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Ukraine War Update: Battlefield Stalemate and Shifting Western Support

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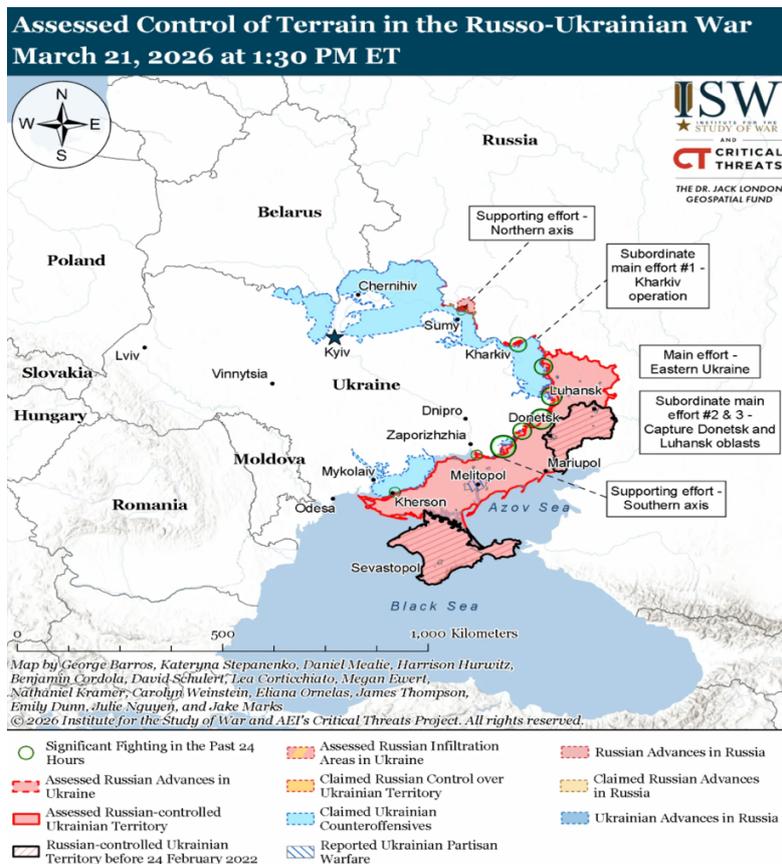
Ukraine War Update: Battlefield Stalemate and Shifting Western Support

24 March 2026

Executive Summary

- ✦ The Russia–Ukraine war has entered its fourth year with largely static front lines and Russia still controlling about 20 percent of Ukrainian territory.
- ✦ Fighting continues as a war of attrition with limited Ukrainian advances, heavy casualties, and slow territorial changes on the battlefield.
- ✦ Both sides increasingly rely on long-range strikes including drones and missiles targeting cities, energy infrastructure, and logistical networks.
- ✦ International support dynamics are shifting as US attention moves to other conflicts while the European Union increases financial and military assistance to Ukraine.

Key Picture: Ukraine War 2026: Battlefield Stasis and the Transition to European Support



Source: [ISW](#)

Recent Developments in the Russia–Ukraine War

Four years after the start of Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022, the conflict remains one of the most significant wars in Europe since the Second World War.¹ Russia launched the invasion with attacks across Ukraine by land, air, and sea, beginning a large-scale phase of the broader Russo-Ukrainian war and triggering a major humanitarian, economic, and geopolitical crisis.²

As the war reaches its fourth anniversary, the front lines have shifted only slowly, with Russia still controlling around 20% of Ukrainian territory.³ Recent developments include limited Ukrainian territorial gains and efforts to halt Russian advances⁴, continued large-scale drone and missile strikes on cities and infrastructure⁵, and ongoing international diplomatic efforts and military support for Ukraine, though peace negotiations remain stalled.⁶ These developments illustrate how the war has entered a prolonged phase characterised by incremental battlefield changes, persistent escalation through aerial attacks, and continued international involvement.

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Battlefield Developments and Territorial Control

Four years into the full-scale invasion, the battlefield situation in Ukraine continues to evolve slowly, with limited territorial changes despite sustained military operations on both sides. Recent battlefield developments suggest limited Ukrainian advances alongside continuing Russian offensives.⁷ Ukrainian forces have reportedly pushed Russian troops back in parts of southeastern Ukraine, including areas linked to operations around the Dnipropetrovsk region, reclaiming several hundred square kilometres of territory during counteroffensives in early 2026.⁸ At the same time, Ukrainian advances have generally remained limited and incremental, reflecting the difficult operational environment and heavily fortified Russian defensive positions.

