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US and Russia meet for negotiations in Geneva

The dialog on “strategic stability” agreed to in talks between US President Joe Biden and his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin last summer began in Geneva, Switzerland on Sunday evening. The heads of the two high-level delegations, US Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman and the Deputy Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov, met for an initial working dinner. The actual negotiations then started on Monday.



Russian deputy foreign minister Sergei Ryabkov, right, and his delegation arrive for security talks with US Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman at the United States Mission in Geneva, Switzerland, Monday, Jan. 10, 2022. (Denis Balibouse/Pool via AP)

In the runup to the bilateral talks, it was already clear that they were not a round of détente but would initiate a further stage in the war preparations of the United States and its European allies against Russia.

For weeks the NATO states have accused Russia of planning a military attack on Ukraine and threatened massive countermeasures, ranging from the refusal to allow the Nord Stream 2 pipeline to come online, to Russia's exclusion from the global financial transaction system SWIFT. The plan is not for gradual escalation but for immediate retaliation, explained the US State Department.

Russia, for its part, demanded security guarantees. In mid-December, Moscow submitted two draft treaties which called on the US to reject any further expansion of NATO and to give up military activity in Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia.

Washington immediately made it clear that it would never sign onto such concessions and would not accept any "red lines." It merely declared its readiness to discuss arms controls, a reciprocal limit on the stationing of missiles and mutual restrictions of military exercises. The INF treaty, which was agreed to between the US and the Soviet Union in 1987 and restricted the use of some short- and mid-range missiles, was unilaterally abrogated by former President Donald Trump in 2019.

Despite the opposition from the US to an agreement, the European Union was alarmed that Washington and Moscow could reach a deal that excludes the EU.

EU foreign policy spokesman Josep Borrell said during a visit to Ukraine, "We are no longer in the Yalta times," where the great powers divided up Europe in 1945. Ukraine is part of Europe, and the EU cannot be a spectator when the United States and Russia discuss Europe's security, he stated.

The French security expert François Heisbourg complained, "It's our security, but we're not there." The Europeans are concerned whether President Biden is still consistent following the US failure in Afghanistan and its strategic focus on China. They also fear that Biden could be significantly weakened by the midterm elections in November and that Trump will return to the White House in 2024.

Similar points were also made by German officials. Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock of the Green Party warned during her inaugural visit to Washington that there could be no decision about security in Europe without Europe.

As soon as the plan for the dialog in Geneva was announced, long-term head of the foreign affairs desk at the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, Stefan Kornelius, wrote, “Should this plan be implemented, the European Union has to prepare for a major humiliation: a conference on the security of the states of Europe—without Europe’s community of states.”

Europe, Ukraine and the Belarusian opposition are “clearly further along in their self-understanding of security and order than to allow two gentlemen in Moscow and Washington to force them into an old corset,” stressed Kornelius.

The escalating conflict between NATO and Russia, which is threatening to plunge Europe into a disastrous war three-quarters of a century after the end of the Second World War, is a devastating indictment of the consequences of capitalist restoration in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union.

Since the last Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev embraced the imperialist powers and dissolved the Soviet Union 30 years ago, NATO has militarily encircled Russia ever more closely. Despite solemn promises not to militarize Eastern Europe and the former Soviet republics, many former members of the Warsaw Pact and the former Baltic Soviet republics are now members of NATO. NATO regularly conducts military maneuvers on the Russian border and has set up a rapid reaction force that can attack Russia within a few days.

The military encirclement of Russia reached a new stage in 2014, when the US, Germany and other European powers organized a coup in Ukraine that brought a pro-Western regime to power with the help of fascist militias. Since then, the country, which has a 2,300 km-long border with Russia, has received military aid totaling more than \$2.5 billion from the United States. Numerous European powers have also provided the country with weapons, including the Czech Republic, Poland, France, Britain and in particular Turkey.

In Germany, current Minister of Economic Affairs and co-leader of the Greens, Robert Habeck, called a year ago for arms deliveries to the Ukrainian military. Wolfgang Ischinger, an influential figure in German foreign policy, declared in a guest post at the end of last year in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, “An ‘augmentation’ of Ukraine’s defence capabilities should not be a taboo for Berlin. Berlin shouldn’t be on the sidelines.”

The regime in Kiev, which is headed by rival oligarch cliques and is responsible for widespread social misery, is chronically unstable and therefore extremely dangerous. It repeatedly resorts to nationalist provocations in order to hold onto power, which adds to the danger of war.

It is significant that former President Petro Poroshenko, who came to power in the 2014 coup, is being targeted by his successor Volodymyr Zelensky on charges of high treason. He is accused of having enriched himself through prohibited coal deliveries from eastern Ukraine, which is controlled by pro-Russian separatists.

The Russian regime of President Putin, which also represents the interests of the oligarchs, has nothing to offer to counter the threat of war. It swings between military threats and diplomatic maneuvers, while being totally incapable of appealing to the international working class, the only social force capable of stopping the threat of war.

In addition to the bilateral talks, more meetings are planned in Geneva this week. The NATO-Russia Council will meet again on Wednesday for the first time in two years, followed Thursday by the permanent council of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), the only format in which Ukraine itself is represented. But none of these meetings will lessen the danger of war. This ultimately results from the irresolvable contradictions of world capitalism—the incompatibility of the world economy with the nation state and the social character of production with capitalist private property.

Faced with increasing geopolitical conflicts and growing resistance to social inequality and its murderous COVID-19 policy, the capitalist ruling elite, like at the beginning of the 20th century, sees no other way out apart from war and dictatorship. Only a united socialist offensive by the international working class can prevent such a catastrophe.

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