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No New Ukraine Talks Until West Responds to Russia's Demands, Moscow Says

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Germany's Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock (L) and her Russian counterpart Sergei Lavrov. **Russian Foreign Ministry / TASS**

Russia is still awaiting the U.S. and NATO's response to its sweeping demands for a new security settlement in Europe, Russia's top diplomat said Tuesday as tensions between Moscow and the West over Ukraine continue to mount.

Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said after a series of high-level talks last week that the United States and NATO promised to provide written responses to Russia's list of proposals. Moscow said last month it sought "legally binding security guarantees" after Western governments warned that Russia's troop buildup could signal an imminent invasion of Ukraine.

Washington and NATO have rejected some of Russia's key demands — which include banning Ukraine from joining the Western military bloc and scaling back NATO troops and missiles from Eastern Europe — as "non-starters."

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“We’re currently waiting for the promised answers in order to continue negotiations,” Lavrov said during talks with his German counterpart Annalena Baerbock in Moscow, according to the state-run TASS news agency.

“We expect to continue these negotiations, it’s a serious issue and you can’t delay the specific agreements on this matter,” the Russian diplomat said.

Russian officials have signaled a variety of options if its demands are not met, including military deployment in Cuba or Venezuela.

Lavrov, who previously said he expected Western answers to Moscow’s demands early this week, said “we’ll determine our reaction depending on what concrete steps our partners take.”

NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg said later Tuesday that he had invited Western allies and Russia to hold another set of security talks soon.

Stoltenberg said the proposed NATO-Russia Council meeting would aim to “try to find a way forward to prevent any military attack against Ukraine” and address both the alliance’s and Russia’s concerns.

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken will meet Lavrov on Friday in Geneva in hopes of securing a "diplomatic off-ramp" to the Ukraine crisis, a U.S. official said.

"Secretary Blinken is 150% committed to see if there is a diplomatic off-ramp here and that really is the impetus behind this engagement with Foreign Minister Lavrov," the official told reporters on condition of anonymity Tuesday.

"It's really an opportunity for the U.S. to share our major concerns with Russia and to see where there might be an opportunity for Russia and the United States to find common ground," she said.

In a call with Lavrov ahead of his trip, Blinken "stressed the importance of continuing a diplomatic path to de-escalate tensions," State Department spokesman Ned Price said.

A readout from the Russian Foreign Ministry said Lavrov told Blinken that Moscow needs "concrete article-by-article" responses "as soon as possible."

He called on Blinken "not to replicate speculation about the allegedly impending 'Russian aggression'."

AFP contributed reporting.

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