



NEWS

US Senators, Administration Agree To Advance Russia Sanctions Bill; Kyiv Hails Move

By **Alex Raufoglu** July 10, 2026 22:56 CET



US Republican Senator Lindsey Graham meets the news media in Kyiv on July 10.

WASHINGTON -- A bipartisan group of US senators said they had reached an agreement with the Trump administration to advance long-delayed legislation aimed at imposing tougher economic penalties on Russia and countries that continue to support Moscow's war economy.

The breakthrough, announced on July 10 as Republican Senator Lindsey Graham visited Kyiv for talks with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, could give President Donald Trump a powerful new tool to pressure Kremlin leader Vladimir Putin as Washington seeks an end to Russia's war, now in its fifth year.

Graham said the agreement with the White House clears the way for the bill to move forward, arguing that the legislation would allow the United States to punish countries helping Russia evade Western sanctions while creating leverage for negotiations.



SEE ALSO:

Ukraine Intensifies Attacks On Russian Energy Assets, Reportedly Forcing Halt To Azov Traffic

“We’ve reached an agreement with the White House on a version of the Russian sanctions bill that they will support. It means it’s going to become law,” Graham told reporters in Kyiv after concluding his 10th wartime visit to Ukraine.

The legislation, known as the **Sanctioning Russia Act**, has been under negotiation for months by Graham and Democratic Senator Richard Blumenthal of Connecticut, along with Democrat Jeanne Shaheen of New Hampshire and Republican Roger Wicker of Mississippi.

In a joint **statement**, the four senators said they expected to release the updated legislation soon, describing the agreement as a major step toward strengthening pressure on Moscow.

“As Russia intensifies its slaughter of civilians, it is imperative that the legislative and executive branches work together to create tools to exact a heavy price on those who buy Russian oil and natural gas, fueling the Putin war machine,” they said.

Targeting Russia's Sanctions Escape Routes

At the heart of the bill is an effort to close what US lawmakers describe as a major weakness in the existing sanctions regime: Russia's ability to continue earning billions of dollars from energy exports through third countries.

While many Western nations have restricted direct purchases of Russian oil and other commodities, Moscow has redirected exports through intermediaries, particularly major buyers in Asia.

Graham said the revised legislation would target countries that continue purchasing discounted Russian oil and then helping Moscow maintain revenue streams that support its military campaign.

The senator said the bill specifically focuses on five countries that have been circumventing sanctions by purchasing Russian energy for resale.



SEE ALSO:

Omsk Residents Describe 'Huge Shock' At Surprise Ukrainian Attack

“This bill has 85 co-sponsors,” Graham said, referring to the bipartisan support it has attracted in the Senate.

“We’ve been working with the administration, Senator Blumenthal and myself, Senator Shaheen, to make sure that it was acceptable to the administration -- that it was written in a way they could support.”

The original version of the legislation introduced in 2025 included provisions allowing the president to impose sweeping tariffs, including a proposed 500 percent tariff on countries purchasing Russian-origin petroleum and uranium, as well as a similar tariff on remaining Russian imports into the United States.

It remains unclear what changes were made to the legislation during negotiations with the White House.

Graham said the goal was not only to punish Russia’s supporters but also to encourage countries to move away from Russian energy supplies.

“I’ve never been more optimistic than I am today,” Graham said. “We have the formula to end this war. Help Ukraine be more lethal. Let those supporting Russia know it’s going to

be a price to be paid if you keep doing it. And try to find an off-ramp, not to humiliate Putin, but to end this war so that Ukraine will thrive and survive.”

From Tensions To Cooperation

The renewed sanctions push comes as relations between Trump and Zelenskyy appear to have shifted significantly after months of uncertainty.

The two leaders met earlier this week on the sidelines of the NATO summit in Ankara, where they discussed military cooperation and efforts to end the war.

The meeting represented a sharp contrast with their confrontation in the Oval Office in February 2025, when Trump criticized Zelenskyy and accused him of failing to show sufficient gratitude for US support.



Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky (left) meets with US President Donald Trump on the sidelines of the NATO Summit in Ankara on July 8.

Speaking alongside Zelenskyy in Ankara, Trump said the relationship between the two leaders had improved dramatically.

