 2025).<sup>2</sup>

US efforts to achieve an interim 30-day ceasefire are underway (see [Attempts to achieve a 30-day ceasefire](#)), and the US view is that a longer-term peace agreement can only be negotiated once hostilities have ceased.<sup>3</sup>

Initial US diplomatic efforts appear to have prioritised a reset of relations with Russia and increased pressure on Ukraine to negotiate and potentially accept peace terms that may be less favourable to Ukraine than those President Zelenskyy had previously been pushing for in [his peace formula](#) (originally presented in November 2022) and in his October 2024 [Victory Plan](#).<sup>4</sup> Those documents called for the cessation of Russian aggression, the withdrawal of Russian forces from occupied Ukrainian territories, NATO membership for Ukraine, and justice and reparations.<sup>5</sup> President Zelenskyy made clear that Ukraine would not accept any proposals which called on the country to compromise its sovereignty and cede any Ukrainian territory to Russia.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> [“JD Vance reveals Trump’s Ukraine plan: let Russia have what it’s taken”](#), The Times, 13 September 2024

<sup>2</sup> [“Keith Kellogg predicts Trump will accomplish near term solution to Russia-Ukraine war”](#), Fox News, 8 January 2025

<sup>3</sup> US Department of State, [Remarks to the press](#), 11 March 2025; [“Stop shooting, then we talk – Rubio outlines peace plan”](#), The Kyiv Post, 17 March 2025 and US Department of State, [Press briefing](#), 19 March 2025

<sup>4</sup> [“Almost half think Trump sympathizes with Russia in Ukraine war: survey”](#), The Hill, 17 March 2025

<sup>5</sup> President of Ukraine, [Speech](#), 15 November 2022 and President of Ukraine, [Press release](#), 16 October 2024

<sup>6</sup> US Department of State, [Virtual panel session on a just and lasting peace in Ukraine](#), 28 March 2023; [President Zelenskyy official](#), Telegram, 26 April 2023; [“Ukraine tells African peace mission no peace talks with Russia before withdrawal”](#), CNBC, 17 June 2023

## Is the US aligning with Russia?

Many of the comments made by senior Trump administration officials since early February 2025, including those by [US Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth](#) and [Secretary of State Marco Rubio](#), appear to align with many of the demands set out by President Putin in June 2024, when he said that Ukraine and its allies must accept the new territorial realities on the ground and that Ukraine must renounce its ambitions to join NATO.<sup>7</sup>

### 1 Putin's peace proposals: June 2024

Russia's long-held position is that any peace settlement must consider [Russia's legitimate security interests](#), which were the focus of diplomatic talks prior to the invasion of Ukraine, and that the Ukrainian Government must recognise the "new territorial realities", referencing [Russia's attempts to annex the Russian-occupied regions](#) in September 2022.<sup>8</sup>

In June 2024, President Putin offered terms for a ceasefire and negotiated peace, which he said represented not "a freezing of the conflict" but its "definitive resolution".<sup>9</sup> The peace proposal stipulated that:

- Ukraine must withdraw from all regions annexed by Russia: Donetsk, Luhansk, Zaporizhzhia and Kherson, as defined by their 1991 administrative borders. Those regions, plus Crimea and Sevastopol, must be internationally recognised as part of the Russian Federation.
- Ukraine must demilitarise, adopt a neutral, non-nuclear status and renounce its ambition to join NATO.
- The rights, freedoms and interests of Russian-speaking citizens in Ukraine must be ensured, in full.
- All sanctions against Russia must be lifted.

In recent weeks, the US administration has suggested that Ukraine's aim of NATO membership is unrealistic as part of any peace agreement and that it must be "prepared to do difficult things". This has been widely interpreted as ceding territory (Russia currently occupies approximately 20% of Ukraine).<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Russian Foreign Ministry, [President of Russia Vladimir Putin's speech at the meeting with senior staff of the Russian Foreign Ministry](#), 14 June 2024. Russia's demands are examined in more detail in Library research briefing, [Ukraine: The Swiss Peace Summit and what comes next?](#), July 2024

<sup>8</sup> President of Russia, [Meeting with heads of delegations of African states](#), 17 June 2023 and Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, [Press briefing](#), 3 May 2024. Russia's security interests were at the centre of diplomatic negotiations in early 2022 that sought to avert the invasion of Ukraine. These negotiations are examined in Library research briefing: [Ukraine: Russia's "red line"](#)

<sup>9</sup> Russian Foreign Ministry, [President of Russia Vladimir Putin's speech at the meeting with senior staff of the Russian Foreign Ministry](#), 14 June 2024

<sup>10</sup> US Department of Defense, [Opening Remarks](#), 12 February 2025; US State Department, [Remarks to the press](#), 10 March 2025; Institute for the Study of War, [Ukraine Fact Sheet](#), 21 February 2025;

The Trump administration has been clear that any peace agreement will not be backed up by American security guarantees.<sup>11</sup>

## Temporary suspension of US military aid and intelligence sharing with Ukraine

In early March 2025, the US suspended military aid to Ukraine and stopped sharing intelligence (aside from defensive intelligence).<sup>12</sup> Access to satellite imagery by US company Maxar was also limited.<sup>13</sup> Secretary of State, Marco Rubio, said the suspension of aid was the result of Ukraine's lack of commitment to "any sort of peace process".<sup>14</sup>

This followed [a televised meeting at the White House](#) on 28 February 2025 between President Trump, Vice President Vance and President Zelenskyy, which ended early after heated discussions.

Diplomatic relations prior to the meeting were already strained after President Trump blamed Ukraine for starting the war and called President Zelenskyy a "dictator without elections", a comment he subsequently denied making.<sup>15</sup> Trump also suggested that Russia holds the "upper hand" in any negotiations and, in statements to mark the third anniversary of the war, refused to call Russia "the aggressor".<sup>16</sup> In response, President Zelenskyy accused President Trump of living in "a disinformation space" created by Russia.<sup>17</sup>

After the White House meeting, President Trump said the Ukrainians were welcome back when they were ready to discuss peace.<sup>18</sup> Ahead of a meeting

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["Ukrainian concessions 'the only way' to end Russia's war, Rubio says"](#), Politico, 10 March 2025 and ["FULL: President Trump hosts NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte at White House"](#), Fox News, 13 March 2025

- <sup>11</sup> US Department of Defense, [Opening Remarks](#), 12 February 2025. In June 2024, under the Biden administration, [an agreement on long term security cooperation and security guarantees was signed with Ukraine](#). That agreement contained a six-month termination clause allowing either party to withdraw from its obligations, should they so decide.
- <sup>12</sup> US Department of State, [Remarks to the press](#), 10 March 2025. Approximately \$4 billion of allocated funds for military assistance to Ukraine remains from the Biden administration. No new military assistance has been announced by President Trump. This is examined in Library research briefing, [Military assistance to Ukraine since the Russian invasion](#) (February 2022 to January 2025)
- <sup>13</sup> ["US curtails Ukraine access to satellite imagery"](#), Politico, 7 March 2025
- <sup>14</sup> US Department of State, [Remarks to the press](#), 10 March 2025. See also US Department of State, [Press briefing](#), 6 March 2025
- <sup>15</sup> ["Fact-checking Trump's claims about war in Ukraine"](#), BBC Verify, 19 February 2025. Under martial law, presidential and parliamentary elections in Ukraine have been suspended. President Zelenskyy's term in office was due to expire in May 2024 and [President Trump holds press conference with Prime Minister Keir Starmer of the United Kingdom](#), White House YouTube channel, 27 February 2025
- <sup>16</sup> ["US objects to phrase 'Russian aggression' in G7 statement on Ukraine"](#), The Financial Times, 20 February 2025
- <sup>17</sup> ["Zelenskyy says Trump living in 'disinformation space' after Trump seemingly blames Ukraine for war"](#), CBS News, 20 February 2025
- <sup>18</sup> ["Trump tells Zelenskyy: Come back when you're ready for peace"](#), The Daily Telegraph, 28 February 2025

with Ukrainian officials in Saudi Arabia on 12 March, Secretary Rubio suggested that aid could be resumed depending on the outcome of the meeting.<sup>19</sup> In a joint statement following the meeting, the US confirmed that military assistance and intelligence sharing would immediately resume following Ukraine's acceptance of the US proposal for a 30-day interim ceasefire (see [Attempts to achieve a 30-day ceasefire](#)).<sup>20</sup>

The UK Government and the European Union welcomed the resumption of military aid and intelligence sharing.<sup>21</sup> Its initial suspension had been described as a “major setback” for Ukraine.<sup>22</sup> The Institute for the Study of War assessed that the frontline in Ukraine was not at risk of “imminent collapse” but that the pause in aid would harm Ukraine's warfighting capabilities over time.<sup>23</sup> Patriot air defence missiles were expected to run out “in a matter of weeks” according to Ukrainian officials, while US-provided artillery shells would be depleted by May or June.<sup>24</sup>

## A critical minerals/ rare earths deal with Ukraine

The diplomatic picture has also been complicated by efforts to conclude a deal between the US and Ukraine that would give the US access to Ukraine's vast reserves of [rare earth minerals and other critical raw materials](#). Such resources [are located across Ukraine](#) (including in the Russian-occupied regions in eastern Ukraine) and include uranium, titanium, lithium, and graphite, among others. Deposits are estimated to be worth trillions of US dollars.<sup>25</sup>

First proposed by Ukraine in 2024 as part of [Zelensky's Victory Plan](#), President Trump said that US access to Ukraine's rare earth minerals would compensate for the significant amount of military aid that had been given to the country since 2022.<sup>26</sup> At the end of February, President Trump said the conclusion of an agreement would give Ukraine “the right to fight on”, although gave no indication whether that meant the US would support Ukraine militarily.<sup>27</sup>

US administration officials, including the Vice President, JD Vance, have also suggested that an agreement would give the US a vested economic interest in

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<sup>19</sup> US Department of State, [Remarks to the press](#), 10 March 2025

<sup>20</sup> US Department of State, [Joint Statement on the United States-Ukraine Meeting in Jeddah](#), 11 March 2025

