

Russia Open to Discuss Arms Control with US But Seeks ‘Understanding About the Parameters and Principles of Coexistence’

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Bang in the middle of the brouhaha over the decision by the US and its European allies to supply Abram and Leopard battle tanks to Ukraine, Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov messaged to Washington on Thursday that arms control “cannot exist in isolation from military-political and geo-strategic realities” and, therefore, an understanding over “the parameters and principles of coexistence that would minimise the conflict potential” between Russia and the West is an absolute prerequisite of the situation.

Ryabkov said Moscow does not reject to discuss arms control with Washington, but the US complicates a constructive dialogue. In a significant overture, peppered with caveats, he proposed that “The off-charts aggression of the US, who bid on inflicting a ‘strategic defeat’ on Russia in the total hybrid war, initiated against us, has made constructive and fruitful business ‘as usual’ on arms control with Washington almost impossible in principle. Of course, it does not mean that we refuse arms control itself. But this area cannot exist separately from military-political and geo-strategic reality.”

Ryabkov said it is necessary to achieve an understanding with the West [read Washington] to make “viable” decision in these areas. Ryabkov is Russian FO’s point person for relations with the US. His [interview with Kommersant newspaper](#) [in Russian] coincided with the arrival of the new American ambassador Lynne Tracy in Moscow on Thursday.

Customarily in diplomacy, a new envoy augurs a new beginning. And the Russian side is hoping that a productive conversation would be possible with the new envoy, the first lady ambassador to the Kremlin from America, on problematic aspects within Russian-US relations.

On the other hand, Ambassador Tracy begins her tour soon after the announcements that the Western powers led by the US would be sending tanks to equip Ukrainian military,

signifying a serious escalation of US-Russia tensions.

In the western media narrative, the 31 Abram tanks and the Leopard tanks (totalling a hundred or so) are going to be a game changer in the Ukraine conflict. But Moscow has sized up the western move as more of an astute political manoeuvring, necessitated by the recent military setbacks that Kiev suffered and the growing fears of a crushing defeat if Russia launches a major offensive in the coming months.

Quite obviously, Moscow has taken note that it will take several months for the tanks to actually reach Ukraine and be deployed and several months of [intensive training will be necessary](#) for the Ukrainian personnel to be ready to handle the tanks. Tass news agency produced a handful of reports [[here](#), [here](#) and [here](#)] citing authoritative opinion by Russian military experts to the effect that Moscow has the capability to “burn” these western tanks. But Kremlin has refrained from making any threat of retaliation.

In military terms, of course, 100-130 tanks make hardly any difference to the military balance in Ukraine, which is in Russia’s favour. The high probability is that Ukrainian military’s recent defeats may snowball into a rout once Moscow launches its expected grand offensive and give a knockout blow to the Ukrainian military.

The recent visit to Kiev by senior officials of the White House National Security Council and the US State Department, followed by a secret mission by the CIA chief William Burns, highlighted the criticality of the situation. Meanwhile, the long-standing power struggle between the Ukrainian security agencies and the intelligence has burst into the open in the recent weeks causing a [purge of top officials](#) who are closely associated with Zelensky.

Moscow no longer trusts any promises from the Americans, given the long history — starting from former Secretary of State Jim Baker’s promise to Mikhail Gorbachev in 1989 not to expand the NATO eastward “by an inch” — of western betrayals and broken promises.

The influential head of the Russian security council Nikolai Patrushev repeated yesterday that even if the active combat in Ukraine ceases, Moscow doesn’t think that there is going to be any let-up in the US’ proxy war against Russia.

To quote Patrushev,

“Progress in the special military operation in Ukraine indicates that the United States and NATO intend to go ahead with efforts to prolong this military conflict and that they have already become participants in it.” Patrushev underscored that “even with the end of the hot phase of the conflict in Ukraine, the Anglo-Saxon world will not stop their proxy war against Russia and its allies.”

Patrushev said,

“Today’s events in Ukraine are a result of years-long preparations by the US for a hybrid war against Russia and an attempt to prevent the emergence of a multipolar world.”

Patrushev is one of Putin’s closest aides with an association that harks back to their career in the Soviet KGB. Clearly, just when its strategy of “grinding” the Ukrainian forces is succeeding, why should Moscow dither on its tracks?

This is where DFM Ryabkov's interview yesterday with Kommersant become a useful signpost. Ryabkov in effect signals that the door is still open for negotiations with the US. Interestingly, he pointed out that "most successful decisions in the field of arms control coincided or were associated with periods of detente or specific political projects" and were characterised historically by "fairly balanced attitude of the parties to each other's obvious 'red lines' in the field of security."

Indeed, Ryabkov ruled out any "unilateral concessions" by Russia in matters of national security and stressed that the fundamental contradictions will need to be addressed first.

The good part is that there is growing realisation among sections of the elite in Washington also that the US cannot win the proxy war in Ukraine. Coupled with this are the complexities of the US domestic politics, the latest being the issue of classified documents that creates uncertainty for Biden's re-election bid.

Arguably, the spectre that is haunting the Biden Administration is that the military defeat combined with the political tensions within the Ukrainian government could very well lead to the collapse of the Zelensky regime and a meltdown of the country's state apparatus. And all this while the Russian forces, estimated to be in the region of 600,000, are gathering at the gates.

Conceivably, the Biden Administration's top priority at this juncture will be to prevent Moscow from launching the big military offensive so as to gain some respite to revamp the battered Ukrainian military, equip it with advanced weaponry and restore a modicum of military balance in order for the fighting to resume after a pause.

But, just when its strategy of "grinding" the Ukrainian forces is succeeding, why should Moscow dither on its tracks? In fact, Kremlin Spokesman Dmitry Peskov said earlier today that "tensions are really escalating" following Washington's decision regarding tanks and the reported ongoing discussions in western capitals regarding supply of F-16 fighter jets to Ukraine.

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