The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Putin Wants ‘Immediate’ Talks With NATO on Russia’s Security

By Ola Cichowlas for AFP

December 14, 2021



Russian President Vladimir Putin. **kremlin.ru**

Russian President Vladimir Putin said Tuesday that he wants "immediate" talks with the United States and NATO over security guarantees, as tensions soar between Moscow and the West over Ukraine.

The US and its allies have for weeks accused Russia of planning an invasion of its neighbour, warning of a massive coordinated sanctions response should Putin launch an attack.

Tens of thousands of Russian troops are stationed near the borders of ex-Soviet Ukraine, where the West has accused the Kremlin of backing pro-Moscow separatists since 2014.

In a phone call with the Finnish president — whose country has traditionally served as middle ground between Russia and the West — Putin said he wanted security talks to begin without delay.

Related article: Putin Says Russia Has 'Right to Defend its Security' Amid NATO Tensions

He told President Sauli Niinsto that Moscow wants "to immediately launch negotiations with the United States and NATO in order to develop international legal guarantees for the security of our country," the Kremlin said in a statement.

Russia's demands, it said, included stopping NATO from expanding east and the deployment of weapons in neighboring states, including Ukraine.

Putin reiterated the same demands in a phone call with French President Emmanuel Macron later on Tuesday.

In his call with the Finnish president, Putin also accused the Ukrainian leadership of increasingly using "heavy weapons and attack drones" against pro-Russia rebels in its separatist east.

The Russian leader denies planning an invasion, blaming the Western security alliance for the rise in tensions and demanding "legal guarantees" the alliance won't expand eastwards.

Black Sea tensions

U.S. President Joe Biden last week warned Putin of "sanctions like he's never seen" should Russian troops massed on the Ukrainian border launch an attack.

The EU and the G7 met in recent days to coordinate what they warn would be an unprecedented economic sanctions regime if Russia attacks.

Putin's comments come a day after Russia's deputy foreign minister Sergei Ryabkov warned Moscow could act militarily if the talks it demands do not materialize.

"The lack of progress towards a political-diplomatic solution to this problem will lead to the fact that we will respond militarily," Ryabkov told the RIA Novosti state news agency.

Tensions continued to soar Tuesday, with Russia saying it was monitoring a French warship near its borders in the Black Sea.

The Russian army last week said it scrambled three of its jets to escort five French and U.S. military aircraft over the sea.

Putin has accused the West of provoking tensions in the Black Sea, decrying U.S.-led military exercises there.

The Black Sea is a sensitive region for Russia, which controls the Crimean peninsula after annexing it from Ukraine in 2014.

Kiev has been fighting a pro-Russia insurgency in its eastern regions since the annexation. The conflict has claimed more than 13,000 lives.

Ukraine accuses Germany

Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskiy, meanwhile, accused Kiev's ally Germany of blocking a supply of NATO weapons to the country.

"Germany has recently prevented us from getting anti-drone rifles and anti-sniper systems from NATO, which are exclusively defense tools," Zelenskiy said in an interview with Italian newspaper La Repubblica published Tuesday.

"Don't we have the right to have them in the eighth year of the war? Obviously, we do," he added.

A spokesperson for the German foreign ministry said Monday that it could not comment "on the confidential decisions at the heart of the (NATO) alliance at this stage."

Zelenskiy's comments come after Ukraine said in November it was seeking more military aid from its Western allies to deter Russia from an attack.

The Ukraine leader warned of "much higher losses" in the event of an invasion.

"Is Russian society ready to pay with the lives of its sons for the attempt to occupy another part of Ukraine?" he asked.

The West for a long time hesitated to sell arms to Kiev, but Ukraine eventually managed to get some defense systems — including Turkish-made Bayraktar drones.

Kiev's use of the drones in October was met with criticism from Russia and some of its Western allies, including France and Germany.

Original url:
https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2021/12/14/putin-wants-immediate-talks-with-nato-on-russias-security-a75818