<sup>21</sup> Prime Minister's Office, [PM statement on talks in Saudi Arabia](#), 11 March 2025 and Council of the European Union, [Press release](#), 11 March 2025

<sup>22</sup> Economist Intelligence Unit, [Update: US pauses military aid to Ukraine](#), 5 March 2025

<sup>23</sup> Institute for the Study of War, [Russian offensive campaign assessment](#), 4 March 2025

<sup>24</sup> As above

<sup>25</sup> President of Ukraine, [Press release](#), 16 October 2024. See also “[What minerals does Ukraine have and what are they used for?](#)”, BBC News, 24 February 2025

<sup>26</sup> [Interview with Fox News](#), 10 February 2025

<sup>27</sup> “[Ukraine PM says mineral deal agreed with US](#)”, BBC News, 26 February 2025

the future of the country and would be a better security guarantee for Ukraine than any form of military commitment.<sup>28</sup>

Following talks in Saudi Arabia on 11 March 2025, the US and Ukraine issued a joint statement suggesting that a comprehensive agreement would be concluded as soon as possible and that it would “guarantee Ukraine’s long-term prosperity and security”.<sup>29</sup>

### Changing the parameters of the deal

Since the talks in Saudi Arabia, the US has, however, reportedly increased its demands with respect to any deal. The latest draft of the deal, as [reported by the Financial Times](#) on 27 March 2025, would apply to all mineral resources in Ukraine, including oil and gas, in addition to major energy assets and infrastructure connected to the exploration of natural resources. An advisory board would also be established to oversee the joint investment fund responsible for managing Ukraine’s critical mineral resources and splitting the income from projects between the two countries. The US would appoint three of the five members of that proposed advisory board, giving it overall control, and an effective veto, over the joint investment fund.<sup>30</sup>

The deal also states that the US will receive all the royalties from Ukrainian assets until the country has paid off at least \$100 billion in what the Trump administration considers to be war debt, plus 4% in interest.<sup>31</sup> US companies would also receive priority rights to all future investments in natural resources and infrastructure and have oversight of any agreements signed with third parties, such as the European Union or the UK.<sup>32</sup>

The US’ latest demands have been criticised by several officials in Ukraine who have labelled it as “unfair” and “robbery”.<sup>33</sup> Alan Riley, an expert in energy law at the organisation The Atlantic Council, called the deal an “expropriation document” highlighting that it contains “no guarantees, no defence clauses” and the US “puts up nothing”.<sup>34</sup>

President Zelenskyy has reaffirmed Ukraine’s commitment to a deal, but said there were lots of things in the new deal that had not been discussed before

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<sup>28</sup> [Interview with Fox News](#), 3 March 2025

<sup>29</sup> US Department of State, [Joint Statement on the United States-Ukraine Meeting in Jeddah](#), 11 March 2025

<sup>30</sup> [“US pushes for expansive new deal to control Ukraine’s minerals and energy”](#), The Financial Times, 27 March 2025 and [“Trump demands Ukraine’s minerals and oil in exchange for ceasefire”](#), The Times, 27 March 2025; [“New version of mineral deal with US may conflict with Ukraine’s European integration aspirations”](#), European Pravda, 28 March 2025

<sup>31</sup> [“US pushes for expansive new deal to control Ukraine’s minerals and energy”](#), The Financial Times, 27 March 2025

<sup>32</sup> [“New version of mineral deal with US may conflict with Ukraine’s European integration aspirations”](#), European Pravda, 28 March 2025

<sup>33</sup> [“Trump demands Ukraine’s minerals and oil in exchange for ceasefire”](#), The Times, 27 March 2025

<sup>34</sup> [“Revealed: Trump’s plan to force Ukraine to restore Putin’s gas empire”](#), The Daily Telegraph, 27 March 2025

or had been previously rejected, and it needed to be reviewed.<sup>35</sup> He also said Ukraine would not accept a critical minerals agreement that threatened Ukraine's accession to the EU.<sup>36</sup> Giving the US preferential treatment on future investment projects could potentially break the EU's competition laws.<sup>37</sup> At a press briefing on 28 March 2025, a spokesperson for the European Commission said that an eventual "concrete" agreement would need to be reviewed from the perspective of Ukraine's accession negotiations.<sup>38</sup>

President Trump has since accused President Zelenskyy of trying to back out of the deal, saying that if he tried to renegotiate the terms of the deal he would face "big problems".<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> ["Zelenskyy: deal with US will not be signed if it threatens Ukraine's accession to EU"](#), Ukrainska Pravda, 28 March 2025

<sup>36</sup> ["Ukraine won't sign minerals deal with US if it threatens EU membership, Zelensky says"](#), The Kyiv Independent, 28 March 2025

<sup>37</sup> ["There may be problems ahead"](#), BBC News, 31 March 2025

<sup>38</sup> ["Zelenskyy says no to any US minerals deal that might risk Ukraine's EU bid"](#), Politico, 29 March 2025 and European Commission, [Midday press briefing](#), 28 March 2025

<sup>39</sup> ["Trump promises big, big problems if Zelenskyy backs out of minerals deal"](#), Politico, 31 March 2025

## 2

## A reset in US-Russian relations

During a telephone conversation on 12 February 2025, President Trump and President Putin agreed to reset US-Russian relations and re-establish dialogue on “topics of mutual interest”, including the possible settlement of the Ukraine conflict.<sup>40</sup>

It was the first time that the Kremlin had acknowledged direct contact between the two leaders, despite President Trump alluding to [several previous conversations with President Putin](#) since taking office.

## 2.1

### What was the outcome of initial talks?

#### Riyadh: 18 February 2025

The first round of bilateral talks took place in Saudi Arabia on 18 February 2025 between US Secretary of State Marco Rubio, National Security Adviser Mike Waltz, US Special Envoy to the Middle East Steve Witkoff and Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and Presidential Aide Yuri Ushakov.

“The new administration is rapidly changing all foreign policy configurations. This largely aligns with our vision”.

[Kremlin spokesman, Dmitry Peskov](#), 2 March 2025

The first meeting between US and Russian officials in over three years, both sides agreed to take steps to normalise diplomatic relations, including the appointment of respective ambassadors, the removal of restrictions on the diplomatic activities of the two countries, and the establishment of a consultation mechanism to address potential issues and concerns. It was hoped that the groundwork could be laid for future cooperation on “matters of mutual geopolitical interest” and economic and investment opportunities that may arise with the end to the conflict in Ukraine.<sup>41</sup>

On the issue of Ukraine, US Secretary of State, Marco Rubio, described the meeting as “talks about talks” and to gauge whether Russia was interested in peace negotiations.<sup>42</sup> Secretary Rubio and Minister Lavrov agreed to appoint high-level teams to “begin working on a path to ending the conflict in Ukraine as soon as possible in a way that is enduring, sustainable, and acceptable to all sides”.<sup>43</sup> Russian Foreign Minister, Sergey Lavrov, called the meeting “positive” and “highly fruitful” and said the US had gained a clearer

<sup>40</sup> President of Russia, [Telephone conversation with US President Donald Trump](#), 12 February 2025

<sup>41</sup> US Department of State, [Secretary Rubio’s meeting with Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov](#), 18 February 2025 and Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, [Press release on US-Russia consultations](#), 18 February 2025

<sup>42</sup> US Department of State, [Remarks to the press](#), 10 March 2025

<sup>43</sup> US Department of State, [Secretary Rubio’s meeting with Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov](#), 18 February 2025

understanding of Russia's position.<sup>44</sup> In a statement after the meeting, the Russian Foreign Ministry reiterated the importance of "eliminating the root causes of the conflict" and to ensure the security and legitimate interests of all countries in the region.<sup>45</sup>

In an interview with CNN directly after the meeting, the US National Security Adviser, Mike Waltz, said that any end to the war had to be permanent and that there would inevitably have to be some discussion over territory and security guarantees. Secretary Rubio said concessions would have to be made by all sides, calling the meeting in Riyadh the "first step of a long and difficult journey, but an important one".<sup>46</sup>

### Criticism of the talks

The US had faced criticism prior to the meeting for the absence of Ukrainian or European representation at the talks. In a joint statement, the UK, Germany, France, Poland, Italy, Spain, the European External Action Service and the European Commission expressed their support for a "just, comprehensive and lasting peace" that "guarantees the interest of Ukraine and our own" and said that Ukraine and Europe must be part of any negotiations.<sup>47</sup>

President Zelenskyy said that Ukraine would not accept any agreements made without the country's involvement and warned against trusting "Putin's claims of readiness to end the war".<sup>48</sup>

EU High Representative, Kaja Kallas, said that any deal behind the backs of the Ukrainians and the Europeans would not work, that the US should not take anything off the table before negotiations have begun. She also accused President Trump of appeasing Russia.<sup>49</sup>

Responding to accusations of appeasement, National Security Adviser Waltz said that engaging with Russia was "common sense" and that "If you're going to bring both sides together, you have to talk to both sides".<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, [Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's statement and answers to media questions](#), 18 February 2025 and [Answers to questions from Rossiya 1 television channel](#), 18 February 2025

<sup>45</sup> Russia's security interests were at the centre of diplomatic negotiations in early 2022 that sought to avert the invasion of Ukraine. These negotiations are examined in Library research briefing [Ukraine: Russia's "red line"](#)

<sup>46</sup> US Department of State, [Interview with CNN and the Associated Press](#), 18 February 2025

<sup>47</sup> Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, [Joint Statement](#), 12 February 2025

<sup>48</sup> Volodymyr Zelenskyy, [@ZelenskyyUa](#), X (formerly Twitter), 13 February 2025 (accessed 21 February 2025)

<sup>49</sup> EU High Representative Kaja Kallas, [@kajakallas](#), X (formerly Twitter), 13 February 2025 (accessed 11 March 2025)

<sup>50</sup> US Department of State, [Interview with CNN and the Associated Press](#), 18 February 2025

## Talks in Turkey: 27 February 2025

Further discussions between government officials were convened in Istanbul at the end of February 2025. The focus of the talks was on measures to normalise the operations of each country's respective diplomatic mission, including the restitution of six Russian diplomatic premises in the United States which Russia alleges were seized unlawfully. Russia also called on the US to consider the restoration of direct air services between the two countries.<sup>51</sup>