As stated previously, despite these gains, the broader territorial balance of the war has changed little. Russia continues to control around one-fifth of Ukraine’s territory, and the overall front line remains relatively static with only gradual territorial shifts.⁹ The conflict therefore continues with both sides sustaining heavy losses while attempting small tactical advances rather than achieving decisive breakthroughs. Estimates suggest the combined casualties of Russian and Ukrainian forces may reach up to two million by the spring of 2026, illustrating the scale of the ongoing human and military costs of the conflict.¹⁰

Continued Strikes and Escalation Risks

Recent developments also show that the war is increasingly being fought through long-range strikes against cities, infrastructure, and logistical targets far beyond the immediate front line.¹¹ Russia has continued to use missiles, drones, and artillery against Ukrainian urban areas and critical infrastructure, with recent attacks in Kharkiv again causing civilian deaths and damage to residential buildings.¹² These strikes underline the continuing vulnerability of Ukrainian cities and the extent to which aerial bombardment remains central to Russia’s conduct of the war.

At the same time, Ukraine has expanded its use of long-range drones to strike targets inside Russia, including oil export and energy infrastructure linked to supply chains and military logistics.¹³ For example, Ukrainian drone attacks disrupted operations at the Sheskhari terminal near Novorossiysk on the Black Sea coast, contributing to a decline in Russian oil exports and delays in tanker operations.¹⁴ Russia has also accused the United Kingdom of involvement in a Ukrainian Storm Shadow strike on a military-industrial facility in Bryansk, warning that such attacks risk further escalation.¹⁵ Together, these developments suggest that the conflict is evolving into a form of deep-strike warfare, in which both sides increasingly target infrastructure and logistics far from the battlefield itself.

Diplomatic Negotiations and Stalled Peace Efforts

Alongside military developments, diplomatic efforts to resolve the conflict have continued throughout the war, although with limited success. Since Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, several rounds of negotiations and mediation attempts have taken place between Russian and Ukrainian representatives. The first

talks began only days after the invasion on the Belarus–Ukraine border, followed by additional meetings in Turkey in March 2022 where negotiators discussed ceasefire arrangements, security guarantees, and possible neutrality provisions for Ukraine.¹⁶

More recent developments in 2026 indicate renewed diplomatic engagement but little tangible progress toward ending the war. In early 2026, representatives from the United States, Russia, and Ukraine reportedly held trilateral talks in Abu Dhabi, marking one of the first high-level diplomatic contacts involving all parties in several years. The discussions focused on possible frameworks for ending the conflict, including ceasefire conditions and broader security arrangements, but they ended without a breakthrough.¹⁷

Negotiations remain constrained by fundamental disagreements: Russia continues to insist that Ukraine recognise its control over territories it occupies, while Ukrainian officials have repeatedly stated that Kyiv will not accept territorial concessions as part of a peace settlement. These opposing positions have made meaningful progress toward a negotiated settlement difficult, and analysts continue to view the prospects for a near-term peace agreement as limited.^{18,19}

Shifting International Support for Ukraine

Recent geopolitical developments have raised concerns that international attention and resources are increasingly being diverted away from Ukraine. The escalation of conflicts involving the United States in both Venezuela and Iran has placed new demands on American military and political capacity, potentially reducing Washington’s focus on supporting Kyiv. Policymakers have warned that such developments risk weakening the coordinated Western response to Russia’s invasion.²⁰ In particular, Ukrainian officials have expressed concern that global attention is shifting toward the Middle East conflict, creating opportunities for Russia to consolidate its position in Ukraine while international diplomatic and military priorities are redirected elsewhere.²¹

Recent developments have also raised concerns that the United States may be reducing its level of support for Ukraine as global priorities shift. Past US policy decisions have suggested a gradual scaling back of assistance, including delays to energy support programmes and²² and pauses in some forms of military and financial aid to Kyiv.²³ In addition, some recent US policy decisions, such as a temporary easing of sanctions on Russian oil during the Iran crisis to stabilise global energy markets, have been criticised by Ukraine, arguing that such measures could indirectly benefit Russia’s war effort.²⁴

At the same time, these developments have reinforced the perception that European states may need to assume a greater role in sustaining Ukraine’s defence. With the United States increasingly preoccupied with other global conflicts and showing signs of scaling back its direct involvement, European governments have begun to expand their financial and military commitments to Ukraine. In recent years the European Union has significantly increased military assistance and approved major financial support packages, including a proposed €90 billion loan for Ukraine for budgetary and military support in 2026–27.²⁵

Analysts argue that Europe is gradually replacing the United States as Ukraine’s primary donor and security backer, reflecting a broader shift in the transatlantic balance of responsibility for European security.²⁶ These trends suggest that the war in Ukraine is increasingly embedded within a wider global geopolitical environment, where shifting strategic priorities and competing crises influence the level and structure of international support for Kyiv.

This evolving balance of transatlantic support highlights a broader transformation in European security dynamics, where the war in Ukraine is becoming embedded within a wider system of global geopolitical competition. Whether this shift leads to greater European strategic autonomy or exposes new vulnerabilities in Ukraine’s support network will play a critical role in shaping the future course of the conflict.

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