



Leaked drafts of NATO, US responses to Russia are surprisingly revealing

Description

USA/RUSSIA: Have you ever heard the saying, 'you should talk to the organ grinder, not his monkey'?

There is an old saying that “you should talk to the organ grinder, not his monkey.” This is what Russia has chosen to do in breaking off talks with NATO and negotiating directly with the United States. The wisdom of Russia’s choice is amply demonstrated by the contrasting content and tone of the [U.S. and NATO responses](#) to Russia’s demands concerning NATO expansion and the deployment of troops in eastern Europe, which have just been leaked by the Spanish newspaper *El País*.

The NATO document also raises the important question of who the NATO secretariat (which wrote this document) actually answers to? Not, it seems, NATO members as a whole, several of which would disagree strongly with the tone of this statement. To Washington? But then why a document so much more hostile and undiplomatic than the American one? It seems that the NATO secretariat has developed an internal culture of Russophobia that has now taken on a life of its own and is capable of doing limited but unfortunate and unnecessary damage to European security, despite the fact that in itself the NATO secretariat is nothing but a luxuriously-funded retirement home for ex-politicians, mediocre military bureaucrats, and PR flacks.

Before addressing these statements however, it is worth pointing out that one Western line about Russia’s demands has already been proved false: namely, that they were never intended as a serious basis for negotiations; and that Russia always planned to use their rejection as a pretext to invade Ukraine. Clearly, if that were the case, Russia would have invaded by now.

All the indications suggest that, in fact, President Putin and his administration still want to avoid war and hope to extract enough concessions from the West both to provide certain concrete advantages to Russia, allowing Putin to claim at least limited success for his policy of pressure. One such limited success has been gained by the re-opening of the French- and German-orchestrated “[Normandy Format](#)” talks, aimed at achieving a peaceful solution for the Donbas conflict based on guaranteed autonomy for that region within Ukraine.

A second path to a possible agreement allowing Moscow some appearance of success while avoiding any appearance of NATO surrender is set out in the U.S. (*not* the NATO) response to Russia’s demarche. This document raises a series of concerns about Russian actions but also expresses a willingness to launch a new nuclear arms reduction process and to enter into agreements on medium-range missiles in Europe, specifically on the stationing of U.S. Tomahawk cruise missiles in eastern Europe, provided Russia reciprocates by permitting NATO some ability to check its own missile deployments.

The U.S. message repeats the American commitment to NATO’s open door policy towards Ukraine. But it not only does not explicitly rule out a moratorium on membership for a fixed period of time, but also expresses a willingness to discuss “indivisibility of security — and our respective interpretations of that concept.” This is a phrase used by Russia in its opposition to NATO expansion, and it creates at least some chance of a wider comprehensive strategic dialogue that could lay the basis for solving the various local conflicts in Europe.

On Ukraine, a key passage reads as follows:

The United States is prepared to discuss conditions-based reciprocal transparency measures and reciprocal commitments by both the United States and Russia to refrain from deploying offensive ground-based missile systems and permanent forces with a combat mission on the territory of Ukraine.

A key question here is whether the United States will insist on including Crimea (which Moscow now claims as legally Russian territory) in such an agreement. If so, then obviously there can be no agreement since Russia is not going to withdraw the Black Sea Fleet and its garrison from Sevastopol and leave Crimea open to Ukrainian attack. If, however, Washington is prepared to glide quietly over this issue, then it seems that an agreement along these lines might be possible.

The tone of the U.S. statement is firm but polite. It avoids rhetorical phrases, gratuitous insults, and dragging in additional issues that have no possibility of resolution and will only destroy any possibility of agreement. I wouldn’t describe it as a masterpiece of diplomatic language, but at least it reads as if it was written by adults who have some knowledge and understanding of diplomacy. And President Putin’s latest statement (in his meeting Tuesday with Hungarian premier Viktor Orban) also suggests a willingness to negotiate. As a result, in the words of a leading former U.S. diplomat, “we may now be inching towards a pragmatic solution,” at least if negotiations can be kept strictly secret.

The NATO statement could hardly be more different. It begins with blustering propaganda:

NATO is a defensive alliance and poses no threat to Russia. We have always striven for peace, stability and security in the Euro-Atlantic area, and a Europe whole, free and at peace.

Very few people in the wider world have believed this since the NATO attack on Serbia in 1999 and Libya in 2011. Moreover, the people who use the phrase “Europe whole and free” either do not realize or do not care that this is a mortal insult to Russians, implying as it does that they are not part of “Europe.”

The NATO message further states that,

For more than thirty years, NATO has worked to build a partnership with Russia... NATO and Russia signed the NATO-Russia Founding Act and established the NATO-Russia Council, which remains a unique framework and symbol of the Alliance's openness to engage with Russia... Yet Russia has broken the trust at the core of our cooperation and challenged the fundamental principles of the global and Euro-Atlantic security architecture.

Nuts! As Moscow knows all too well, NATO's approach to “partnership” with Russia was to draw up a common position (usually dictated by the United States) and then, in meetings with Russia, present a *fait accompli*. Even in cases where a majority of European NATO members agreed with Russia (for example, the Bush administration's abandonment of the ABM Treaty), they were never willing to side with Russia at meetings of the so-called NATO-Russia Council. Russia was in fact completely excluded from the European security architecture designed by NATO. Moscow's desire to change this is at the heart of Russia's present strategy.

This document expresses NATO's desire for a “constructive dialogue,” but accompanies this with insult after insult directed at Russia. Now, it may be that some of these insults are indeed deserved. But anyone who thinks that insulting your interlocutor is a good way to begin a constructive dialogue has never studied common sense, let alone diplomacy.

Unlike the U.S. statement, the NATO statement demands the withdrawal of Russian forces from Ukraine (presumably including Crimea), as well as Transnistria, Abkhazia and South Ossetia as part of any agreement. None of this is ever going to happen. If the NATO secretariat — as opposed to Washington — were responsible for negotiating with Russia, there would be no possibility at all of agreement, and every possibility of a disastrous war.

By contrast, the Biden administration's response is a reasonably creditable piece of diplomacy. And of course, from a military point of view, NATO *is* the United States. This is very evident from the military deployments underway in response to the supposed Russian threat to NATO. Washington's dispatch of troops may be totemistic, but they are at least backed by an actual military superpower. [European NATO moves](#) are risible by comparison. Four Danish fighter jets to Lithuania; two Dutch fighters for Bulgaria (a country that doesn't even border Russia); Spain “thinking about” sending planes to Bulgaria; Italy and Germany apparently thinking of doing nothing at all in military terms. Seriously?

Russia should ignore the NATO monkey. America might want to remind it where the coins are likely to

be tossed — and it is not in Belgium where NATO headquarters are situated, or Norway, which has contributed Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg to NATO – and what else exactly?

The NATO statement ends with a heroic declaration of NATO's firm commitment to the principle that "an attack on one Ally is an attack against all." Since Russia has no intention whatsoever of attacking any NATO ally, NATO can strike such heroic poses, and Denmark and Holland can dispatch their fighters in the serene confidence that they will never actually have to fight.

by Anatol Lieven

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