Officials agreed to further talks soon.<sup>52</sup> Contact has also continued between US Secretary of State, Marco Rubio, and Russian Foreign Minister, Sergey Lavrov.<sup>53</sup>

On 1 April 2025, Foreign Minister Lavrov confirmed that preparations were underway for further talks to be held in Istanbul.<sup>54</sup>

## 2.2 Other shifts in policy

The change in US rhetoric toward Russia under the Trump administration has also been evidenced in the implementation of other policy changes:

- In early February 2025 the US Department of Justice disbanded [Task Force KleptoCapture](#), an interagency law enforcement taskforce dedicated to implementing the US sanctions regime against Russia and targeting Russian oligarchs. The decision was reportedly taken in recognition of a shift in the department's priorities towards fighting drug cartels and transnational crime.<sup>55</sup>
- In early February 2025, [the Department of Justice disbanded the Foreign Influence Task Force](#), a unit within the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) dedicated to investigating violations of the Foreign Agents Registration Act. The task force was established in 2017 after allegations of Russian interference in the 2016 US presidential election.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, [Press release on Russia-US talks in Istanbul](#), 28 February 2025

<sup>52</sup> US Department of State, [February 27 meeting in Istanbul](#), 27 February 2025

<sup>53</sup> US Department of State, [Press release](#), 15 March 2025 and Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, [Press release](#), 16 March 2025

<sup>54</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, [Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's answer to a media question](#), 1 April 2025

<sup>55</sup> ["From oligarchs to cartels: The US reshapes global law enforcement"](#), Radio Free Europe, 7 February 2025; ["Trump administration disbands taskforce targeting Russian oligarchs"](#), Reuters, 6 February 2025 and ["Kleptocrats to benefit from Trump DoJ's anti-corruption pause, experts say"](#), The Guardian, 10 March 2025

<sup>56</sup> ["Doj disbands foreign influence taskforce, limits scope of FARA prosecutions"](#), Cyberscoop, 6 February 2025

- In early March 2025, the US Defense Secretary, Pete Hegseth, ordered the suspension of offensive cyber operations against Russia.<sup>57</sup> The New York Times suggested that the pause was part of an “overall evaluation of US operations related to Russia”.<sup>58</sup>
- During bilateral talks in Riyadh on 18 February 2025, both sides acknowledged their “special responsibility in matters of peace and security as nuclear powers”, which has led to speculation about the resumption of US-Russia strategic stability talks.<sup>59</sup> That dialogue has been on hold since the Russian invasion of Ukraine and is the forum through which nuclear arms control has historically been discussed. [The New START treaty](#), which places limitations on the strategic nuclear arsenals of Russia and the US, is due to expire in February 2026. A successor agreement, or a commitment to retain the quantitative limits set out in that treaty, is yet to be discussed. In his first term, President Trump had called for nuclear arms control talks to be expanded to include China.<sup>60</sup>
- On 17 March 2025, the New York Times reported that the US Department of Justice had notified the International Center for the Prosecution of Crimes of Aggression against Ukraine that it would withdraw its participation by the end of March 2025.<sup>61</sup> The US has been part of the organisation since November 2023. The Institute for the Study of War called the move “a unilateral concession to Russia”.<sup>62</sup>

In February 2025, President Trump also suggested that Russia should rejoin the G7 and that it had been “a mistake to throw them out”.<sup>63</sup>

## 2.3

### A Trump-Putin summit?

A meeting between President Trump and President Putin is expected to happen as a direct result of the reset in relations, although a timeframe is not yet clear.

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<sup>57</sup> [“Exclusive: Hegseth orders Cyber Command to stand down on Russia planning”](#), The Record, 28 February 2025 and [“Hegseth orders pause in US cyber offensive against Russia”](#), BBC News, 3 March 2025

<sup>58</sup> [“Hegseth orders Pentagon to stop offensive cyberoperations against Russia”](#), The New York Times, 2 March 2025 (subscription required). See also [“US Defense Department halts cyber operations against Russia”](#), The Moscow Times, 3 March 2025

<sup>59</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, [Press release on Russia-US consultations](#), 18 February 2025 and [“Russia says it’s open to broad nuclear talks with Trump”](#), Radio Free Europe, 7 March 2025

<sup>60</sup> This is examined in Library research briefing, [Prospects for US-Russian nuclear arms control](#), July 2020

<sup>61</sup> [“US to withdraw from group responsible for investigating responsibility for Ukraine invasion”](#), The New York Times, 17 March 2025 (subscription required)

<sup>62</sup> Institute for the Study of War, [Russian offensive campaign assessment](#), 17 March 2025

<sup>63</sup> [“Russia should rejoin G7, Trump says”](#), Politico, 13 February 2025

In remarks to the media on 19 February 2025, President Putin said that he would be happy to meet President Trump but that such a meeting should be properly prepared:

We have not seen each other for a long time. We do not have a particularly close relationship, but in the previous years, during his first presidential term, we met and had very smooth discussions about our bilateral relations. I would gladly meet with him again. I believe he feels the same way – it was evident from the tone of our telephone conversation.

But we are in a situation where it would not be enough to meet – to just have a cup of tea or coffee and talk about the future. We must make sure that our teams prepare discussion points that are crucial for both the United States and Russia, including, but not limited to, the Ukrainian track, in order to reach decisions that both parties would find acceptable. This is not an easy task, of course.<sup>64</sup>

President Putin also highlighted potential areas for discussion, including strategic stability and New START (see above), broader issues relating to the Middle East, and economic cooperation, primarily in energy.<sup>65</sup> In an interview with Russian journalist, Pavel Zarubin, on 24 February 2025, President Putin also suggested that Russia would be open to an agreement with the US on rare earth minerals and other critical natural resources, including in Russia’s “new territories”, referencing those regions of eastern Ukraine which Russia has attempted to annex (Donetsk, Luhansk, Zaporizhzhia and Kherson).<sup>66</sup> He asserted that Russia possesses “significantly larger resources of this kind than Ukraine”.<sup>67</sup>

In comments ahead of the US-Ukraine meeting in Saudi Arabia on 12 March (see [Attempts to achieve a 30-day ceasefire](#)), US Secretary of State, Marco Rubio, said that while both sides had expressed a willingness to meet, there was “no meeting scheduled or planned at this moment”.<sup>68</sup>

President Trump and President Putin discussed a possible ceasefire and peace agreement in Ukraine during a phone call on 18 March (see [Direct talks between President Putin and President Trump: 18 March 2025](#)). President Putin had previously said that while he supported the US ceasefire proposal, there were issues that needed to be discussed first.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> President of Russia, [Answers to questions from media representatives](#), 19 February 2025

<sup>65</sup> As above

<sup>66</sup> The annexation of these regions is examined in Library research briefing, [Implications of the Russian-backed referendums in Ukraine](#)

<sup>67</sup> President of Russia, [Answers to questions from journalist Pavel Zarubin](#), 24 February 2025

<sup>68</sup> US Department of State, [Remarks to the press](#), 10 March 2025

<sup>69</sup> President of Russia, [Joint press conference](#), 13 March 2025

## 3

## A US divergence from Europe?

“We have been with Ukraine since day one...Our support is unwavering. If the war continues. In any future peace negotiations. In reconstruction. In accession to the European Union...

[President of the European Council, António Costa](#), 6 March 2025

The Trump administration’s approach to Ukraine and its increasing rapprochement with Russia has been in stark contrast to that of most European leaders and the European Union, who have continued to express unwavering support for Ukraine in the face of Russian aggression and have said that there can be “no negotiations about Ukraine, without Ukraine”. They have called for a “just and lasting peace” based on sovereignty and credible security guarantees.<sup>70</sup> The UK and the EU have also continued to adopt sanctions against Russia.<sup>71</sup>

The notable European exception is Hungary’s Prime Minister Viktor Orbán who has long opposed EU military support for Ukraine and reportedly refused to endorse the text of the special European Council meeting on Ukraine on 6 March.<sup>72</sup>

European efforts to mediate between Ukraine and the US and to formulate a European response to Ukraine’s long-term security have been largely led by the UK and France.<sup>73</sup> The US has acknowledged, and welcomed, their diplomatic assistance.<sup>74</sup>

<sup>70</sup> Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, [Weimar + statement](#), 12 February 2025; Prime Minister’s Office, [Press release](#), 1 March 2025 and [Chair’s Statement: Leaders meeting on Ukraine](#), 2 March 2025; European Council, [Press release](#), 14 February 2025 and [Special meeting: Ukraine](#), 6 March 2025; [Televised Address by President Emmanuel Macron](#), France 24, 5 March 2025

<sup>71</sup> Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, [Press release](#), 24 February 2025; Home Office, [Press release](#), 24 February 2025 and Council of the European Union, [Press release](#), 24 February 2025

<sup>72</sup> [“Ukraine to start negotiations with US”](#). The Financial Times, 6 March 2025. In 2023, following the election of Prime Minister Robert Fico, Slovakia also suspended military assistance to Ukraine. Hungarian and Slovakian opposition to military support for Ukraine is detailed in Library research briefing, [Military assistance to Ukraine since the Russian invasion \(February 2022 to January 2025\)](#).

