



Kremlin Unveils Conditions for Talks With U.S.

Russia remains open to negotiations with the United States, but will agree only to a comprehensive discussion regarding all issues of concern, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov maintained on March 26.

Moscow has ample “political will” for talks with Washington, but is “in favor of a comprehensive discussion of all issues,” Peskov added.

“[President Vladimir Putin] has repeatedly said that we are open to a dialogue, that we believe it is necessary to discuss all issues comprehensively. You cannot take some issues out of the general context that now dominates our bilateral relations,” Peskov continued.

Last month, Peskov posited that Russia has seen no “political will” from Washington to engage in meaningful talks with Moscow.

Notably, Russia’s ambassador to Washington, Anatoly Antonov, had stated earlier on March 26 that the diplomatic mission had only had “transitory” contacts with the U.S. administration since the terrorist attack at the Crocus City Hall outside of Moscow on March 22, but will discuss “bilateral relations, about how we can live on, and if there is any chance at all for Russian-American relations not to be completely destroyed” next week.

Washington cut almost all relations with Moscow in February 2022, citing Moscow’s actions in the Ukraine conflict. In August that year, Ambassador Antonov said that “only crumbs” remained, noting a deconfliction hotline in Syria, space exploration, and some work on non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.

Since then, nonetheless, Russia has suspended its participation in the New START nuclear arms-control treaty, alluding to U.S. statements about inflicting a “strategic defeat” on Moscow by arming and bankrolling Ukraine.

During an interview with RIA Novosti on March 27, Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said that the United States was covering up for Ukraine by denying Kyiv’s involvement in the deadly Crocus City Hall shooting.

The terrorist attack, the worst in Russia since the early 2000s, killed at least 140 people and injured almost 200. In the aftermath of the shooting, law enforcement detained various suspects, including four accused of staging the attack.

Per Russian President Vladimir Putin, the latter — whom he described as “radical Islamists” — were caught escaping “towards Ukraine where, according to preliminary data, a window to cross the border was prepared.”



AP Images
Dmitry Peskov



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Meanwhile, the United States, together with many of its allies, has been quick to contend that Islamic State (IS, formerly ISIS) terrorists were solely to blame for the shooting, saying there is no proof thus far that Kyiv had anything to do with it. Ukraine has also dismissed responsibility claims in the attack.

Regarding the vehement denials of Ukraine and its Western backers, Zakharova said that “they [Washington] have exposed themselves.”

“They started crying, not calling for an investigation, but covering up for Ukraine. Their bias and involvement in this issue is evident.”

Moreover, Zakharova claimed that if Kyiv had not actually been involved in the attack, Washington’s first reaction would have been to underscore the need for an investigation.

Zakharova’s remarks come after the head of Russia’s Federal Security Service (FSB), Aleksandr Bortnikov, suggested that not only Ukraine, but also the United States and the U.K. — Kyiv’s main backers in its conflict with Moscow — might have been responsible for the terrorist attack. Bortnikov described the information on the matter as being general, but added that investigators already have “concrete results.”

Bortnikov told reporters on March 26 that the authorities are attempting to establish the identity of everyone involved in the attack, both inside and outside Russia.

When asked whether the United States, the U.K., and Ukraine could be behind the terrorist attack, the FSB chief responded, “We think that this is so. In any case, we are now talking about the information that we have. This is general information, but they [investigators] also have concrete results.”

Bortnikov’s statement to the media follows a meeting of the expanded board of the Prosecutor General’s Office of Russia. The FSB director told reporters that the intelligence service will do everything necessary to identify the direct organizers and sponsors of the terrorist attack.

Also, Bortnikov highlighted that Ukraine’s military intelligence chief, Kirill Budanov, should be considered a valid target for Russian troops, as well as anyone “committing crimes” against Russia.

A Moscow court ordered Budanov’s arrest on terrorism charges in December 2023, after Kyiv’s top spy was slammed for masterminding over 100 “terrorist attacks” involving drones targeting Russian civilian infrastructure.

The head of the Ukrainian military intelligence (GRU) has openly called for attacks on Russian soil, including territory that Kyiv acknowledges as being under Moscow’s sovereignty. Budanov initially claimed the assaults were “partisan activities,” but later acknowledged the responsibility of the Ukrainian state.

“Those committing crimes against Russia and Russian citizens are a legitimate target,” Bortnikov said when asked about Budanov and other high-ranking Ukrainian intelligence officials. When questioned by journalists on why Russia has not yet acted on those targets, the FSB chief replied that this possibility “is still ahead.”

The FSB initially identified Budanov as the mastermind of the October 2022 bombing of the Crimean Bridge. The attack entailed a powerful explosive device smuggled into Russia by an unsuspecting truck driver. The man and four other people in a nearby car were killed in the blast.

In November last year, Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergey Ryabkov admitted that meaningful negotiations with the United States were impossible under circumstances at that point of time.



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“I don’t think that, in the foreseeable future, the dialogue will return to how it was before its unilateral suspension by the US,” Ryabkov told reporters on the fringes of an international policy forum in Moscow.

Ryabkov elaborated that Moscow was pondering whether to respond to a letter that Washington sent in October informally requesting that the countries restart communication about “strategic stability.” If Moscow decides to send a formal reply, “our American colleagues will be unlikely to find something looking like a concession,” he said.

“Unilateral concessions from our side are out of the question,” Ryabkov stressed. “Right now, it’s not even an issue of concessions or the search for compromises, but whether there is any sense in communications of that sort.”



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