

Blinken Delays US Response to Russia

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A special press briefing in unseemly hurry by the US state department to warn an imminent Russian assault on Ukraine; a surprise call by state secretary Antony Blinken to his Russian counterpart Sergey Lavrov to be followed by an unscheduled meeting in Geneva Friday; a whirlwind tour of Kiev and Berlin through Thursday — US diplomacy has gone into overdrive as the timeline for giving a formal response to Russia’s demands of security guarantee draws closer.

The senior state department official who gave the [briefing Tuesday](#) sees something sinister in the planned joint military exercise between Russian and Belarusian militaries and suspects “Belarus could play a role in Russia’s planned invasion of Ukraine.”

Yet, the official didn’t even know the scale of the exercise or the number of troops involved. In reality, the drill needn’t even be notified under the OSCE’s [2011 Vienna Document](#) since they are below the threshold of 9,000 troops, etc. But Washington would have us believe that with a paltry force of a few thousand troops, Russia plans to stage an invasion of Ukraine across the Belarusian border!

Now, this is the ostensible backdrop in which Blinken has set out from Washington for a tour of Kiev, Berlin and Geneva through Friday — a hilarious hypothesis.

However, this is not to underestimate the gravity of the developing situation. Moscow expects by the weekend Washington’s response in writing to its proposal for legally binding security guarantee. Moscow will decide on future course of action depending on the US response.

On Tuesday, Lavrov said in Moscow in the presence of the visiting German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock that any further negotiations with the US would depend on Washington’s response, “as we were promised.”

On Wednesday, Deputy Foreign Minister Sergey Ryabkov underscored that a moratorium on NATO expansion for a limited time span would be unacceptable for Russia. He said,

“No, this scenario is unacceptable. We need legally binding guarantees of NATO’s non-expansion in a form of treaties: a bilateral agreement with the US and a multilateral agreement with NATO.”

Ryabkov explained why Moscow needs “bulletproof, 100-percent guarantees of NATO’s non-expansion.” He said,

“We’ve experienced it many times in the past, when such formulas, lucrative on the outside, were quickly forgotten, turned inside out and transformed into their opposite... We cannot be satisfied with yet another trick.”

Simply put, the latest contrived war hysteria appears to presage a retraction by the Biden Administration from the commitment to hand over a written response to Moscow by this weekend.

According to Washington Post,

“It is unclear if the United States will provide a written response to Russia on its key demands from last week, something Moscow continues to insist on to resolve the standoff... The State Department official dodged a question on whether Washington will provide a written response, saying only that the United States remains prepared to engage Russia on “security issues.”

Lavrov and Ryabkov probably smell a rat over Blinken’s whirlwind European tour at this juncture. The heart of the matter is that the European allies have pledged to take tough measures against Russia if it rolls troops into Ukraine, but when it comes to specifics, it is far from clear what they are willing to do. The allies don’t look ringingly united.

On Tuesday, Germany’s Handelsblatt newspaper reported, citing German government sources, that Western governments are no longer considering [cutting Russian banks off from the Swift](#) global payments system. Within hours, Russian rouble gained on the report!

It means the so-called “nuclear option” in the sanctions package is off the consideration zone. Evidently, Europeans cannot afford to snap economic and financial ties with Russia, given their heavy dependence on Siberian gas. In Berlin, Ministry of Economy has disclosed that as of January 11, Germany only has “a theoretical working gas availability of 17.7 days.”

Russian gas supplies have stopped since December 21 and Gazprom has not booked any capacity to pump gas to Europe through the Yamal pipeline through February. Overall, European storage facilities were 49.33% full as of January 12.

Clearly, some major European allies have demonstrated less enthusiasm for imposing huge economic penalties on Russia fearing a blowback could damage their economies, or put in jeopardy the Russian gas supply which is critically needed.

Basically, how do you sanction a country endowed with such fabulous mineral resources and foreign reserves exceeding US\$650 billion? Russia balances its budget if oil sells at \$40 per barrel.

Again, the US threat to punish Russia by holding back the certification for the Nord Stream 2

pipeline is simply unrealistic. The government daily Rossiyskaya Gazeta commented on Wednesday that Russia is not suffering any financial losses over the delay in the certification since high gas prices compensated all investments into this project and may only prompt Russia now to expand its LNG production and switch to gas conversion so as to create new export potential.

Addressing the European Parliament in Strasbourg on Wednesday, French President Emmanuel Macron said,

“when I look at our oil and gas imports, I see we are not independent from Russia. We will not become independent tomorrow but it does not mean we should sever ties with Russia; on the contrary, they bring many benefits to us.”

Macron proposes to visit Moscow soon.

Indeed, during her visit to Moscow on Tuesday, German foreign minister Baerbock too conspicuously distanced herself from Blinken’s hyperbolic threats to Russia, his war hysteria and his apocalyptic predictions. Instead, Baerbock’s emphasis was on [mapping out paths of cooperation](#) with Russia. She demonstrated her ability to think rationally and offered a civilised dialogue to Russia.

Militarily, too, a British military flight taking weapons to Ukraine on Monday flew around German airspace rather than taking the most direct route through it, as Berlin is averse to any such direct military aid.

The US Senator Chris Murphy, a Connecticut Democrat who traveled with Republican and Democratic senators to Kyiv last weekend told reporters Monday,

“Right now there seems to be slightly greater interest coming from the United States on implementing tough multilateral sanctions than from Europe. That’s somewhat stunning to me, given the territorial integrity of Europe, not the United States, is at stake.”

It is an open secret that in October and November, France, Germany and some others in the EU questioned Washington’s warnings that Russia’s military buildup near Ukraine could signal an imminent invasion. France and Germany even opposed activating NATO’s crisis response planning system and had to be persuaded to relent.

Above all, Europeans have no desire to bankroll Ukraine which is a black hole and failing state. It doesn’t make sense to them when the US intelligence brags in the media that they’d bleed Russian troops in a guerrilla war in the middle of Europe. Fundamentally, all this dovetails into a pervasive scepticism among the European elite regarding the Biden administration.

Certainly, Blinken is not the Pied Piper of Hamelin. He has to figure out a way forward. In immediate terms, he has to hand over a document putting down a US response to Russia’s demands. The trip to Europe is to create some wriggle room.

At a press conference in Kiev on Wednesday, Blinken said he will not provide Lavrov with a written response during their upcoming meeting in Geneva Friday. But the countdown may have begun in Moscow. President Biden himself has taken the centerstage and [proposed](#) that “there is room to work if (Putin) wants to do that.”

But the catch is, Biden could merely be buying time. The US has a long record of zigzagging and not sticking to international agreements. In the highly polarised US politics, there isn't any certainty that Biden would even get a second term as president.

Moscow cannot but be aware of past experience and that in the toxic atmosphere of Russophobia in the Beltway, an improvement of relations with the US, leave alone a strategic understanding of such profound consequence to global stability — and of existential nature for Russia itself — will remain a pipe dream.

In a recent tweet, Strobe Talbott, the original choreographer of NATO expansion in the post-cold war order, triumphantly congratulated Blinken and Jake Sullivan for cornering Russia! Suffice to say, the Clinton Team of Russophobes is steering Russia relations and their dubious agenda all along has been to finish off Russia!

Valery Garbuzov, the director of the Institute for US and Canadian Studies under the Russian Academy of Sciences, [told TASS on Wednesday](#), "Firstly, I have no idea, if there will be written replies. That Russia wants to have them in writing does not mean that they will be provided in writing. Secondly, I do not think that there will be answers that will satisfy Russia."

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