<sup>73</sup> French Presidency, [Visit to Washington](#), 25 February 2025; [“Trump-Macron meeting illustrates growing distance between allies”](#), Le Monde, 25 February 2025; [Televised Address by President Emmanuel Macron](#), France 24, 5 March 2025; Prime Minister’s Office, [Press release](#), 25 February 2025; [Prime Minister’s remarks at the White House press conference](#), 27 February 2025; [PM meeting with President Trump](#), 27 February 2025; [Press release](#), 4 March 2025; [PM call with President Trump](#), 10 March 2025 and [“UK helped Ukraine and US reach ceasefire deal – government sources”](#), BBC News, 12 March 2025

<sup>74</sup> US Department of State, [Remarks to the press](#), 10 March 2025 and US Department of State, [Readout: Secretary Rubio’s call with UK Foreign Secretary Lammy](#), 19 March 2025

## 3.1

## Votes in the UN to mark the third anniversary of the conflict

The increasing divergence between the US and Europe over Ukraine policy was evident at the United Nations in February 2025, when the US voted with Russia in two votes marking the third anniversary of the Russian invasion. This is the first time that the US has voted with Russia in votes relating to the invasion of Ukraine.<sup>75</sup>

Prior to the UN votes, President Trump had caused consternation among allies by refusing to refer to Russia as the aggressor in statements marking the third anniversary of the conflict, and by suggesting that Ukraine had started the war.<sup>76</sup>

In a statement issued after the phone call between President Trump and President Putin on 18 March (see Direct talks between President Putin and President Trump: 18 March 2025), the Kremlin called the UN votes a “positive example... in which the two countries aligned their stances”.<sup>77</sup>

### UN General Assembly votes

In two separate votes on 24 February 2025, the UN General Assembly (UNGA) adopted two competing resolutions, one [tabled by the United States](#) (PDF) and one [tabled by Ukraine](#) (PDF).

Both draft resolutions called for peace and an end to the conflict. The Ukrainian-tabled resolution called for the implementation of previous resolutions demanding the immediate, complete and unconditional withdrawal of all Russian forces from the territory of Ukraine within its internationally recognised borders and the immediate cessation of hostilities by Russia.<sup>78</sup> In contrast, the US-tabled resolution was notable for not referring to Russia as the aggressor.

The UNGA adopted the Ukrainian-tabled resolution by 93 votes to 18, with 65 countries abstaining. For the first time, the United States voted against the resolution, alongside Russia, Belarus and North Korea, among others.<sup>79</sup>

The UNGA also adopted the US-tabled resolution, but only after it was amended by the European Union to refer to the full-scale invasion of Ukraine

<sup>75</sup> There have been three previous votes in the UN General Assembly on the Ukraine conflict, in [March 2022](#), October 2022 and February 2023.

<sup>76</sup> [“Fact checking Trump claims about the war”](#), BBC Verify, 19 February 2025

<sup>77</sup> President of Russia, [Telephone conversation with President of the United States Donald Trump](#), 18 March 2025

<sup>78</sup> UN General Assembly, [Resolution A/ES-11/L.10](#) (PDF), 18 February 2025, para.4

<sup>79</sup> UN News, [@UN\\_News\\_Centre](#), X (formerly Twitter), 24 February 2025 (accessed 14 March 2025)

by Russia. The US subsequently abstained in the vote on the amended version, which was passed by 93 votes to eight, with 73 countries abstaining.<sup>80</sup>

## UN Security Council vote

The text of the original US UNGA resolution was, however, passed the same day in the UN Security Council (UNSC).

Despite efforts by European members of the UNSC to amend the resolution, it subsequently passed by 10 votes to nought, with five abstentions ([UNSCR 2774\(2025\)](#)) (PDF). The US voted in favour, alongside China and Russia (all are permanent members of the UNSC with a veto). The other two permanent members of the UNSC, the UK and France, abstained.

The vote was the first held on the Ukraine conflict within the UNSC since Russia's invasion in February 2022.

Speaking after the vote, US Ambassador Dorothy Shea said that the US appreciated the support of UNSC members, suggesting that the resolution “puts us on the path to peace”.<sup>81</sup> The Russian Ambassador welcomed the “changes in the United States’ position on the conflict”.<sup>82</sup>

UK Ambassador, Barbara Woodward, said the UK could not support the resolution because “the terms of that peace matter” and that there can be no equivalence between Russia and Ukraine “in how this Council refers to this war”.<sup>83</sup>

## 3.2

## A call for Europe to step up on defence

The US's rapprochement with Russia comes at a time when the US commitment to European security has also been questioned.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> UN News, [@UN\\_News\\_Centre](#), X (formerly Twitter), 24 February 2025 (accessed 14 March 2025)

<sup>81</sup> [“Ukraine war: Amid shifting alliances, General Assembly passes resolution condemning Russia’s aggression”](#), UN News, 24 February 2025

<sup>82</sup> UN Security Council, [Meetings Coverage](#), 24 February 2025

<sup>83</sup> Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, [UK statement at the UN Security Council](#), 24 February 2025

<sup>84</sup> Bronwen Maddox, [“Trump’s electroshock on Ukraine ends the debate: Europe cannot rely on the US for its security”](#), Chatham House Expert Comment, 7 March 2025; European Union Institute for Security Studies, [Europe in danger: Navigating a future without Trump’s America](#), 12 March 2025 and [“Trump casts doubt on NATO security agreement: ‘if they don’t pay, I’m not going to defend them”](#), Politico, 6 March 2025

The response by European nations has been to begin the process of increasing defence spending, find innovative ways to continue supporting Ukraine and to start making plans for European rearmament.<sup>85</sup>

At a summit of international leaders on 2 March 2025, Prime Minister Keir Starmer said that “now is the time for us to unite in order to guarantee the best outcome for Ukraine, protect European security, and secure our collective future”.<sup>86</sup>

### 3.3 Europe explores a ‘coalition of the willing’ for Ukraine

Although not part of formal diplomatic talks over a possible ceasefire or peace agreement in Ukraine, European leaders, led by the UK and France, have also been working on providing Ukraine with security guarantees that will ensure any peace agreement that is eventually agreed. A deal “without anything behind it”, is one which many, including the UK Prime Minister, believe that Russia will violate and that “the time for planning is now”.<sup>87</sup>

At the meeting of international leaders in London on 2 March, Prime Minister Keir Starmer outlined a four-point plan to work alongside Ukraine in achieving peace and to defend the country against future Russian aggression:<sup>88</sup>

- To continue providing military assistance to Ukraine and keep increasing economic pressure on Russia (through sanctions)
- To ensure Ukraine’s place in negotiations on any lasting peace agreement, which must ensure Ukraine’s sovereignty and security
- To keep boosting Ukraine’s defensive capabilities, in the event of any peace deal
- To develop a ‘coalition of the willing’ to defend a deal in Ukraine.

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<sup>85</sup> Prime Minister’s Office, [Chair’s Statement: Leaders meeting on Ukraine](#), 2 March 2025; European Council, [Special European Council](#), 6 March 2025; [Remarks by President António Costa at the press conference following the Special European Council meeting](#), 6 March 2025 and Ministry of Defence, [European Group of Five \(E5\) Defence Minister’s meeting in Paris \(12 March 2025\) – Joint Statement](#), 12 March 2025

<sup>86</sup> Prime Minister’s Office, [Chair’s Statement: Leaders meeting on Ukraine](#), 2 March 2025

<sup>87</sup> Prime Minister’s Office, [Press release](#), 20 March 2025

<sup>88</sup> Prime Minister’s Office, [PM remarks at international leaders’ summit press conference](#), 2 March 2025 and [HC Deb 3 March 2025](#), c25

“Any deal must be backed by strength”.

Prime Minister Keir Starmer, 2 March 2025

On the last point, the Prime Minister acknowledged that “not every nation will feel able to contribute”, but that planning among countries willing to contribute to some form of peacekeeping or reassurance force would now begin with a sense of “real urgency”. He made specific commitments to back up that force by deploying, if necessary, UK “boots on the ground, and planes in the air”. He also made clear that “to succeed, this effort must have strong US backing”.<sup>89</sup> France has also committed to deploying forces.<sup>90</sup>

The UK convened a further virtual meeting on 15 March 2025, involving 25 countries and partners, including European states, the EU Commission, NATO, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. Suggesting that Russia was trying to “play games with President Trump’s peace plan”, the Prime Minister said the aim of the meeting was to discuss further “how countries plan to contribute to the coalition of the willing”.<sup>91</sup>

A military planning session to progress operational plans that will “swing in behind a peace deal and guarantee Ukraine’s future security” took place in the UK on 20 March.<sup>92</sup> That was followed by three days of intensive military planning which “convened over 200 military planners from countries across the globe, considered in detail the structure of any future force to ensure Ukraine can defend itself from future Russian aggression”.<sup>93</sup>

The outcome of those operational planning sessions was presented to a meeting of the coalition in France on 27 March 2025, which was also attended by President Zelenskyy.<sup>94</sup> Following that meeting, UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer said “We will be ready to operationalise a peace deal whatever its precise shape turns out to be”.<sup>95</sup>

Few details have emerged of what a coalition may eventually look like, but a key commitment to “help secure Ukraine on the land, at sea, and in the sky” is thought likely to require a considerable number of troops on the ground and a significant air and air defence presence to ensure air superiority. A force of around 30,000 personnel, an air policing mission and the deployment of surveillance and other assets to monitor the border and any potential ceasefire violations has been suggested.<sup>96</sup> Questions over the length of any deployment and rules of engagement, including the ability of any peacekeeping force to defend itself against Russian attack are also yet to be answered. A force backed by a UN Security Council (UNSC) resolution is unlikely, given Russia is a permanent UNSC member with a veto.

<sup>89</sup> As above. See also [“Where does the phrase ‘coalition of the willing’ come from?”](#), The Guardian, 2 March 2025

<sup>90</sup> [Televised Address by President Emmanuel Macron](#), France 24, 5 March 2025

<sup>91</sup> Prime Minister’s Office, [Press release](#), 14 March 2025

<sup>92</sup> Prime Minister’s Office, [PM statement at press conference on the Coalition of the Willing](#), 15 March 2025 and [“UK hosts military leaders to work on Ukraine plans”](#), BBC News, 20 March 2025

<sup>93</sup> Prime Minister’s Office, [Press release](#), 27 March 2025

<sup>94</sup> President of Ukraine, [Speech by the President at the Leader’s Summit on Support for Ukraine](#), 27 March 2025

<sup>95</sup> Prime Minister’s Office, [PM remarks](#), 27 March 2025

<sup>96</sup> [“Keir Starmer ready to put British troops in Ukraine for years”](#), The Times, 16 March 2025

The coalition of the willing is next scheduled to meet at NATO Headquarters on 10 April 2025. The Ukraine Defence Contact Group which coordinates military support to Ukraine will meet on 11 April under the chairmanship of the UK and Germany.<sup>97</sup>

## 2 A vote in Parliament on deploying the armed forces?

On 3 March 2025, the Prime Minister said on the floor of the House of Commons:

“My position on [the sustained deployment of our troops](#) is that this House would of course want to discuss that and vote on that, but we are nowhere near that stage at the moment” (c38)

The role of Parliament in the deployment of the UK armed forces in situations of armed conflict is examined in Library research briefing [Military action: Parliament’s role](#)

## Would the US support European peacekeepers in Ukraine?

In mid-February 2025, US Defense Secretary, Pete Hegseth, had previously backed the idea of a European peacekeeping force in Ukraine saying that any long-term security guarantees for Ukraine should be backed by European and non-European, but not US, forces:

any security guarantee must be backed by capable European and non-European troops.

