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Kremlin Confirms Failed Backchannel Contact With U.K. Security Adviser

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Kremlin foreign policy adviser Yuri Ushakov. **Sofya Sandurskaya / TASS**

Russian presidential aide Yury Ushakov held a one-off phone call with British national security adviser Jonathan Powell early this year, the Kremlin confirmed on Wednesday.

Earlier, the Financial Times reported that Powell had called Ushakov in January in an attempt to open a confidential line of communication with Moscow, but the conversation "did not go well" and failed to establish a regular line of contact.

"There really was a discussion, that's correct. But the exchange didn't continue," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters during a daily briefing.

"[Powell] was very eager to explain the Europeans' position but showed little willingness to listen to ours. Naturally, without the possibility of a mutual exchange of views, the conversation didn't go any further than that," he said.

FT's reporting suggested the call was London's independent initiative backed by some

European allies due to concerns that U.S. President Donald Trump's unpredictable stance on Ukraine could sideline EU interests.

"The worry is that we are outsourcing the discussions with the Russians to the Americans," one European official was quoted as saying in the report.

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Downing Street told FT that it was "normal" for the United Kingdom to engage with Russia through diplomatic channels, but declined to comment further.

Trump took office in January, after which Washington and Moscow resumed direct talks on Ukraine. The U.S. president then met Putin in Alaska in August for a summit that did not lead to a breakthrough on achieving a ceasefire in the war.

FT reported that Powell had not spoken to Ushakov "in recent months," while a European official expressed concern that his outreach "before more pressure is applied" with sanctions was premature.

The U.S. and Britain announced sanctions on Russia's biggest oil companies Rosneft and Lukoil last month.

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