

RUSSIA DRAFTS PACT TO LIMIT U.S., NATO ROLE IN EX-SOVIET NATIONS

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Soaring tensions: A file photo of Russian vessels after military drills in Crimea. AP

Russia on Friday unveiled proposals to contain the U.S. and NATO in the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, calling for urgent negotiations with Washington as it amasses forces near Ukraine.

The U.S. said it was willing to talk but stated upfront that it disagreed with much in the far-reaching proposals, as it renewed warnings of painful reprisals if Russia invades Ukraine.

Russia released unfinished security documents — an unusual move in diplomacy — that call for U.S.-led NATO alliance not to bring in new members or establish bases in ex-Soviet countries.

Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov said Russia was ready to hold urgent security talks with the U.S. “as early as” on Saturday.

“We are ready to immediately, even tomorrow — literally tomorrow, on Saturday — go for talks with the U.S. in a third country,” he told reporters, suggesting Geneva as a venue.

In Washington, a senior official said the U.S. expected to respond “sometime next week” to Russia on a format for talks but made clear it was not enthusiastic about the proposals.

“If there is any further aggression against Ukraine, that will have massive, massive consequences and will carry a high price,” the official said.

White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki noted that the U.S. has negotiated with Moscow on strategic concerns for decades but said it would only act in concert with NATO allies. “There will be no talks on European security without our European allies and partners,” she told reporters.

The West says Moscow has readied some 1,00,000 troops for an imminent attack on Ukraine, which has been battling a pro-Moscow insurgency in its east since 2014.

Russian President Vladimir Putin denies planning an attack and blames NATO for the rise in tensions, demanding “legal guarantees” the alliance will not expand eastwards.

The draft document addressed to NATO says its members should “commit themselves to refrain from further enlargement, including the accession of Ukraine as well as other states”.

It also insists that alliance members not conduct military activity in Ukraine or other countries in Eastern Europe, the South Caucasus and Central Asia.

Moscow and NATO, the document said, should limit the deployment of missiles, set up an emergency telephone hotline and also work to “prevent incidents” in the Baltics and the Black Sea.

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