If these troops are deployed as peacekeepers to Ukraine at any point, they should be deployed as part of a non-NATO mission. And they should not [sic] covered under Article 5. There also must be robust international oversight of the line of contact.

To be clear, as part of any security guarantee, there will not be U.S. troops deployed to Ukraine.<sup>98</sup>

In an interview with Tucker Carlson on 22 March 2025, however, US Special Envoy, Steve Witkoff, called efforts to establish a coalition of the willing “a posture and a pose” and criticised European leaders for being simplistic and thinking “we all have got to be like Winston Churchill”, calling the idea of President Putin “marching across Europe” as “preposterous”.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> The Ukraine Defence Contact Group is examined in more detail in Library research briefings [Military assistance to Ukraine since the Russian invasion \(February 2022 to January 2025\)](#) and [Detailed timeline of UK military assistance to Ukraine \(February 2022 – present\)](#)

<sup>98</sup> US Department of Defense, [Opening Remarks](#), 12 February 2025

<sup>99</sup> [The Tucker Carlson Show](#), 21 March 2025

European leaders have, however, said that if any coalition is to succeed it will require US security guarantees.<sup>100</sup> US military capabilities such as air defence and intelligence and surveillance assets are considered crucial to any peacekeeping force. The need for a US “over the horizon” air presence, potentially in a neighbouring European country and ready to intervene in the event of Russian aggression, has also been suggested.<sup>101</sup>

Several analysts consider that continued US opposition to providing any form of “security backstop” will lead to questions over the ability of the Europeans to field, and sustain, a credible ‘reassurance’, or peacekeeping, force.<sup>102</sup> An assessment in the journal *Strategic Europe* on 1 April 2025, argues that “leaders [of the coalition] have dangerously raised expectations, setting themselves up for failure”.<sup>103</sup>

## Russian opposition to European peacekeepers

Russia has also categorically rejected the deployment of European peacekeepers in Ukraine to monitor and enforce any peace agreement.

After meeting with the US Secretary of State in Riyadh in mid-February 2025, Russian Foreign Minister, Sergey Lavrov, said:

We were clear with our counterparts that President Putin has repeatedly emphasised that NATO expansion and absorption of Ukraine was a direct threat to the interests of the Russian Federation and our sovereignty. Considering this, the troops from NATO countries [in Ukraine] under a foreign flag - an EU flag, or any national flags - does not change anything in this regard. This is unacceptable.<sup>104</sup>

In a statement on 6 March, the Russia Foreign Ministry reiterated that position, suggesting that any Western military forces in Ukraine would represent an occupation:<sup>105</sup>

With regard to Mr Macron’s idea of deploying Western military contingents in Ukraine under the guise of peacekeeping forces, we have repeatedly made it clear that this is unacceptable. This, what essentially represents an occupation of Ukraine, would inevitably lead to an extremely dangerous escalation.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> Prime Minister’s Office, [PM remarks at international leaders’ summit press conference](#), 2 March 2025

<sup>101</sup> [“What would a European-led peacekeeping force in Ukraine involve?”](#), The Times, 12 March 2025

<sup>102</sup> Ed Arnold, [“Back to the future: Applying the Chilcot checklist to Ukraine”](#), RUSI Commentary, 10 March 2025; [“Starmer’s ad hoc alliance could still struggle to materialise”](#), BBC News, 15 March 2025 and [“The two big unknowns left up in the air after Starmer’s coalition of the willing Ukraine summit”](#), Sky News, 15 March 2025

<sup>103</sup> [“The problems with European security guarantees for Europe”](#), *Strategic Europe*, 1 April 2025

<sup>104</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, [Foreign Minister’s statement](#), 18 February 2025

<sup>105</sup> For a discussion of an “occupation” as a concept in international law, see International Committee of the Red Cross, [Occupation and other forms of administration of foreign territory](#) (PDF), 2012

<sup>106</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, [Statement](#), 6 March 2025

The Russian Deputy Foreign Minister, Alexander Grushko, has also suggested that any foreign forces in the conflict zone would be considered “parties to the conflict”.<sup>107</sup>

In response, both President Macron and Prime Minister Starmer have said that the deployment of allied forces in Ukrainian territory was “not up to Russia to accept or not”.<sup>108</sup>

## 3.4 A balancing act for the UK

Prime Minister Keir Starmer has said that “times have changed” and that they “demand a united Britain”, where all resources must be deployed to achieve security.<sup>109</sup> In order to do so, the government has committed to increasing defence spending to 2.5% of GDP by 2027 and to 3% of GDP in the next Parliament, subject to economic and fiscal conditions and the UK’s “strategic and operational needs”.<sup>110</sup> As outlined above, the UK has also taken on a leading role in ensuring continued support for Ukraine and in proposals for achieving a lasting peace in Ukraine through enforcement of any peace deal.

In meeting these challenges, the Prime Minister has said that the UK will not choose between allies but will look to strengthen the UK’s relationship with the US, which the government describes as [the UK’s “most important bilateral alliance”](#), while also pursuing “a new alliance with Europe” in order to “work together on our collective interests and threats”.<sup>111</sup> [The UK is pursuing a reset of relations with the EU](#) and on 18 March 2025 the EU High Representative, Kaja Kallas, met with the Foreign Secretary and Defence Secretary to discuss the coordination of cooperation on Ukraine and efforts to counter Russian threats to Europe.<sup>112</sup>

In the House of Commons on 19 March 2025, the Prime Minister reaffirmed the UK’s “unwavering support for the people of Ukraine”.<sup>113</sup> Following the meeting of the coalition of the willing in Paris on 27 March 2025, he accused Russia of “playing games and playing for time” and that a deadline should be set for Russia to deliver “real progress”.<sup>114</sup> The UK Government has been clear that a

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<sup>107</sup> [“Russia wants ‘ironclad’ guarantee that Ukraine will be barred from NATO: official”](#), Fox News, 17 March 2025

<sup>108</sup> [“West can send troops to Ukraine without Russia’s permission, Macron says”](#), The Kyiv Independent, 16 March 2025 and [“Starmer warns Putin of ‘severe consequences’ if he breaches peace deal”](#), The Guardian, 20 March 2025

<sup>109</sup> [HC Deb 25 February 2025](#), c631

<sup>110</sup> As above, c633. The rise in defence spending is examined in Library insight, [UK to spend 2.5% of gross domestic product on defence by 2027](#), 26 March 2025

<sup>111</sup> [HC Deb 25 February 2025](#), c633; [HC Deb 3 March 2025](#), c25 and Prime Minister’s Office, [Prime Minister’s remarks at the White House press conference](#), 27 February 2025

<sup>112</sup> Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, [Press release](#), 17 March 2025

<sup>113</sup> [HC Deb 19 March 2025](#), [c337](#)

<sup>114</sup> Prime Minister’s Office, [PM remarks](#), 27 March 2025

“just and lasting peace” in Ukraine is also important for European and UK national security.<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> Prime Minister’s Office, [PM remarks](#), 27 March 2025 and Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, [Statement to the OSCE](#), 26 March 2025

## 4 What does this mean for peace in Ukraine?

Many commentators, including the Economist Intelligence Unit, have expressed concern that the US approach of putting maximum pressure on Ukraine and softening rhetoric towards Russia may result in a “weak” peace deal that largely favours Russia and provides little in the way of security guarantees for Ukraine against future Russian aggression.<sup>116</sup>

Members of the European Parliament have accused the US of “blackmailing” Ukraine into surrender “for the sole purpose of announcing a so-called peace deal”, while an editorial in the Financial Times on 13 March 2025 said that President Trump must “now play hardball with Moscow as he has with Kyiv”.<sup>117</sup> That sentiment has been echoed by others after Russia issued conditions to be addressed before any ceasefire proposal can be agreed by the Russian side.<sup>118</sup> The Editor of the Daily Telegraph said that President Trump “must now get tough and show he can be as impatient with Putin as he has been with Zelensky”.<sup>119</sup>

### 4.1 Attempts to achieve a 30-day ceasefire

#### US-Ukraine talks in Jeddah: 11 March 2025

“There’s no military solution to this war. The solution to this war and the way to end it [...] is to negotiate”.

[US Secretary of State, Marco Rubio](#), 11 March 2025

Talks between US and Ukrainian officials were held in Jeddah on 11 March 2025. The talks were convened after Ukraine offered [a partial aerial and maritime ceasefire plan to the US](#), as part of efforts to mend diplomatic relations and demonstrate its commitment to a peace process following the meeting with President Zelensky at the White House at the end of February.

During talks, the US presented a more comprehensive ceasefire plan than the one originally presented by Ukraine, involving an immediate 30-day full ceasefire, applicable to the entire frontline, on long-range missile and drone strikes and on operations in the Black Sea. The ceasefire can be extended by

<sup>116</sup> Economist Intelligence Unit, [US pauses military aid to Ukraine](#), 5 March 2025

<sup>117</sup> European Parliament, [Resolution of 12 March 2025 on continuing the unwavering EU support for Ukraine, after three years of Russia’ war of aggression](#), 2025/2528 (RSP)

<sup>118</sup> President of Russia, [Joint press conference](#), 13 March 2025

<sup>119</sup> [From the Telegraph Editor](#), The Daily Telegraph, 14 March 2025

mutual agreement of the parties and is “subject to Russia’s acceptance and concurrent implementation”.<sup>120</sup>

The joint statement issued after the meeting also outlined the importance of humanitarian relief efforts as part of the peace process, particularly during the interim ceasefire period, including the exchange of prisoners of war, the return of forcibly transferred Ukrainian children and the release of civilian detainees. Such measures do not appear, however, to be a specific term of the ceasefire but confidence-building measures. In remarks after the meeting, Secretary Rubio said, however, that the “number one goodwill gesture we could see from the Russians is to see the Ukrainian offer and reciprocate it with a yes”.<sup>121</sup>

Both delegations agreed to appoint negotiating teams and begin talks immediately on “an enduring peace that provides for Ukraine’s long-term security”.<sup>122</sup> The Ukrainian delegation reiterated the need for European partners to be involved in the peace process.

