

## US and NATO talks with Russia: failure or a new "Great Game"

The talks between the US and Russia in Geneva and between NATO and Russia in Brussels were declared a failure by most analysts and commentators. Russia put forward its demands, and these demands were rejected by both Washington and its NATO allies, - that is the main thesis of the commentators. It may seem that creation of new architecture of the international relations based on dominance of SG3, the new world's Premier League, which should include the US, Russia and China, has hit an insurmountable obstacle.

However, it is not so simple and unambiguous, and there are reasons to come to that conclusion.

### 1

#### *The Great Game of Albert Einstein*

Reason One. It is necessary to note one indisputable fact. In January 2022, Moscow and Washington have begun to build a new system of international relations and strategic security system, and they started it with Europe.

The creation of a new security system cannot proceed without struggle, clash of interests, opinions and positions, without identifying and overcoming contradictions, without a "Great Game". The more at stake, the higher the stakes in the game, the more complex and acute contradictions have to be resolved. As Albert Einstein said, "In the middle of difficulty lies opportunity."

Reason Two. The United States and Russia expressed their readiness to discuss and agree on moratorium on deployment of ground-based Intermediate and shorter-range missiles, as well as establishment of mutual limits on the scale of military exercises with increased transparency.

Progress on these issues has been overwhelmed and obscured by a mountain of statements about the refusal by the United States and NATO of any commitment to non-expansion of NATO, about possible sanctions against Russia in the event of the invasion of Russian troops in Ukraine, about the concentration of Russian troops along the borders of Ukraine...

However, it must be recalled that for several years Russia has been proposing to the United States and NATO to discuss the possibility of

concluding a new agreement on the non-deployment of ground-based intermediate and shorter-range missiles in Europe that was provided for by the Intermediate -Range Nuclear Forces Treaty, IRNFT, between the USSR and the United States, signed by Mikhail Gorbachev and Ronald Reagan in 1987 and terminated in 2019, when, by decision of Donald Trump, the United States withdrew from this treaty. Under Trump, all Russia's proposal to renew the treaty or to start negotiations on a new one have been rejected. As Stoltenberg said at the time, Russia's position was "unconstructive."

In January 2022, in Geneva, the head of the American delegation, First Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman said that the United States was ready to discuss with Russia the deployment of missiles. Moreover, according to her, the parties had exchanged ideas about intermediate-range and shorter-range missiles, although they recognized that reaching agreements would require a lot of work.

For several years, Russia has been also proposing to limit military exercises in Europe, and all these years NATO has refused to talk with Moscow on that subject. In 2021, it got to the point that the officials of the Russian representation to NATO in Brussels were expelled from Belgium. In response, Russia closed its representation in Brussels and NATO's representation in Moscow.

In January 2022, in Geneva, Wendy Sherman said that the United States was ready to discuss with Russia on establishing mutual restrictions on the scale of military exercises with increasing their transparency, and after Russia-NATO talks in Brussels, it was announced that the representation offices of NATO in Moscow and Russia's in Brussels will be reopened.

Reason Three. For defusing of international tension, the most important were the Russian proposals to exclude the deployment of nuclear weapons outside the national territory, to return nuclear weapons already deployed and to eliminate all existing infrastructure for the deployment of nuclear weapons outside the national territory. Before the Geneva meeting, US State Department spokesman called Russia's proposals "problematic."

After the meeting both sides preferred to remain silent on this most important subject.

The silence of the Kremlin and the White House speaks volumes, and in order to explain this silence, as well as what is happening before our eyes

within the framework of the new “Great Game”, we need to pay attention to one aspect that surprised a few analysts... Here, we come to the Reason Four.

2

*“Never trust anyone. Only me. But don't trust me either.”*

*Heinrich Müller*

Reason Four. The talks between the US and Russia that began in Geneva on January 9, unlike any talks that have taken place in the history of diplomacy, these talks had one unique aspect that might explain a lot...

On January 8, the day before the start of the talks and the first meeting of the heads of delegations in Geneva, US State Department spokesman said that Washington expected Moscow to make statements after the talks “that will not reflect the true nature of the talks. We urge our allies and partners to view these statements with the utmost scepticism.”

Never in the history of diplomacy has been such a case when one of the participants, before the start of negotiations, openly and publicly warned his allies and partners in advance that they should not trust what another participant in the negotiations may say about the agreements reached.

That was only the beginning...

After the talks in Geneva on January 10, at a briefing at the White House, Jen Psaki said that Washington is “preparing for the possibility and likelihood ... that Russia will spread disinformation about commitments that have not been made.”

Moreover, after the completion of negotiations in Brussels between Russia and NATO, State Department spokesman Ned Price told the US European allies not to succumb to Moscow’s misinformation tricks about obligations that were not taken at the negotiations.

