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Russia, U.S. Agree to Talk Security Demands Next Week

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Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov. **Sergei Bobylev / TASS**

Moscow has secured a deal that the United States will provide a written response to its European security demands next week, Russia's top diplomat said following high-stakes talks with his U.S. counterpart Friday.

Washington previously dismissed Moscow's "binding" demands — including barring Ukraine from joining NATO and withdrawing the alliance's forces and weapons from Eastern Europe — as "non-starters."

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"We ended up with an agreement that we will receive written responses to all our proposals next week," Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov told reporters after 1.5-hour talks with U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken in Geneva.

Lavrov deferred to his U.S. counterpart when asked if Moscow planned to publish Washington's response.

"I would like to make this response public, but I'm going to have to consult Secretary Blinken on that," he said at a press conference broadcast live.

Blinken confirmed plans to respond to Russia's concerns, as well as share U.S. concerns "and put some ideas on the table for consideration," in a follow-up meeting.

He didn't say whether Washington's responses would be made public.

"We didn't expect any major breakthroughs to happen today, but I believe we are now on a clear path in terms of understanding each other's concerns and each other's positions," Blinken told reporters following the meeting with Lavrov, which he called "frank and substantive."

He added that the sides agreed that Russia will issue its own written response to U.S. concerns and that U.S. President Joe Biden was ready to hold further talks with Russian President Vladimir Putin.

"President Biden met here in Geneva with President Putin, he's spoken to him on the phone or via videoconference on a number of occasions, and if we conclude (and) the Russians conclude that the best way to resolve things is through a further conversation between them, we're certainly prepared to do that," Blinken said.

Lavrov's deputy Sergei Ryabkov warned that Russia would need to "make serious political decisions" if it finds the U.S. response unsatisfactory. Officials including Ryabkov and President Vladimir Putin have previously warned of "military-technical responses" Russia's demands are not met.

Lavrov said during his press conference that he and Blinken did not discuss the widely reported suggestion that Russia could deploy its "military infrastructure" in Cuba and Venezuela if the negotiations fail to lead to an agreement.

Western governments have warned in recent months that Russia's troop buildup could signal an imminent invasion of Ukraine. Officials in Moscow have repeatedly denied planning to invade, with Lavrov reiterating Friday that Russia has "never" threatened "the Ukrainian people."

The Russian diplomat vowed to hold further negotiations with Blinken after receiving a formal response to its security proposals.

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