

US rejects Russian demands for security guarantees, escalates Ukraine crisis

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Yesterday, as crisis talks between German, French, Ukrainian and Russian officials began in Paris, U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken delivered a statement rejecting Russian demands for security guarantees from NATO in Ukraine.

The NATO alliance is stoking a war crisis, deploying thousands of troops to Eastern Europe and demanding that the far-right regime in Ukraine be armed to fight an invasion it alleges Russia is preparing. It has sent large quantities of missiles and other arms to Ukraine, and it is preparing to set up missile bases in Ukraine only a few minutes' flight time from Moscow. Moscow therefore issued a written request for guarantees that Ukraine would not be allowed to join the NATO alliance and serve as a jumping-off point for attacks on Russia.

Blinken dismissed this out of hand. "There is no change. There will be no change," he said of US-NATO plans to allow Ukraine and other former Soviet republics, such as Georgia, to join NATO. "We make clear that there are core principles that we are committed to uphold and defend, including Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity, and the right of states to choose their own security arrangements and alliances," he continued.

Blinken added that this policy had been decided directly by President Joe Biden who, he said, was "intimately involved" in drafting the US response to Moscow's request. "We reviewed it with him repeatedly over the last weeks, just as we were getting, as you know, comments, input, ideas from allies and partners."

Only days after US officials revealed plans to send up to 50,000 troops to the borders of Russia and Ukraine, Blinken all but admitted that Washington is not negotiating but sending an ultimatum backed with threats of war.

Having publicly rejected Russia's principal demand, Blinken admitted that Biden's letter is "not a formal negotiating document. ... It's not explicit proposals. It lays out the areas and some ideas of how we can, together, if they're serious, advance collective security." He added that Washington would not publish its document to allow "for

confidential talks" and demanded that Russia not publish it either. "We hope and expect that Russia will have the same view and will take our proposal seriously."

Blinken's remarks were largely echoed by NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg, who raised Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova and insisted on "the right of each nation to choose its own security arrangements." He added, "We remain fully committed to our founding treaty, and our collective defense pledge enshrined in Article 5."

Under cover of invocations of national sovereignty, the imperialist powers are pursuing a highly reckless, provocative strategy. These remarks mean that if Ukraine joins NATO and if far-right, anti-Russian Ukrainian militias like the Azov Battalion provoked war with Russia, Ukraine could invoke Article 5 of the NATO treaty to claim that all NATO powers were legally bound to go to war with Russia, as well. Indeed, such risks of world war were no doubt a decisive factor in Russia's request for guarantees that states like Ukraine not join NATO.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov spoke yesterday to the Russian Duma, giving voice to the shock and fear that are spreading throughout Russian ruling circles. "The entire system is in a fever," Lavrov admitted, though he insisted that Moscow would probably honor US requests not to publish Biden's document. However, Lavrov made clear the devastating economic and military implications of the NATO campaign against Russia.

"One need only see the increasingly provocative military maneuvers on our borders, their dragging of Ukraine into the NATO orbit, their arming it with deadly weapons and their incitement of direct provocations against the Russian Federation," Lavrov said. "In this context, the demands that are addressed to us to stop military exercises on our own soil, to which we are indisputably entitled, are particularly cynical."

Anticipating that Washington could choke off Russia's access to the global SWIFT financial system for US-dollar transactions—as it previously did to Iran—Lavrov said: "We are working to reduce our dependence on the dollar, and the

Americans are actively helping us, as they are doing virtually everything they can to undermine confidence in this currency and make it risky for international transactions, not only for Russia but every country.” Lavrov said Russia aims for “a transition to settling payments in national currencies,” thus by-passing the US dollar.

Pointing to Russia’s alliances with China and Latin American countries like Venezuela, Nicaragua and Cuba, he concluded: “The West is trying, so to say, to punish dissidents who have an independent policy—mainly our country and China—with all sorts of inappropriate tools like sanctions, media demonizing, intelligence provocations and more.”

Though its foreign ministry spokesman, Zhao Lijian, the Chinese government also criticized attempts to recruit Ukraine to NATO. “As the world’s largest military alliance, NATO should abandon the outdated Cold War mentality and ideological bias and do things that are conducive to upholding peace and stability,” Zhao said. He called on all countries to “fully consider each other’s legitimate security concerns.”

The unprecedented war crisis that has erupted in Eastern Europe is the end product of 30 years of imperialist war and intrigue since the Stalinist dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991. The emergence of independent nation-states across the territory of the former Soviet Union, many of which had substantial Russian or Russian-speaking minorities, and across all of Eastern Europe, threw the region open to NATO. While NATO absorbed the Eastern European states, they relentlessly incited right-wing, anti-Russian tendencies in the former Soviet republics.

This has placed Russia and its post-Soviet capitalist regime in an insoluble quandary. Last month, President Vladimir Putin stressed his concern that the anti-Russian threats of the Ukrainian regime, which was brought to power in a NATO-backed, far-right putsch in 2014, could be a “first step to genocide.”

One need not support Putin’s bankrupt Russian nationalism to recognize that this danger exists. Not only the Ukrainian regime, but the Georgian regime that launched a US-backed attack on Russian peacekeepers that triggered a brief war in 2008, as well as the Baltic republics all have pro-Russian ethnic minorities and are constantly on the verge of open conflict with Moscow. The NATO powers respond, however, by working to stir up ethnic conflicts all around Russia as well as inside it, threatening to blow the country apart and reduce it to semicolonial status.

The COVID-19 pandemic has vastly intensified imperialist war plotting. In every NATO country, social anger is growing over policies of mass infection that have led to the unnecessary deaths of millions. As strikes and protests

mount across North America and Europe, the ruling classes in the NATO powers are desperate to deflect internal class tensions outwards, and are recklessly stoking a war with Russia, a nuclear-armed power.

The European powers have been falling in line with the US/NATO war drive. Denmark has pledged to send a frigate to the Baltic Sea and four F-16 fighters to Lithuania, while Spain is sending warships to the Black Sea. France is sending troops to Romania, and also Germany will help equip the Ukrainian army. Social Democratic Defense Minister Christine Lambrecht hailed her sending of 5,000 combat helmets to Ukraine as “a very clear signal. We stand by your side.”

Berlin is increasingly issuing aggressive statements. While German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock backed Blinken and Stoltenberg, claiming that “Our strongest weapon is and remains our unity,” SPD Chairman Lars Klingbeil has threatened, “The moment [Putin] attacks the territorial integrity of Ukraine, the moment he crosses the border politically but also geographically, there is a clear, unequivocal answer. All options are on the table.”

While there are bitter rivalries and conflicting financial and commercial interests—Germany seeks to get cheap Russian gas via the Nordstream 2 pipeline that the US wants to disrupt—the NATO imperialist powers all support policies to encircle Russia and reduce it to semicolonial status and to deflect outwards rising social anger at their handling of the pandemic.

Averting the mounting danger of world war requires building an antiwar movement in the international working class that is opposed to imperialism, rejecting the policies of mass infection with COVID-19, and is unequivocally independent of all parties and organizations of the capitalist class and based on an international socialist strategy.



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