What does it all mean? Why was the United States forced to openly call on its partners three times not to pay attention to false information about the agreements reached between Washington and Moscow if they are against the interests of Washington's allies and partners?

There may be two answers to this question:

First. Before the start of negotiations, Washington had information that Moscow would try to distort the agreements in order to split the US and its allies.

That raises new questions. How could responsible and experienced politicians enter into negotiations knowing in advance that negotiating partner intends to distort agreements? How it was possible to enter into negotiations on the future of the world with the side that could not be trusted at all?

Second. The White House admitted that there might be a leak of information from Moscow or Washington, which the US State Department and the Russian Foreign Ministry did not want to bring to the attention of American partners and allies. Apparently, this information might be so sensitive for the US allies that it could split the West and complicate both the relationship between Washington and other NATO members, and the entire course of negotiations with Moscow.

In this case, Russia and the United States could have agreed in advance that in the event of a leak of information, no matter where it came from, Washington would have opportunity to deny it, presenting it as Moscow's disinformation ...

Most probably, Moscow had to agree to participate in that cover up operation. It is hard to imagine that any leader, except for Vladimir Putin, could have agreed to this. Putin could... Moreover, enjoyed the idea... Or he could had himself proposed such a cover up operation in the KGB style...

### 3

#### *Contours of compromise*

The first four reasons indicate that, although the US and NATO have taken negative position on non-expansion of NATO, as well as rejection of new members of the alliance from among the former Soviet republics, the dialogue between the US and Russia has begun, and progress has been made. More, Washington and Moscow might have started their own separate game.

However, there are other reasons to believe that the US and Russia are moving forward to set up new system of international relations.

Reason Five. The refusal of Washington and Brussels not to expand NATO, although expressed in extremely harsh terms, could be also an Einsteinian "difficulty" that hides the "opportunity", or part of the cover up

operation that Biden and Putin may play out in front of the Europeans, or even with some European allies active participation.

Behind the thunder of refusals to provide guarantees to Russia, in the political elites of the United States, as well as among analysts, there are new ideas arising to seek a compromise with Russia on this issue as well.

The tough stance of the US and NATO surprised no one in Moscow. From the point of Law, NATO cannot give written guarantees of its non-expansion. This requirement of Moscow cannot be fulfilled without the adoption of NATO internal decisions, including changes in the Charter, that must be agreed upon by all members of the alliance. It seems almost impossible to convince current leaders of Poland and the Baltic states to sign a decision depriving Ukraine and Georgia of ever joining NATO.

However, it should be noted that it is also impossible to accept Ukraine and Georgia into NATO. According to the NATO Charter, states with armed conflicts on their territory, with internal territorial disputes and occupied territories cannot be accepted into the alliance. As Stoltenberg said after the completion of the Russia-NATO talks in Brussels, the NATO collective security principle does not apply to Ukraine.

It was precisely blocking Ukraine's accession to NATO that was one of the Kremlin's goals, although not the main one, of annexing Crimea to Russia, as well as supporting the separatists and the republics they created in eastern Ukraine.

In Georgia, the situation is even more straitforward. The civil war in Georgia began back in 1991 as an inter-ethnic conflict between Georgians and Abkhazians, and this conflict ended in 1992 with the withdrawal of Abkhazia from Georgia and the introduction of the Russian peacekeeping contingent into Abkhazia. In 2008, the ethnic conflict between Georgians and Ossetians ended up with an attempt by Georgian President Saakashvili to send the army into South Ossetia, which was part of Georgia, but also wanted to secede and become independent or part of Russia, and where Russian peacekeeping troops were already located. As a result of that short war, South Ossetia separated from Georgia, and the Georgian army was defeated. Georgia has no chances to join NATO.

The main threat to Russia's security could have been created not by the imaginary entry of Ukraine and Georgia into NATO, but by bilateral agreements

between the United States and the former Soviet republics on the deployment of American bases and missiles on their territory. This is precisely what Moscow does not want to happen. The progress in negotiations on non-deployment of ground-based missiles actually is important step to solving the problem for Russia.

One can continue to speak and write about rejection of NATO's non-expansion, but it is clear that if the United States and Russia sign an agreement on the non-deployment of ground-based missiles on the territory of countries near Russian territory, the problem for Moscow will be solved.

Moreover, in recent days, ideas have appeared in the US political elite about adopting NATO moratorium, for example, for 20-25 years on the expansion... or, giving the republics in Donbass for the period of 20-25 years the right to veto Ukraine's entry into NATO...

What will happen to Ukraine and Georgia in 20-25 years? The Kremlin will have time to think, reflect and make a decision... In any case, it will not be Vladimir Putin's problem.