Following Ukraine’s acceptance of the US proposals, which both sides called a “positive step forward”, military assistance and intelligence sharing with Ukraine was immediately reinstated (see [Temporary suspension of US military aid and intelligence sharing](#)).<sup>123</sup> Military assistance previously approved under the Biden administration will therefore continue.<sup>124</sup>

The United States has made clear that Russian reciprocity is crucial to achieving peace. In remarks to the press after the Jeddah talks, Secretary Rubio said that “the ball is now in their [Russia’s] court” and that “If they say no, then we’ll unfortunately know what the impediment is to peace here”.<sup>125</sup>

The US-Ukraine statement was welcomed by the UK and by the European Union, which both said it was now down to Russia to show its willingness for peace.<sup>126</sup> In a statement on 14 March, G7 foreign ministers, including US Secretary of State, Marco Rubio, called on Russia to “reciprocate by agreeing to a ceasefire on equal terms and implementing it fully”.<sup>127</sup> G7 ministers suggested that sanctions could be expanded and frozen Russian assets mobilised to support Ukraine if Russia did not agree to a ceasefire.<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> US Department of State, [Joint Statement on the United States- Ukraine Meeting in Jeddah](#), 11 March 2025

<sup>121</sup> US Department of State, [Remarks to the press](#), 11 March 2025

<sup>122</sup> US Department of State, [Joint Statement on the United States- Ukraine Meeting in Jeddah](#), 11 March 2025

<sup>123</sup> US Department of State, [Remarks to the press](#), 11 March 2025 and President of Ukraine, [Nightly address by the President](#), 11 March 2025

<sup>124</sup> President Trump has not, to date, sought congressional approval for any new packages of military assistance.

<sup>125</sup> US Department of State, [Remarks to the press](#), 11 March 2025

<sup>126</sup> Prime Minister’s Office, [PM statement on talks in Saudi Arabia](#), 11 March 2025 and Council of the European Union, [Press release](#), 11 March 2025

<sup>127</sup> US Department of State, [G7 Foreign Minister’s meeting in Charlevoix](#), 14 March 2025

<sup>128</sup> As above

## Russian support: With conditions

In comments to the media in February 2025, President Putin said that Russia had “never turned its back on negotiations with Ukraine” and that Russia was ready to return to the negotiating table.<sup>129</sup>

In a televised press conference on 13 March, however, President Putin said that while Russia supported the US’ ceasefire proposal, there were issues, or “nuances”, that needed to be discussed first:<sup>130</sup>

- Any cessation of hostilities should lead to long-term peace and eliminate the root causes of this crisis. Russia has consistently argued that its ‘special military operation’ in Ukraine is in response to the provocative actions of NATO and that its aim is to “de-militarise and de-nazify” Ukraine.<sup>131</sup> In late 2021/early 2022 Russia presented proposals for legally binding security guarantees that addressed its concerns in Ukraine but also European security more broadly.<sup>132</sup>
- The Ukrainian incursion into the Russian region of Kursk must be addressed. President Putin has suggested that operations to liberate Kursk were almost complete and that there are only two options for Ukrainian personnel in Kursk: “surrender or die”.<sup>133</sup> He also said any Ukrainian personnel captured in Kursk would be treated as terrorists and not prisoners of war.<sup>134</sup>
- What guarantees would Russia receive that Ukraine was not using the 30-day ceasefire period to continue mobilisation, to re-arm (including receiving arms from allies) and to train its forces? How would such guarantees be controlled and verified?
- Consideration must be given to how a ceasefire, along a line of contact running almost 2,000km, is policed, including how ceasefire violations are determined, and by whom. What will be the implications of any ceasefire violations, and who will be held responsible?

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<sup>129</sup> President of Russia, [Answers to questions from media representatives](#), 19 February 2025 and [Answers to questions from journalist Pavel Zarubin](#), 24 February 2025

<sup>130</sup> President of Russia, [Joint press conference](#), 13 March 2025

<sup>131</sup> [Address by the President of the Russian Federation](#), 24 February 2022 and Ministry of the Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, [Foreign Ministry Statement](#), 6 March 2025

<sup>132</sup> These are examined in section 2.2 of Library research briefing, [Ukraine: Russia’s ‘red lines’](#), February 2022

<sup>133</sup> President of Russia, [Joint press conference](#), 13 March 2025 and [Visit to a command post of the Kursk group of forces](#), 12 March 2025

<sup>134</sup> President of Russia, [Visit to a command post of the Kursk group of forces](#), 12 March 2025

President Putin's conditions have been interpreted by many as a stalling tactic, giving Russia the opportunity to [consolidate recent gains in Kursk and on the frontline in eastern Ukraine](#).<sup>135</sup>

Many of Russia's conditions are also considered unlikely to be acceptable to Ukraine and its European allies.<sup>136</sup> Supporting Ukraine to ensure that it is in a strong negotiating position in any peace talks has been Europe's main priority (see [A US divergence from Europe?](#)). President Putin, in the meantime, has been accused of seeking a ceasefire on his own terms.<sup>137</sup>

President Zelenskyy said President Putin's response was "highly predictable and manipulative" and that Russia was "surrounding the ceasefire idea with such preconditions that it either fails or gets dragged out for as long as possible". He called for allies to put further pressure on Russia, including the imposition of additional sanctions.<sup>138</sup>

President Trump said President Putin's position was "promising but incomplete" and that he would welcome the opportunity to talk to, or meet with, President Putin directly. He said that resolving the situation "shouldn't be very complicated" and that if Russia did not engage it would be "a very disappointing moment for the world."<sup>139</sup> US Special Envoy, Steve Witkoff, described talks with President Putin after his 13 March 2025 press conference, as "positive and solutions based".<sup>140</sup>

President Trump has previously said that if Russia did not negotiate in good faith the US would impose high tariffs and further sanctions on Russia.<sup>141</sup> That sentiment was reiterated by the White House press secretary, Karoline Leavitt, in a press conference on 17 March 2025. She said that President Trump was willing to impose further sanctions, if necessary, but wouldn't get ahead of the President on such a serious question.<sup>142</sup>

## Direct talks between President Putin and President Trump: 18 March 2025

Ahead of a phone call with President Putin on 18 March 2025, President Trump said discussions would focus on "dividing up certain assets", primarily land

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<sup>135</sup> ["The real meaning of Russia's 30-day energy ceasefire in Ukraine"](#), Atlantic Council, 18 March 2025 and ["Putin is stalling – Trump 'ceasefire' call met with scepticism in Kyiv"](#), The Kyiv Independent, 19 March 2025

<sup>136</sup> ["Is Putin ready for a ceasefire or playing for time?"](#), BBC News, 13 March 2025

<sup>137</sup> Institute for the Study of War, [Russian offensive campaign assessment](#), 17 March 2025

<sup>138</sup> President of Ukraine, [Nightly address by the President](#), 13 March 2025

<sup>139</sup> ["FULL: President Trump hosts NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte at White House"](#), Fox News, 13 March 2025

<sup>140</sup> ["Russia wants ironclad guarantee that Ukraine will be barred from NATO: official"](#), Fox News, 17 March 2025

<sup>141</sup> ["Trump tells Putin to end 'ridiculous' war in Ukraine or face new sanctions"](#), BBC News, 23 January 2025

<sup>142</sup> [Press Secretary Karoline Leavitt briefs members of the media](#), White House You Tube Channel, 17 March 2025

and power plants, in order to secure a peace deal. He suggested similar discussions with Ukraine had already taken place.<sup>143</sup> The Russian Deputy Foreign Minister, Alexander Grushko, also said that Russia wanted an “ironclad guarantee” of a neutral status for Ukraine and that the country would not be allowed to join NATO.<sup>144</sup> Such demands are not new and were part of the list of conditions for peace that President Putin outlined in June 2024 (see [Prioritising a Russia-Ukraine peace agreement](#)).<sup>145</sup>

### What was the outcome of talks?

The talks are not considered to have offered the breakthrough that President Trump was hoping for.<sup>146</sup>

President Putin did not sign up to the full ceasefire proposed by the US, although he did agree to an interim proposal to halt strikes against energy infrastructure for a period of 30 days (see below). It was agreed that technical negotiations on implementing a maritime ceasefire in the Black Sea (see below) and negotiations on a full ceasefire involving ground forces would also begin immediately.<sup>147</sup>

In an early confidence-building measure, commitments were made for the transfer of 175 prisoners of war by each side and 23 injured Ukrainian soldiers, which was achieved on 19 March.<sup>148</sup>

Neither [the statement from the White House](#), nor [the statement from the Kremlin](#), referenced territorial concessions or Ukraine’s neutrality. Russia did, however, reiterate its conditions for moving negotiations forward, including the need to “eliminate the root causes of the crisis”. Russia also demanded that Ukraine does not mobilise more forces or re-arm during the ceasefire period and that foreign military assistance and intelligence sharing with Ukraine must cease. The Kremlin statement said that “a complete cessation of providing Kiev with foreign military aid and intelligence must become the key condition for preventing an escalation of the conflict and making progress towards its resolution through political and diplomatic means”.<sup>149</sup>

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<sup>143</sup> “Donald Trump plans Tuesday talks with Vladimir Putin on Russia-Ukraine war”, The Financial Times, 16 March 2025

<sup>144</sup> [“Russia wants ironclad guarantee that Ukraine will be barred from NATO: official”](#), Fox News, 17 March 2025

