

Burnham hosts Zelensky as Europe rebuffs Trump's Russia-Ukraine policy

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British Prime Minister Andy Burnham hosted Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky on Wednesday “to underline the UK’s rock-solid support for Ukraine for as long as it takes,” in the words of a government statement.

The Saturday before, US President Donald Trump had announced a deal to buy diesel from the Russian government, undermining US and European sanctions. He claimed an “energy ceasefire” would now be in operation in the Ukraine war, making clear its primary purpose for him was to protect the Russian refineries supplying the fuel.

Neither Kyiv nor Moscow confirmed any agreement. The Ukrainian government said it would support such a ceasefire and, at time of writing, according to Russian reports, had not struck energy infrastructure in Russia since Trump’s announcement.

Russia confirmed Wednesday that it had struck six thermal plants and a substation supplying Kyiv and its surroundings, and in the Kharkiv region, overnight. There has been wide reporting of a Russian strike the same night on an oil depot in Lutsk, following strikes on a gas production facility and power station in Kharkiv earlier in the week.

As Trump made his announcement, talks between the Ukrainians and Trump’s Middle East envoy Steve Witkoff and son-in-law Jared Kushner were ongoing in Miami. In Reuters’ reporting, according to three sources, Witkoff and Kushner “told the Ukrainians... that Russian President Vladimir Putin was not prepared to negotiate”.

Trump’s representatives argued for a halt to Ukrainian strikes on refineries and that the diesel deal might “soften” the Kremlin’s position. One source explained, “The idea was that the US could go back to Russia and say ‘See, the Ukrainians stopped striking

and we gave you ?this deal. Now it’s your turn to do something.’”

Zelensky’s public criticisms of the diesel deal earned a threat from Trump that he “he’d better damn well stop” and a suggestion that “It’s time for Ukraine to get a new president... who can make a deal.” Zelensky, he told reporters, “wants to make problems for the world.”

The European powers, which are overwhelmingly responsible for funding Ukraine’s war effort after the withdrawal of American funds, rallied around the Ukrainian president. Italy’s Georgia Meloni said of Trump’s diesel agreement: “It provides Moscow with legitimacy as its bombs continue to fall on Ukrainian cities, generates new revenue to finance the war, and implicitly weakens the effectiveness of sanctions.”

Burnham’s invitation to Zelensky aligned the UK with these efforts. It came just a few days after the Labour Prime Minister visited German Chancellor Friedrich Merz to talk up closer military and economic ties. He followed that with an announcement that Russia had sought to influence the outcome of the Brexit vote, urging MPs to help him pursue a “better deal with the EU”.

The specifics of Burnham’s promises to the Ukrainian president underscore why this move closer to the European powers is necessary for the British ruling class. Though Burnham offered to “go further and faster in our support to back your courageous fight,” there was little new he could actually deliver.

Vague statements were made about directing ministers “to draw up further sanctions, military aid, and fiscal packages” and urging “partners to fully implement an equivalent ban on Russian LNG”. However, the UK’s only concrete proposal was to “accelerate £10 million” of a £45 million package of

surface-to-air Lightweight Multirole Missiles, which have proved effective at dealing with Russia's increasingly prevalent jet-powered drones.

Ukraine is heavily outmatched by Russian drone and missile attacks, which have escalated rapidly since progress on the frontline slowed to a crawl. Russian forces have placed a particular focus on disabling Ukraine's energy infrastructure, with 2.4 times as many strikes on these targets so far in 2026 compared to the same period last year, intended to demoralise Ukrainian society through the harsh winter.

The UK's offer of course does little to shift the balance. Equalising the air war as Ukraine appears to have managed on land would require resources currently far beyond any single European power, whose rearmament has only just begun. Britain's drawing closer to Europe is part of efforts to marshal their combined economic and military strength to pursue a war which Trump's transactional approach to Putin threatens to undermine—adding to the difficulties created by his trade war measures against the European powers, including the UK.

Burnham and the Europeans are still attempting to maintain at least a degree of US involvement in Ukraine. The UK government statement spoke of putting pressure on Putin “to respect the United States’ calls for an energy ceasefire.” Whatever continued commitment they secure from Trump, the Europeans’ main hope is that it could be rapidly escalated again by a new administration representing the majority view of the military and security apparatus.

This faction extended its hand through an editorial in the *Wall Street Journal* on Tuesday. The paper highlighted a recent speech by NATO's Supreme Allied Commander Europe Gen. Alexis Grynkewich for helping to “counter signals out of Washington that the U.S. is ready to let Europe deal with its own problems.” It added the admonition that Grynkewich had struck a “discordant note” by stipulating that the alliance would not seek to “impose a strategic defeat on our adversary”.

Discussion of support for the Ukraine war will occupy the whole second day of the European Council Summit being held Thursday-Friday. A draft of the Summit's conclusions has, according to Euronews, been amended to note, “The European Council regrets the United States’ decision to temporarily lift sanctions

on Russian diesel.”

The division between the White House and the European capitals is over two strategies for Ukraine's domination. The policy of the majority of the European and American ruling class is to force a Russian withdrawal and secure their complete political and financial control over Ukraine, ideally including Crimea and with the hope of shattering the Putin government in the process. Trump veers between aiding this strategy and making moves to secure Ukraine's resources and access to Russia's also in partnership with the Putin government, excluding the Europeans.

For the Ukrainian working class, these are different versions of the same exploitation and oppression. They have no allies in the White House, Brussels, or any of the halls of power of Europe and America. Ending the slaughter and destruction means linking arms with a Russian working class ultimately facing the same fate, in a joint socialist struggle against war and its authors.

Their allies are the workers of Europe and America, who have every interest in bringing a stop to a conflict which increasingly threatens war between nuclear-armed powers.



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