

**Ukraine conflict**

## US and Russia agree to extend talks over Ukraine crisis

Moscow says it is still prepared to walk away if west does not shift on security demands



A Ukrainian soldier smokes in a trench on the front line with pro-Russia separatists in the eastern Donetsk region © Andriy Dubchak/AP

**Henry Foy** and **Ben Hall** in Geneva and **James Politi** in Washington YESTERDAY

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Russia warned that it would walk away from diplomatic efforts to end the crisis over Ukraine if the west continued to ignore demands over security guarantees, but agreed to extend talks into this week.

There was no breakthrough in Geneva after almost eight hours of discussions between Wendy Sherman, US deputy secretary of state, and Sergei Ryabkov, Russia's deputy foreign minister, in which the American side presented new ideas on arms control.

But there was also no breakdown in talks that Russia has warned could lead to military action if its red lines were not respected. With 100,000 Russian troops massed along its border with Ukraine, [fears of conflict have intensified](#).

The US and Nato ruled out Moscow's top demand for [a ban on Nato enlargement](#). Sherman said Russia still had a choice between diplomacy and escalation, with the outcome in the balance.

"If Russia walks away from the diplomatic path, it may well be quite apparent that they were never serious about pursuing diplomacy at all," she said.

Ryabkov said Moscow would "judge any further steps and the prospects of all this work and make appropriate decisions based on the results of events that are still to come", regarding whether it was worth continuing talks.

Russian officials will hold talks with NATO in Brussels on Wednesday and with the 57-member Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe on Thursday in Vienna. Sherman said she would “have further conversations with the Russian government and decide on the best way forward” later in the week.

She described the talks as “serious, straightforward business, candid discussion”.

However, Ryabkov made [no promise of de-escalation](#) and said military movements inside Russia “would continue, because this is what is absolutely required to maintain the necessary level of operative readiness of our armed forces in a situation where the security environment of Russia has changed dramatically for the worse”.

Russia denies that it is planning to invade Ukraine and says its deployment of troops and equipment close to the borders is an exercise.

“Return the troops to barracks or tell us what exercises are ongoing and what their purpose is,” Sherman said. “If Russia stays at the table and takes concrete steps to de-escalate tensions, we believe we can achieve progress.”



Wendy Sherman, US deputy secretary of state, left, and Sergei Ryabkov, Russia's deputy foreign minister, meet in Geneva © Denis Balibouse/Reuters

Sherman said she had presented proposals for new arms-control talks on missile

negotiations, which “cannot be completed in a matter of days or weeks”.

Moscow last month [published several demands](#) to reshape European security, including a ban on further enlargement of Nato and on Nato military activities in former communist bloc members. It has since issued increasingly belligerent threats if its red lines are not met.

Ryabkov said that Russia “cannot retreat” from its demand for a promise that “Ukraine and Georgia will never, ever become members of Nato”.

“We are fed up with loose talk. Half promises, misinterpretations . . . We do not trust the other side, so to say,” he said. “We need ironclad, waterproof, bulletproof . . . guarantees. Not safeguards. Guarantees.”

Ryabkov reiterated his threat that European security would suffer if no deals were reached: “After every mistake, every miscalculation . . . the security of countries to the west of Russia suffers.”

The US has [threatened to impose](#) bruising economic, financial and trade sanctions on Russia if it invades Ukraine, saying that those measures would eclipse the punishments imposed after the annexation of Crimea in 2014. Sherman repeated that warning on Monday.

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