

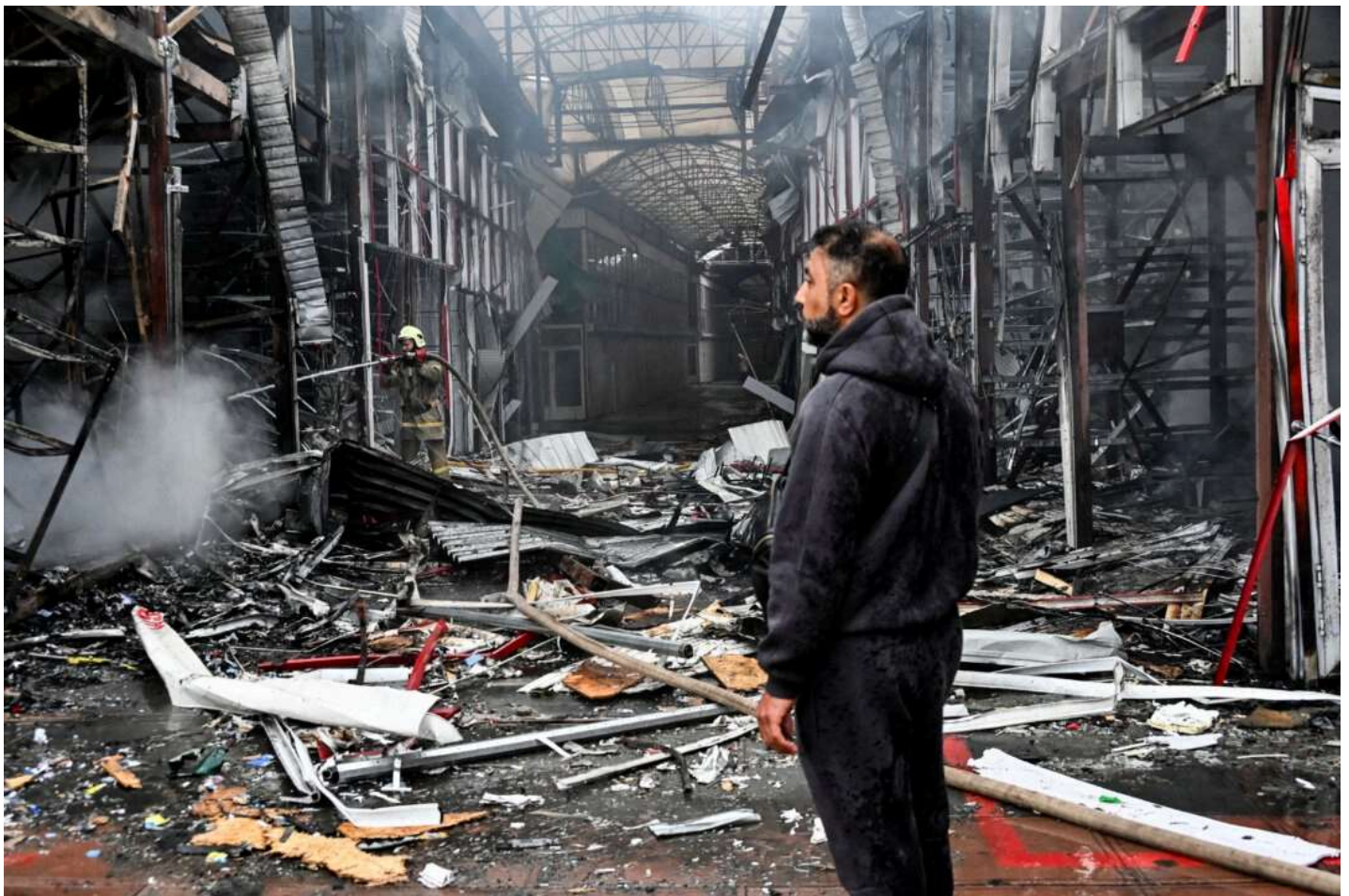
Russia Launches Its Largest Drone Attack Since Invasion Started, Says Ukraine

The drone strike comes ahead of a highly anticipated call between U.S. President Donald Trump and Russian President Vladimir Putin.

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Save



A man stands as a Ukrainian fireman puts out a fire at the "Barabashovo" market following a drone strike in Kharkiv, Ukraine, on May 6, 2025. Sergey Bobok/AFP via Getty Images



By Jacob Burg

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Russia on May 18 launched its most significant and widespread drone attack on Ukraine since the start of the war, leveling homes and

leaving at least one woman dead, according to Ukraine officials.

The assault comes just one day before a [critical phone call](#) between Russian President Vladimir Putin and U.S. President Donald Trump to discuss a potential cease-fire to end the war, which began with Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine.

Ukraine's intelligence service said it believes Russia had planned to fire an intercontinental ballistic missile later on May 18 as a show of strength toward the West ahead of potential peace talks. Moscow did not offer an immediate response to Ukraine's allegation.

In an effort to smooth over relations with the United States following February's disastrous clash in the Oval Office, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy met with U.S. Vice President JD Vance and Secretary of State Marco Rubio on May 18 during Pope Leo XIV's inauguration in Vatican City.

Zelenskyy described it as a "good" meeting between the two nations' officials and released pictures of them all sitting at an outdoor table while smiling. The sit-down lasted 40 minutes, according to Ukrainian media.

"I reaffirmed that Ukraine is ready to be engaged in real diplomacy and underscored the importance of a full and unconditional cease-fire as soon as possible," Zelenskyy said.

After Leo's inaugural Mass at Vatican City, Zelenskyy met the new pontiff.

On May 16, Ukraine and Russia had their first in-person negotiations after more than three years of war, facing pressure from Trump to ratify a cease-fire. Trump has repeatedly vowed to bring the costly war to a rapid conclusion.

Both nations offered to exchange 1,000 prisoners but did not reach a final agreement following Moscow's insistence on conditions that a Ukrainian delegation member described as "non-starters."

While speaking at the Munich Security Conference in Washington on May 7, Vance said Russian leadership was [seeking unrealistic concessions](#) in negotiations to end the war.

"Certainly, the first peace offer that the Russians put on the table, our reaction was, 'You're asking for too much.' But this is how negotiations unfold," Vance said.

During a May 9 [interview](#) with Fox News, he said Putin had demanded that Ukraine surrender some territories that Russia had not even occupied or captured.

European Leaders to Talk With Trump Ahead of Putin Call

German Chancellor Friedrich Merz said on May 18 that he and the leaders of the UK, France, and Poland planned to speak with Trump before the U.S. president's May 19 phone call with Putin.

Last week, the four European leaders visited Kyiv and called for new sanctions on Moscow unless Putin agrees to a cease-fire. Zelenskyy said the leaders joined him during a May 16 phone call with Trump after the Russia-Ukraine negotiations wrapped.

Putin [opted to skip](#) attending the Russia-Ukraine peace talks in Turkey on May 16, with Russian presidential aide Vladimir Medinsky leading Moscow's delegation in Istanbul.

On May 17, Trump said he [would speak](#) to Putin by phone at 10 a.m. on May 19.

"The subjects of the call will be, stopping the 'bloodbath' that is killing, on average, more than 5,000 Russian and Ukrainian soldiers a week, and trade," Trump wrote in a social media post.

Tom Ozimek, Andrew Thornebrooke, and Reuters contributed to this report.

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