

Russia Not to Blame if War Breaks Out, Lavrov Says

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Russia is not seeking war with the United States and NATO, the country's top diplomat [said](#) Friday as he signaled openness for further dialogue despite the West's rejection of its sweeping security demands.

"If it depends on Russia, there will be no war. We don't want a war," Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said.

"But we won't allow [the West] to rudely ignore and trample on our interests," Lavrov said in a videoconference with Russian radio broadcasters.

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He accused Western governments "hysterically advancing" the threat of Russia invading Ukraine.

Moscow has amassed some 100,000 troops close to the border with Ukraine and in annexed Crimea. A series of military exercises in western Russia, as well as its announcement of surprise drills with neighboring Belarus, has fueled tensions further.

The U.S. and NATO on Wednesday rejected Russia's demand to halt NATO's expansion in eastern Europe, including by permanently barring Ukraine from the alliance, but outlined areas where they could increase cooperation with Moscow.

Lavrov, who is set to speak with U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken "in the coming days," said Russia is formulating an inter-agency reaction.

Lavrov characterized parts of the responses, which Washington asked Moscow to keep private, as "in many ways throwing wool over our eyes, but they contain rational seeds on secondary issues."

He also differentiated between NATO's "shameful" and "highly ideological" response and that of the United States, which he complimented as "the height of diplomacy."

He outlined missile deployment, deconfliction mechanisms and military exercises away from Russian-NATO borders as areas of possible negotiations.

But the veteran diplomat, who said Moscow will not compromise on issues including Ukraine's potential NATO membership, repeated Moscow's warnings of retaliation if its demands are rejected.

"If our attempts to agree on mutually acceptable principles of ensuring security in Europe fail, then we'll take retaliatory measures," he said.

Later in the videoconference, Lavrov suggested that outside forces he did not identify seek to "provoke" Ukraine to go to war, but reiterated that Russia "doesn't want it."

U.S. Ambassador to Moscow John Sullivan later Friday [equated](#) Lavrov's comments on not wanting war while having Russian troops near Ukraine to having "a gun on the table" during negotiations.

"We hope that the Russian government is true to its word, and does not plan to, and will not, further invade Ukraine. But the facts suggest that it has the present ability to do that," Reuters quoted Sullivan as saying in an online briefing.

"It's the equivalent of if you and I were having a discussion or a negotiation. If I put a gun on the table and say that I come in peace, that's threatening," he said.

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