<sup>145</sup> Russian Foreign Ministry, [President of Russia Vladimir Putin’s speech at the meeting with senior staff of the Russian Foreign Ministry](#), 14 June 2024. Russia’s demands are examine in more detail in Library research briefing, [Ukraine: The Swiss Peace Summit and what comes next?](#), July 2024

<sup>146</sup> [“The will of a US President alone may not be enough”](#), BBC News, 18 March 2025; [“Putin calls Trumps bluff”](#), From the Telegraph Editor, 19 March 2025

<sup>147</sup> Karoline Leavitt, [@PressSec](#), X (formerly Twitter), 18 March 2025 (accessed 18 March 2025)

<sup>148</sup> As above

<sup>149</sup> President of Russia, [Telephone conversation with President of the United States Donald Trump](#), 18 March 2025

The talks also touched on broader US-Russia relations, events in the Middle East, strategic stability and US-Russian economic opportunities.<sup>150</sup>

### Ukrainian response

President Zelenskyy had proposed a partial ceasefire ahead of talks with the US in Jeddah on 11 March 2025, and therefore welcomed any plan to end Russian attacks on Ukraine's energy infrastructure. However, he also said that Russia's additional conditions showed that it "was not ready to finish this war".<sup>151</sup> The Institute for the Study of War said President Putin's demands "amount to Ukrainian capitulation".<sup>152</sup>

Indeed, the partial ceasefire against energy infrastructure was immediately met with Russian attacks on civilian infrastructure in Ukraine and corresponding Ukrainian attacks on a Russian oil depot in Krasnodar.<sup>153</sup> In response to the attacks on Ukraine, President Zelenskyy said that "Putin's words are very different from reality". He called for unity among allies and joint efforts to put further pressure on Russia, which he said were "absolutely necessary prerequisites for peace".<sup>154</sup> Following a phone call with President Trump on 19 March 2025, President Zelenskyy said that Ukraine was committed to working with the US to achieving peace, which he suggested could be "this year".<sup>155</sup>

### An energy infrastructure moratorium

Efforts to achieve a 30-day moratorium on targeting energy infrastructure had been undermined, by both sides, as attacks on infrastructure continued.<sup>156</sup>

Technical talks on a potential ceasefire continued in Saudi Arabia on 23, 24 and 25 March between US and Ukrainian officials and between US and Russian officials. Ukraine and Russia are yet to talk directly.

While talks focused primarily on securing a ceasefire in the Black Sea (see below), officials also sought to get firm commitments, from both sides, on observing the moratorium on targeting energy infrastructure that had previously been agreed.

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<sup>150</sup> Karoline Leavitt, [@PressSec](#), X (formerly Twitter), 18 March 2025 (accessed 18 March 2025). See also "[Putin woos Trump with a partial ceasefire and big geopolitical deal](#)", The Economist, 18 March 2025

<sup>151</sup> "[No surprise that Zelenskyy supports halt to strikes on Ukraine energy targets](#)", BBC News Live, 18 March 2025

<sup>152</sup> Institute for the Study of War, [Russian offensive campaign assessment](#), 18 March 2025

<sup>153</sup> "[Russia and Ukraine carry out attacks after Trump-Putin call](#)", BBC News, 19 March 2025

<sup>154</sup> "[Putin and Trump trust each other says Kremlin as Zelenskyy accuses Russia of breaking partial ceasefire](#)", The Guardian, 19 March 2025

<sup>155</sup> President of Ukraine, [President of Ukraine and President of the United States had a telephone conversation](#), 19 March 2025 and US Department of State, [Statement from Secretary Rubio and NSA Waltz on call with Zelenskyy](#), 19 March 2025

<sup>156</sup> Institute for the Study of War, [Russian offensive campaign assessment](#), 26 March 2025

In statements issued by the White House on 25 March, both sides reportedly agreed to “to develop measures” for implementing previous agreements banning “strikes against [the] energy facilities of Russia and Ukraine”.<sup>157</sup>

On 25 March the Kremlin issued a list of the energy facilities of Russia and Ukraine that it considered to be covered by the “temporary moratorium”, including oil refineries, oil and gas pipelines and storage facilities, electricity generation and transmission infrastructure, nuclear power plants and hydroelectric dams. It said that the 30-day moratorium had come into force on 18 March and that “in the event of a violation of the moratorium by either party, the other party has the right to consider itself free from obligations to comply with it”.<sup>158</sup>

In his nightly address on 25 March, President Zelenskyy said it had been agreed “that a ceasefire in our energy sector can begin today”. However, he also went on to accuse Russia of lying about its respect for the moratorium and said that any further strikes by Russia would be faced with “a strong response”.<sup>159</sup> In a post on X on 25 March President Zelenskyy’s Communications Adviser, Dmytro Lytvyn, said that Russia had continued its attacks against Ukrainian energy facilities for almost a week since purportedly agreeing an energy ceasefire:

But the reality is – since March 18, they’ve been hitting our energy sites with bombs, attack drones, and FPV drones. We’re not going into all the details, but there have already been 8 confirmed hits on energy facilities. And every night our air defense forces shoot down nearly a hundred attack drones – and many of those drones were likely targeting other energy facilities.<sup>160</sup>

Russia has also accused Ukraine of breaking the moratorium. At the beginning of April 2025, the Russian Foreign Minister, Sergey Lavrov, said that, while Russia had been “100 percent compliant with that [energy ceasefire] agreement with President Trump”, Russian energy facilities continued to be targeted by Ukrainian drones.<sup>161</sup>

As the Institute for the Study of War has noted, however, “The mechanisms to monitor and address allegations of violations remain unclear”.<sup>162</sup>

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<sup>157</sup> White House, [Outcomes of the United States and Russia Expert Groups on the Black Sea](#) and [Outcomes of the United States and Ukraine Expert Groups on the Black Sea](#), 25 March 2025

<sup>158</sup> President of Russia, [A list of energy facilities of Russia and Ukraine covered by the temporary moratorium on strikes against the energy system, as agreed upon by the Russian and American sides](#), 25 March 2025

<sup>159</sup> President of Ukraine, [Speech](#), 25 March 2025

<sup>160</sup> Dmytro Lytvyn, [@dmtrlytvyn](#), X (formerly Twitter), 25 March 2025 (accessed 26 March 2025)

<sup>161</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, [Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov’s answer to a media question](#), 1 April 2025 and “Ukraine is not complying with the moratorium on strikes targeting energy sites”, [The International Affairs](#), 2 April 2025

<sup>162</sup> Institute for the Study of War, Russian offensive campaign assessment,

## A ceasefire in the Black Sea: With caveats

The main focus of talks in Saudi Arabia on 23-25 March, was to advance negotiations on a ceasefire in the Black Sea and to restore safe navigation for commercial shipping.

The White House statements confirmed that both sides had agreed to “ensure safe navigation, eliminate the use of force, and prevent the use of commercial vessels for military purposes in the Black Sea”.<sup>163</sup>

No details of an exact agreement have been released, although it is thought to be based on the [Black Sea Grain Initiative](#) (PDF), an agreement that was brokered with the help of the UN and Turkey in July 2022, and a [UN-Russia Memorandum of Understanding](#) (PDF) that was reached in September 2022.<sup>164</sup> Both agreements allowed for the safe shipment of Ukrainian and Russian grain and related foodstuffs and fertilisers through the Black Sea to reach global markets.

The agreements were extended periodically until Russia withdrew from both in July 2023 having accused Ukraine and the West of “commercialising” what was intended to be a humanitarian initiative and accusing Ukraine of using the humanitarian sea corridor to prepare terrorist attacks.<sup>165</sup> Russia subsequently declared civilian ships in the Black Sea arriving and leaving Ukrainian ports as legitimate military targets.<sup>166</sup>

Russia said at the time that it would immediately re-join the deal if its demands were met, including reconnecting the Russian Agricultural Bank to the SWIFT payment system and lifting sanctions on the sale of Russian grain and fertilisers.<sup>167</sup>

### Russian demands for sanctions relief

President Zelenskyy said that Ukraine would do “everything to ensure that the agreements work out” and that Ukraine was ready to “work as swiftly as possible and with absolute transparency to end the war”.<sup>168</sup>

Russia, however, has said that any ceasefire in the Black Sea can only start once certain sanctions related to its trade in food and fertilisers are lifted. Those measures were reportedly added after talks with the US had concluded.<sup>169</sup>

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<sup>163</sup> White House, [Outcomes of the United States and Russia Expert Groups on the Black Sea](#) and [Outcomes of the United States and Ukraine Expert Groups on the Black Sea](#), 25 March 2025

<sup>164</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, [Excerpt from Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov’s interview with Channel One](#), 25 March 2025

<sup>165</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, [Foreign Ministry statements on the Istanbul agreements](#), 17 July 2023

<sup>166</sup> [Statement of the Russian Ministry of Defence](#), 19 July 2023

<sup>167</sup> [“Ukraine war: wheat prices soar after Russia threatens ships”](#), BBC News, 20 July 2023

<sup>168</sup> President of Ukraine, [Speech](#), 25 March 2025

<sup>169</sup> [“Rubio says US will evaluate Russian demands for Black Sea ceasefire”](#), Reuters, 26 March 2025

A statement released by the Kremlin on 25 March, which echoed the White House statement, said that the US will “help restore Russia’s access to the world market for agricultural and fertiliser exports, lower maritime insurance costs, and enhance access to ports and payment systems for such transactions”. However, it went on to state, unlike the White House statement, that measures related to the Black Sea would only come into force once the following conditions had been met:

the removal of sanctions imposed on Rosselkhozbank (Russian Agricultural Bank) and other financial institutions involved in ensuring international food trade (including fish and fish products) and fertilisers, their reconnection to SWIFT, and opening of relevant correspondent accounts;

the removal of restrictions imposed on trade finance operations;

the removal of sanctions imposed on companies producing and exporting food (including fish and fish products) and fertilisers, as well as restrictions banning insurance companies from working with food cargoes (including fish and fish products) and fertilisers;

the removal of restrictions on servicing ships in ports and sanctions against ships flying the flag of Russia, if they are involved in food trade (including fish and fish products) and fertilisers;

the removal of restrictions on supplies to the Russian Federation of agricultural machinery and other goods used in the production of food (including fish and fish products) and fertilisers.<sup>170</sup>

Those caveats largely mirror the demands made by Russia in 2023 for it to rejoin the Black Sea Grain Initiative (see above).

