

**Ukraine conflict**

## **Russia writes off security talks as diplomatic 'dead end'**



'Drumbeat of war is sounding loudly' after Ukraine negotiations end with no agreement

Henry Foy in Brussels and Ben Hall in London 10 HOURS AGO

---

Russia did not even wait until the third and final round of this week's diplomatic talks with the west had concluded before [dismissing the entire exercise](#) as a "dead end".

As delegates to the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe met in Vienna on Thursday to discuss ways to avert a potential new Russian attack on Ukraine, hopeful of a breakthrough, senior Moscow officials were already writing it off.

"I don't see any grounds to sit down in the next few days, get together again and start these same discussions," said Sergei Ryabkov, Russia's deputy foreign minister. "I don't know exactly what happened in the OSCE," he added, dismissively. "It seems everything is quite predictable there too."

It was the reaction that western governments and negotiators had feared, but strongly expected, as [Russian president Vladimir Putin](#) considers how to respond.

"The drumbeat of war is sounding loudly," warned Michael Carpenter, US ambassador to the OSCE, after the talks ended on Thursday. "We have to take this very seriously. We have to prepare for the eventuality that there could be an escalation."

Desperate to avoid a possible Russian assault on Ukraine, the US, [Nato](#) and European countries billed this week as the chance to extend a [diplomatic olive branch to Moscow](#) that offered the Kremlin a possible way out from increasingly belligerent rhetoric about threats to European security.



But over five days of direct talks, which began with an informal private dinner on the shore of Lake Geneva on Sunday, western officials noted precious few areas of compromise from the Moscow delegations or interest in engaging with their suggestions for more detailed negotiations.

“I don’t think this negotiation track is serious [for Russia],” said a senior European diplomat. “Nobody understands if they have started the actual process of negotiations or not. There’s real doubt.”

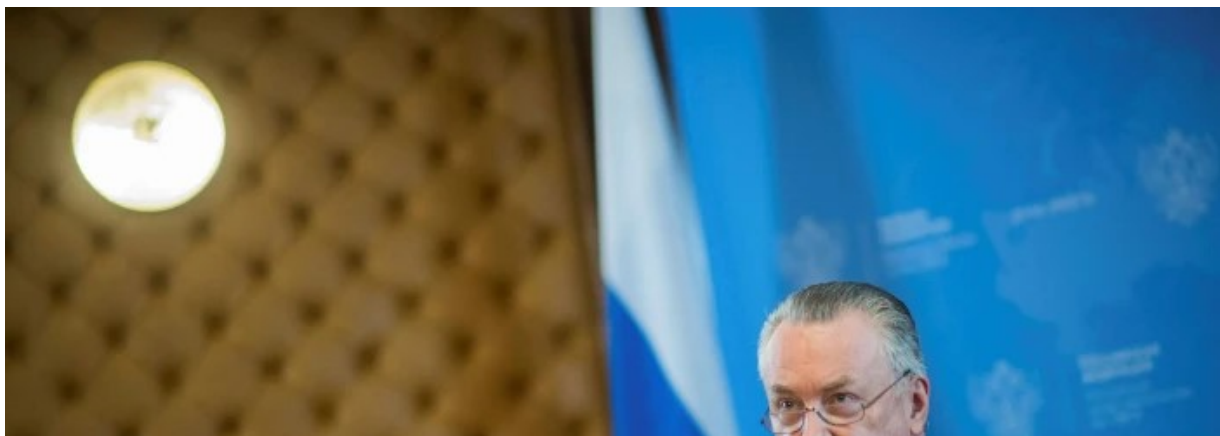
Wendy Sherman, deputy US secretary of state, had dined with Ryabkov in Geneva before both led their respective delegations in formal bilateral talks in the Swiss city on Monday.

On Wednesday, after heading the US delegation to the summit between Russia and Nato members, she admitted to hearing the same talking points from Russian officials as if the eight hours of talks two days previously had not happened.

“There’s progress that can be made and everyone, Russia most of all, will have to decide whether they really care about security, in which case they should engage, or whether this was all a pretext,” Sherman said after those Nato talks.

That fear of failed diplomacy as a pretext for conflict had grown all week. As officials talked, some of the roughly 100,000 Russian troops deployed at locations close to its border with Ukraine conducted live-fire exercises. Putin has warned that [Moscow could respond militarily](#) if the west did not meet his requests.

Moscow sent its delegations to Geneva, Brussels and Vienna with clear demands. But it also knew that its two main requests were impossible for the US and Nato to agree to: a ban on Ukraine and Georgia joining the alliance and a demand for Nato to scale back its military deployments to the level of 1997, before newly independent states of the former communist bloc joined the alliance.





Alexander Lukashevich, Russia's ambassador to the OSCE, warned that dismissing Russia's demands "was fraught with the inevitable deterioration of the security situation of all states" © Michael Gruber/Getty Images

The US and Nato, ruling these out but acknowledging Russia's security concerns regarding western military deployments, instead offered potential compromise areas: [talks on arms control](#), missile deployments and re-establishing diplomatic channels to reduce tensions. The ploy appeared to have failed.

Alexander Lukashevich, Russia's ambassador to the OSCE, dismissed the offer as a "senseless exchange of positions", warning that dismissing [Russia's demands](#) "was fraught with the inevitable deterioration of the security situation of all states, without exception."

Ryabkov, speaking to Russian television, said military officials had been advising Putin on options if the crisis were to intensify and that new military drills could begin soon.

Andrew Weiss of the Carnegie Endowment for Peace said the west's diplomatic efforts this week had succeeded in complicating Russia's [potential military preparations](#) by offering an alternative — an approach he called "the best the west can do".

Yet Russia consistently rejected calls from the US and Nato to reduce its force on the Ukrainian border, denying it was a threat to Kyiv and stating its legal right to move troops wherever it liked within its territory.

As the diplomatic blitz subsides, the officials who spent the week on the other side of the negotiating table from the Russians are left waiting on the Kremlin. "Nobody knows Putin's next move," Weiss said. "And we'll all find out at the same time."

