

VOA NEWS

February 13, 2025

Hi, I'm VOA's Alexis Strobe with your worldwide news update.

President Donald Trump discussed the war in Ukraine on Wednesday in phone calls with Russian President Vladimir Putin and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy. Reuters correspondent Olivia Zollino reports.

In a post on his social media platform after speaking to Putin, Trump said the two leaders had agreed that negotiations should start immediately.

Russia occupies around a fifth of Ukraine and has demanded Kyiv cede more territory and be rendered permanently neutral under any peace deal. Ukraine demands Russia withdraw from captured territory and says it must receive NATO membership or equivalent security guarantees.

Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth on Wednesday said NATO membership was unrealistic, as was recovering the territory Ukraine had lost.

"Chasing this illusionary goal will only prolong the war and cause more suffering."

Speaking from Kyiv Wednesday, U.S. Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent said a mineral deal between Kyiv and Washington would provide Ukraine with a so-called post-war "security shield."

"... and we believe that this is an important signal to the world, to the Russian leadership, that we stand together."

Trump has said he wants \$500 billion in rare earth minerals from Ukraine. Zelenskyy said Kyiv would study the draft agreement presented by the U.S.

That was Reuters correspondent Olivia Zollino.

Israel's defense minister says "all hell will break loose" if Hamas does not release three hostages as planned this weekend. The threat on Wednesday comes as mediators work to keep the fragile cease-fire from collapsing.

The militant group has accused Israel of failing to meet its commitments under the deal and threatened to delay the next release of hostages. A Hamas official now says there are positive signals for the release.

The dispute has been a major test for the fragile cease-fire, along with President Donald Trump's proposal to relocate Palestinians out of devastated Gaza.

This is VOA News.

Tulsi Gabbard, a former U.S. representative with little intelligence experience, was sworn on Wednesday as the top U.S. spy. Reuters correspondent Freddie Joyner reports.

Gabbard now will oversee the 18-agency intelligence community, including the CIA, and act as President Donald Trump's top adviser on intelligence issues.

With little experience in this area, she was considered to be one of Trump's most controversial picks. Yet every Republican besides Senator Mitch McConnell, the party's former leader in the chamber, lined up behind the nominee.

White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt was asked about this at her briefing Wednesday.

"We're greatly disappointed in any Republican who chooses willfully to vote against the president's exceptionally qualified cabinet nominees and picks to lead his America First administration."

By comparison, no Democrats or independents voted in favor of Gabbard.

Gabbard, a 43-year-old former Democrat, had faced bipartisan questions about past statements seen as supporting U.S. adversaries and lack of experience that would have prepared her to manage a \$100 billion budget.

That was Reuters correspondent Freddie Joyner.

Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán is hosting Alice Weidel, the Alternative for Germany party's candidate for chancellor, a rare meeting between a European leader and Germany's far-right party.

Speaking at a news conference following their meeting Wednesday, Orbán praised AfD, calling it "the future" and endorsing its stance on immigration and the economy.

The meeting signaled a shift in Orbán's approach to AfD, which he previously kept at a distance.

The ACLU sues for access to migrants flown to Guantanamo in February. AP correspondent Haya Panjwani reports.

Civil rights attorneys have sued the Trump administration to gain access to detained migrants who they say have been flown to Guantanamo Bay and held there without being able to consult lawyers or speak to relatives.

American Civil Liberties Union lawyers filed the federal lawsuit in Washington, D.C. They say this is the first time in U.S. history that the government has detained non-citizens on civil immigration charges at the U.S. naval base in Cuba.

For decades, the base primarily was used to detain foreigners associated with the September 11, 2001 attacks.

Haya Panjwani, Washington.

Congo's largest church organizations have met with Rwanda-backed rebels in the country's east to advocate for peace and dialogue after weeks-long fighting. The meeting Wednesday comes weeks after the M23 rebels moved into Goma, the region's largest city, and captured it before advancing deeper into the neighboring South Kivu province.

One of the church leaders, Bishop Donatien Nshole, said "the meeting was an opportunity to seek an end to the war as soon as possible, because we remain convinced the solution to this crisis is not military."

The M23 rebels are the most prominent of more than 100 armed groups vying for control of Congo's mineral-rich east.

That wraps up this update, but the world and news never stop. For additional updates, visit our website. I'm Alexis Strobe, VOA News.