The Kremlin statement also suggested that vessels would be subject to inspection, in contrast to the White House statement which made no specific reference to verification and monitoring.<sup>171</sup>

### Response to Russia’s demands

President Zelenskyy said Russia’s imposition of caveats was evidence that it had “already started to manipulate” the process and that it “was trying to distort the agreements” that had been reached.<sup>172</sup>

The UK Government said that despite confirmation of an agreement on a naval ceasefire, Russia had “immediately backtracked and placed conditions on the agreements – despite good faith participation from Ukraine” which it said demonstrated that “Putin has clearly shown his lack of commitment to the peace process”.<sup>173</sup>

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<sup>170</sup> President of Russia, [Main outcomes of the Russia and United States expert groups meeting](#), 25 March 2025

<sup>171</sup> As above

<sup>172</sup> President of Ukraine, [Speech](#), 25 March 2025

<sup>173</sup> Prime Minister’s Office, [Press release](#), 27 March 2025

US Secretary of State, Marco Rubio, said that the US is “evaluating” Russia’s demands and would make a decision about next steps after “more fully understand[ing] what the Russian position is, or what they’re asking in exchange, and then we’ll present that to the President”.<sup>174</sup>

## 4.2

## What happens next?

### EU cooperation will be needed on sanctions

Decisions on providing sanctions relief to Russia, and specifically Russia’s demand for the Russian Agricultural Bank to be reconnected to the SWIFT international payments system is not a decision that the United States can take unilaterally. SWIFT is a cooperative society incorporated under Belgian law and is therefore within the EU’s jurisdiction. As the SWIFT website notes:

Swift has no authority to make sanctions decisions. Any decision to impose or to lift sanctions on countries or individual entities rests solely with the competent government bodies and legislators.

Whilst sanctions are imposed independently in different jurisdictions around the world, Swift cannot arbitrarily choose which jurisdiction’s sanction regime to follow. Being incorporated under Belgian law it must instead comply with related EU regulation, as confirmed by the Belgian government.<sup>175</sup>

### 1 What is SWIFT?

The Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunication (SWIFT) is [a service that facilitates secure messaging between banks and other financial institutions](#). This enables financial institutions to perform transactions such as payments and settling trades between themselves. However, [it is not, in itself, a payments or settlement system](#).

Swift is used by more than 11,000 institutions in more than 200 countries and territories around the world. Each bank has its own unique SWIFT code. Swift said that [in 2021, it recorded an average of 42 million messages per day](#).

The organisation is [a cooperative society under Belgian law](#) and its [headquarters are in La Hulpe](#), outside Brussels. As a cooperative, it is owned by its members.

Source: House of Lords Library, [Ukraine sanctions and the Swift system](#), 1 March 2022

<sup>174</sup> [“Rubio says US will evaluate Russian demands for Black Sea ceasefire”](#), Reuters, 26 March 2025

<sup>175</sup> SWIFT, [Compliance](#) (accessed 27 March 2025)

The West has also refuted claims that Russia's food and fertiliser sectors are targeted by Western-led sanctions.<sup>176</sup> Following Russian threats to withdraw from the Black Sea Grain Initiative in 2023, the UK's Office for Financial Sanctions Implementation and the US Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control issued [a fact sheet](#) (PDF) and [guidance](#) outlining the specific exemptions applicable in this sector. The [EU has also issued guidance](#) on exemptions relating to Russian food and agricultural products.<sup>177</sup>

Broader sanctions have also been imposed in concert with G7 allies, including the UK, the European Union and other partners such as Australia and New Zealand. While the US could unilaterally lift its own national sanctions, agreement within the G7 and the EU is likely to be required for any sanctions relief to have maximum effect.<sup>178</sup>

Russia's demands have therefore been called "partly misleading" by some commentators. An article for Euractiv on 27 March 2025 argued that "Russia's bargaining in the Black Sea grain deal is seen as Moscow wanting to feel out if it can start eroding the EU's sanctions regime".<sup>179</sup>

European Commission Spokesperson, Aitta Hipper, said on 26 March that "the end of the Russian unprovoked and unjustified aggression in Ukraine and unconditional withdrawal of all Russian military forces from the entire territory of Ukraine would be one of the main preconditions to amend or lift sanctions".<sup>180</sup>

- Sanctions against Russia are examined in detail in Library research briefing, [Sanctions against Russia \(February 2022 to January 2025\)](#).

## Further talks?

Ahead of talks in Saudi Arabia towards the end of March 2025, Russia made clear that it viewed the US as its "main counterpart" in any discussions over a potential ceasefire and peace agreement, and in its statement following the

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<sup>176</sup> Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, [Press release](#), 17 July 2023

<sup>177</sup> Office of Financial Sanctions Implementation, [Humanitarian assistance and food security factsheet: Understanding UK and US sanctions and their interconnection with Russia](#), June 2023 (PDF); HM Government, [Russia sanctions: guidance](#), March 2025 and Council of the European Union, [What do EU sanctions against Russia NOT do?](#) (accessed 27 March 2025)

<sup>178</sup> See Atlantic Council, [Experts react: What to know about the US-led Black Sea ceasefire deal with Russia and Ukraine](#), 25 March 2025

<sup>179</sup> "US needs EU consent for Black Sea ceasefire deal with Russia", Euractiv, 27 March 2025

<sup>180</sup> "EU says no sanctions relief for Russia until full military withdrawal from Ukraine", The Moscow Times, 26 March 2025 and "EU rejects Russian ceasefire demand for sanctions relief", The Financial Times, 26 March 2025

Trump-Putin phone call, the Kremlin confirmed its intention to “continue efforts aimed at reaching a settlement in Ukraine bilaterally”.<sup>181</sup>

That sentiment was echoed in both the Kremlin statement and the White House statement of 25 March 2025 after talks in Saudi Arabia had concluded.<sup>182</sup>

At the time of writing, no schedule has been set for further talks on a settlement in Ukraine. US frustration with Russia has surfaced after President Putin suggested on 28 March that an interim government be installed in Ukraine, under the supervision of the UN, which could then hold elections for a more “capable government” with which Russia could begin peace talks.<sup>183</sup> Russia has repeatedly said that it will not negotiate with President Zelenskyy, who it considers to be an illegitimate leader.<sup>184</sup> President Trump expressed his anger with President Putin, saying that such proposals were not “going in the right location” and that “new leadership means you’re not gonna have a deal for a long time”.<sup>185</sup> He suggested, not for the first time, that the US would consider imposing sanctions in response.<sup>186</sup>

In an interview with the Russian Foreign Ministry’s journal, *International Affairs*, on 1 April, Deputy Foreign Minister, Sergey Ryabkov went one step further saying that Russia had not seen “any signals from either Trump or Ukraine” that it could achieve a longer-term peace, beyond the 30-day ceasefire proposal. He said that Russia could not accept the US proposals as they currently stand, as they fail to address what Russia has referred to as “the root causes of the conflict” (see [Prioritising a Russia-Ukraine peace agreement](#)).<sup>187</sup>

Following a meeting between Russian and Chinese officials on 1 April 2025, the Russian Foreign Ministry was reported by the Russian news agency TASS to have said:

The Russian side stressed that to achieve a comprehensive, just and lasting peace settlement, it is necessary to unconditionally eliminate the root causes of the conflict, including dissolving threats to Russia's security emanating from

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<sup>181</sup> “US is Russia’s main counterpart in talks to end war. Kremlin says”, *The Kyiv Independent*, 13 February 2025 and President of Russia, [Telephone conversation with President of the United States Donald Trump](#), 18 March 2025

<sup>182</sup> President of Russia, [Main outcomes of the Russia and United States expert groups meeting](#), 25 March 2025 and White House, [Outcomes of the United States and Russia Expert Groups on the Black Sea](#), 25 March 2025

<sup>183</sup> “Putin calls for temporary UN-led administration of Ukraine to end war”, *Novaya Gazeta Europe*, 28 March 2025

<sup>184</sup> “After Ukraine peace summit, questions remains whether Russia will come to the table”, *Radio Free Europe*, 17 June 2024. President Zelenskyy’s term expired in March 2024. Under the constitutional terms of martial law elections cannot be held in Ukraine until the conflict is over.

<sup>185</sup> “Russia still ‘working with US’ after Trump says he is angry with Putin”, *BBC News*, 31 March 2025

<sup>186</sup> “Trump says he’s ‘very angry’ and ‘pissed off’ at Putin during an NBC News interview”, *NBC News*, 30 March 2025

<sup>187</sup> [Interview with Deputy Foreign Minister Sergey Ryabkov](#), *International Affairs*, 1 April 2025 (in Russian) and “Russia cannot accept US ceasefire proposal in Ukraine. Deputy FM says”, *The Moscow Times*, 1 April 2025

the territory of Ukraine as a result of NATO's expansion to the east, as well as putting an end to Kiev's stomping on the rights of the Russian-speaking population. Moscow is open to realistic peace initiatives and mediation proposals that take into account Russian interests.<sup>188</sup>

In the meantime, Russia continues to make territorial gains along the frontline in eastern Ukraine while Ukrainian forces have almost completely withdrawn from the Russian region of Kursk.<sup>189</sup> President Zelenskyy had previously expressed hope that holding Russian territory would provide leverage and strengthen Ukraine's hand in any subsequent peace negotiations.<sup>190</sup>

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<sup>188</sup> [“Russia open to realistic peace initiatives, mediation offers on Ukraine- Foreign Ministry”](#), TASS, 2 April 2025

<sup>189</sup> Institute for the Study of War, [Russian offensive campaign assessment](#), 1 April 2025

<sup>190</sup> [“Ukraine’s army escapes from Kursk by the skin of its teeth”](#), The Economist, 17 March 2025

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