

## US appears open to negotiating Russia's proposal to ease tensions over Ukraine

Russia outlines normalization path with NATO by demanding end of bloc expansion on its border.

By [Paul Antonopoulos](#)

Global Research, December 20, 2021  
Infobrics

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*Moscow has outlined an eight-point draft treaty of security guarantees that would lead to lower tensions in Europe and defuse the crisis over Ukraine if the West were to adopt it. The demands include ending Ukraine's path towards NATO membership, limiting the deployment of troops and weapons close to Russia's borders, and a return to the pre-1997 status quo, i.e. before NATO's eastward expansion.*

Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov said on Friday that although there was no deadline for beginning talks to ease tensions, Moscow wants to begin negotiations "without delays and without stalling" and stressed that "we can go any place and any time, even tomorrow." He also emphasized that "this is not about us giving some kind of ultimatum, there is none. The thing is that the seriousness of our warning should not be underestimated."

Effectively, he warned that ignoring Moscow's request for discussions could lead to a "military response" similar to the 1962 Cuban missile crisis.

Moscow's call for talks comes as a Ukrainian soldier was killed on Friday during fighting with Donbass defense forces. Although Kiev is amassing forces and attaining new weapon systems like the [US-made Javelin anti-missile system](#), the West lambasts Russia for deploying over 100,000 troops on its border to deter Ukraine from any new military adventures.

US President Joe Biden warned his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin of "sanctions like he's never seen" before should Ukraine be attacked, an unlikely prospect since Moscow has repeatedly stressed that it has no interest in war or territorial expansion in Ukraine. Despite this guarantee though, it has not lessened the Western media campaign to demonize Russia.

The Guardian reported that the "Kremlin's aggressive proposals are likely to be rejected in western capitals as an attempt to formalize a new Russian sphere of influence over eastern Europe." This is extremely problematic as it claims that Moscow's suggestion for Russia and NATO to "not consider each other adversaries" and "resolve all disputes peacefully and refrain from the use of force" is an "aggressive proposal."

It brings to question why the London-based newspaper finds it "aggressive" to resolve disputes peacefully?

Although the British tabloid believes that Moscow’s proposals “are likely to be rejected” by the West, White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki said “there’s no reason we can’t do that moving forward to reduce instability, but we’re going to do that in partnership and coordination with our European allies and partners.”

A senior White House official told reporters on Friday that Washington disagreed with parts of Moscow’s proposal, but was willing to discuss its content.

“We are prepared to discuss them. That said, there are some things in this document that the Russians know will be unacceptable,” the official told reporters on condition of anonymity, demonstrating that the US is willing to negotiate rather than reject everything as The Guardian appears to hope.

Although it is unlikely that the West will stop military exercises in Poland and the Baltic states as the Kremlin hopes, demands like banning Ukraine from joining NATO and limiting the types of weapons near Russia’s borders could find success. The Kremlin likely does not expect all their demands to be met, however the proposals could force negotiations in the context of increased military tensions in eastern Ukraine.

Russia-based experts doubted that the West would accept the proposals, with Dmitry Trenin, director of the Carnegie Moscow Center, explaining that the “publication of Russian proposed agreements with US and NATO on [European security] may suggest that Moscow (rightly) considers their acceptance by the West unlikely.”

Andrei Kortunov, head of the Russian International Affairs Council (RIAC), agreed with Trenin’s assessment and said: “This is a bargaining position — [the Kremlin] is trying to get some degree of partial acceptance. Of course, there is a real risk to making these sorts of demands, especially if the West takes a harsh position, but clearly, the Kremlin thinks that the risk is justified in the circumstances.”

Regardless of whether the Kremlin knew if their proposal would be accepted or not, at the very minimum, an opening for negotiations has been made. It is now in the West’s hands to pursue this opening from Moscow, or face a Russia that has clearly said they will use a “military response” if NATO continues to encroach on its sphere of influence and security interests in Ukraine. It is likely that Washington will explore negotiations with Moscow as it too wants to pool more resources towards opposing and challenging China in Asia-Pacific rather than Russia in Eastern Europe.

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