There is opinion that the best option for everyone would be the Ukraine's refusal to join NATO for some period. However, it will not be possible to do this without the consent and direct participation of the leadership of Ukraine. Will the Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky be able to change his position to that extent and will Ukrainian nationalists and radicals allow him to do so? ... The United States and Russia will have to try hard or wait for a new president of Ukraine ...

Why then create so much noise and tension around these issues? Why couldn't the US and Russian diplomats and military agree on all these issues quietly and without creating tension in Europe?

So, now we have to move on to the next point...

4

*"Kipling was a great writer." Vladimir Putin*

Reason Six. A new system of security and international relations will affect vital interests not only of Moscow and Washington, but also of US allies in NATO, including those that are Washington's closest and most valuable allies. Taking decisions on important issues for US allies without their participation that Moscow was pushing Washington for, meant for the

Americans to spoil relations with the allies and undermine the US positions in Europe.

However, the new architecture of international relations with SG3 or SG4 or SGX at the top of it taking decisions on strategic issues, does not imply that other thirty countries have the right to veto the decisions taken by SG3/4/X.

In April 2021, Vladimir Putin already characterized this situation, comparing the United States with Sher Khan, and the US allies with Tabakis, the heroes of Kipling's book Mowgli. "Around Sher Khan, all sorts of small Tabakis are spinning. Everything is going according to Kipling," Putin said. - "Kipling was a great writer!" However, it is better literature to be left aside.

Washington has to create a new architecture of the world, maintaining relations of trust with allies. In this situation, it would be better if the allies themselves accept and support the new rules of relations and recognize their place in the world.

That is why Washington did not agree to hold talks with Moscow only in the US-Russia format and pushed Moscow to hold talks with both NATO and the OSCE. Moscow agreed, hoping that Washington knew better how to deal with its partners so that there was less harm from them.

Members of NATO and the OSCE were given a chance to show themselves and to declare their position. As expected, negotiations with NATO and the OSCE created the impression that dialogue between the West and Russia was not possible.

At the first stage, perhaps, this was part of the plan of Washington and Moscow, because the top diplomats of the United States and Russia openly played along with the American allies, bringing the rhetoric and intransigence of positions to an extreme.

Let's compare the reaction and mood of the leaders of the Russian and American delegations after the meeting in Geneva, where only Americans and Russians communicated, and their reaction after the meeting in Brussels, where the Europeans participated in the negotiations.

Direct negotiations between Washington and Moscow, from the point of view of Wendy Sherman, were "straightforward and frank."

From the Kremlin's point of view, the conversation in Geneva was complex, long, very professional, deep, specific, without any attempts to embellish something, to bypass any sharp corners. Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov said immediately after the talks: "We got the impression that the American side approached the Russian proposals very seriously and carried out their in-depth study."

After Geneva, the impression was that Washington and Moscow, having identified zones where the parties cannot yet find compromises, but were ready to move forward, at the same time found those areas where specific agreements were possible.

After Brussels, everything changed. Representatives of Russia and the USA - NATO spoke as if contradictions were insurmountable and positions were inflexible.

In fact, it turned out that by involving its NATO partners, Washington increased the tension in the negotiations and allowed its allies to drive them into a dead end. On January 13, this was recognized by all parties, and it was Russia that stated most clearly that it makes no sense to continue negotiations or to resume them.

Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov, following talks with NATO, said that the United States and NATO "under no circumstances, for any reason" do not agree to Russia's demands not to expand the alliance and return to the 1997 borders, as well as to provide "legally binding assurances that relevant systems will not be placed in close proximity to our borders."

The US and its allies have effectively said "no" to Russia's key proposals on security guarantees and want to discuss only those issues that are of interest to them, Ryabkov said. "And these problems are secondary in relation to non-expansion of NATO. This is a dead end ... We have nowhere to retreat ... further measures will be applied, other methods against opponents."

Sergei Lavrov, Russian Foreign Minister, said: "It was of fundamental importance for us to fulfil the direct instructions of Russian President Putin, who said that we are obliged to raise these issues in the toughest possible way regarding the entire architecture of European security. Russia must receive legal guarantees of non-expansion of NATO to the East, non-deployment of strike weapons in neighbouring territories that pose threat to Russia's security,

and to return to the European security architecture of 1997, when the Russia-NATO Founding Act was signed," Lavrov said.

All these statements were made immediately after the conclusion of negotiations on January 13, and the next day, having received instructions from the Kremlin, the leaders of the Russian Foreign Ministry tightened their rhetoric even more.

Sergei Ryabkov said that Moscow does not intend to continue negotiations with Washington. "Moscow has no grounds for a new round of negotiations with Washington on security guarantees in the near future. I don't see any reason... to get together again and start the same discussions."