“We’ve actually developed a good relationship,” Trump said. “It’s hard to believe, right? From the Oval Office to now, I think we’ve developed a very good relationship.”

During the meeting, Trump gave Kyiv political support for two long-sought initiatives: allowing Ukraine to co-produce Patriot missile interceptors and moving forward with a bilateral drone agreement.

Senior US officials told RFE/RL on July 10 that Trump has expressed support for the updated sanctions legislation, though the White House has not publicly released details of the agreement.

The shift marks a notable change after Senate Majority Leader John Thune of South Dakota previously delayed movement on the bill to give Trump room to pursue diplomatic talks with Putin.

The sanctions effort had also faced resistance in Congress. A previous attempt to advance the bill in December stalled after Democrats raised concerns about granting the president broad tariff authority while a related Supreme Court case was pending.

The legislation gained renewed momentum after frustration grew over Moscow’s refusal to halt its offensive and after earlier peace proposals faced criticism from some lawmakers who argued they offered excessive concessions to Russia.

Kyiv Welcomes New Pressure On Moscow

Ukrainian officials welcomed the congressional breakthrough, arguing that economic pressure on Russia is essential to weakening Moscow’s ability to sustain the war.

Vladyslav Vlasiuk, Zelenskyy’s commissioner for sanctions policy, told RFE/RL on July 10 that Russia’s energy revenues remain one of the main pillars supporting its military operations.



SEE ALSO:

Central Asia's Fuel Crisis: The Cost Of Russian Dependence And Short-Term Thinking

“Russia has earned roughly \$58 billion from oil and petroleum product exports to China and India in the first half of this year alone,” Vlasiuk said.

“Those revenues are financing Russia’s war against Ukraine, paying for missiles, drones, and continued aggression. If the Kremlin is deprived of these oil revenues, it will have a much stronger incentive to come to the negotiating table, and this bill is clearly aimed at achieving exactly that.”

After meeting with Graham in Kyiv, Zelenskyy said battlefield strength and economic pressure must work together to bring about a diplomatic solution.

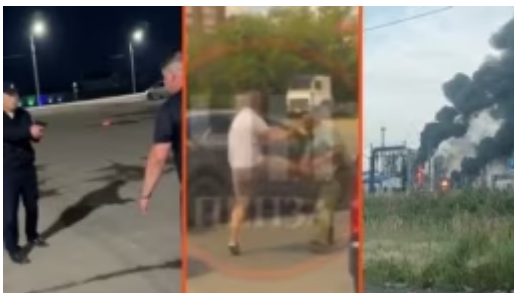
“The stronger Ukraine is on the battlefield, the greater the chances that diplomacy will ultimately succeed,” Zelenskyy wrote on social media.

He also called for the rapid implementation of agreements reached with Trump on Patriot missile production and other defense cooperation.

'Important Signal' To Moscow

US-based advocacy groups that have pushed for tougher sanctions against Russia said the agreement between Congress and the White House sends a warning to Moscow that sanctions evasion will become increasingly costly.

Daniel Balson, advocacy director for the nonprofit Razom for Ukraine, told RFE/RL that the legislation would make it harder for Russia to sustain its military campaign through global energy sales.



“This welcome announcement sends an important signal to the Kremlin: No amount of creative financial shenanigans will allow it to fund its illegal war in perpetuity,” Balson said.

“Ukraine has shifted the tide on the battlefield. Now Ukraine’s partners are turning up the pressure economically. We urge the Senate to

SEE ALSO:

Brawls Break Out At Russian Gas Stations Amid Anger Over Fuel Crisis

move quickly and pass this important legislation.”

Balson said supporters of Ukraine believe the combination of military assistance and economic pressure could force Moscow to

reconsider its strategy.

“Russia is going to lose this war,” he said. “The Ukrainian people know it. America’s allies know it. President Trump knows it. And the United States Congress knows it. It’s high time Vladimir Putin figured it out and brought what’s left of his occupying army home.”

The next test for the legislation will come in Congress, where lawmakers must finalize the text and determine how quickly the measure can move toward a vote.

**Alex Raufoglu**

Alex Raufoglu is RFE/RL's senior correspondent in Washington, D.C.

This item is part of

News

Russia

Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty © 2026 RFE/RL, Inc. All Rights Reserved.