Sergey Lavrov was even more specific: "Negotiations with the United States began only three days ago, with NATO members it took place yesterday. The Americans promised us to try... to make their counter proposals next week. NATO Secretary General J. Stoltenberg, on behalf of the North Atlantic Alliance, also volunteered to put his reaction "on paper". I think it will arrive within a week. After that, Defence Minister S.K. Shoigu and I will report to the President of Russia V.V. Putin. We act on his direct instructions, this is his initiative. Next, we will determine how to respond to what our Western partners will offer us in terms of counter initiatives." In fact, Lavrov made it clear that the Kremlin could move from negotiations to "military and military-technical measures" that Putin spoke about before the negotiations.

On that day, the final point was made by Ryabkov, who, in an interview with a Russian journalist, answering to an obviously provocative and prearranged question about the possibility of deploying Russian missiles in Cuba and Venezuela in the event of failure of negotiations with the United States, said: "I don't want to confirm anything, ... nor rule out ... depends on the actions of American colleagues. The President of Russia has repeatedly spoken out, including on this topic: what could be the measures, for example, in the line of the Russian navy, if things go completely in the direction of provoking Russia and further strengthening military pressure on us."

The United States immediately reacted to Ryabkov's words with a whole series of statements, including by Nuland, Blinken and even US Presidential Assistant Jake Sullivan, who said: "If Russia moves in this direction, we will deal with this decisively."

### *The show must go on*

The next day, US Secretary of State Blinken and NATO Secretary General Stoltenberg spoke on phone and after agreeing positions, announced that the US and NATO were ready to conduct the next round of negotiations with Moscow ...

What will the Kremlin say now?

Obviously, Putin will wait for the US and NATO to formulate and send him their proposals "on paper", and Moscow will use this time to apply pressure to correct the US and NATO proposals.

It goes without saying that pressure, if not by military and military-technical methods, then by threatening to introduce them, will be directed both at the United States and its allies, and if my analysis is correct, the US allies will be the first to come under pressure.

That could be a decision to deploy medium-range and shorter-range missiles, including those with nuclear warheads, in Belarus.

It may be the start of the process of Serbia joining the Collective Security Treaty Organization and the start of negotiations on the deployment of a Russian military base in Serbia.

The Russian media reported about redeployment of Iskander missiles from Siberia to the European part of Russia or to Belarus. According to the Western military, the Iskander missiles can carry both conventional and nuclear warheads. The range of missiles (in two versions, up to 500 km and up to 2000-5000 km) and their ability to overcome anti-missile defence ensure immediate huge damage in the event of strikes by Iskanders on airfields, logistics, communication, command and control centres.

The media have already reported on the possibility of transferring to Belarus two regiments of MIG-31K aircraft with Kinzhal hypersonic missiles capable of hitting both ground targets and navy, including aircraft carriers, cruisers, destroyers and frigates. The Kinzhal hypersonic missiles develop hypersonic speed that exceed the speed of sound by 10 times. It can carry conventional and nuclear warheads and manoeuvre along the entire flight path. That allows the missiles to overcome all existing air and missile defence systems. It will take no more than 8 minutes for Kinzhal missile launched from the territory of Belarus to hit any target in Europe and its territorial waters.

Other steps may also be taken. On January 16, the Kremlin announced that Vladimir Putin would meet in Moscow with Iranian leader Ibrahim Raisi. There have already been reports in the media that a Russian military base could be created in Iran, as has already been done in Syria. That military base in Iran will take control over the region, including the Persian Gulf and the straits.

The possible and most likely options for Russia's response to the position of NATO countries may be the deployment around Europe of warships equipped with Zircon hypersonic missiles. According to media reports, testing of Zircon hypersonic missiles was completed in October 2021.

Russia can also deploy attack submarines, for example, the most modern " Borrey, each capable of carrying missiles that can't be intercepted with 160 nuclear warheads.

Or, Moscow will make a statement about the start of deliveries of Poseidon unmanned underwater vehicles equipped with nuclear power plants and nuclear warheads to the Russian Navy and Poseidon deployment off the coast of the United States and Western Europe. Poseidon is capable of moving at 1 kilometre depth, at intercontinental range and at a speed of 200 km per hour. That exceeds several times the speed of torpedoes and submarines and all types of surface ships. Poseidon is capable of carrying a nuclear warhead with a yield of 100 megatons and creating tsunami with a wave height of 200 to 500 meters that is able to destroy all objects in the territory tens of kilometres deep from the coast...

We will see in the coming days what Putin will choose to influence NATO's negotiating position and force Poland and the Baltic countries to willingly transfer to Washington the right to represent the alliance in negotiations with Moscow.

Valery Morozov

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