

# U.S. and NATO Refuse to Budge on Ukraine in Leaked Letter to Russia

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Western officials have again refused to acquiesce to Moscow's demands that Ukraine be kept out of NATO, demanding instead that the Kremlin end its "unjustified" build-up of troops at the border—and doubling down on a demand that they get troops out of Georgia and Moldova while they're at it. That's according to a leaked letter published Wednesday by the Spanish newspaper *El País* that purports to show the latest response to Russia's security demands by U.S. and NATO officials.

The document, which contains a five-page response from Washington, and four pages from NATO, largely reiterates several proposals that had already been made public in the showdown over Ukraine. For one, Western officials said they would be open to holding negotiations with Russia to agree on limiting nuclear weapons and the scale of military exercises. They said they would be prepared for "discussions and dialogue" with Russia on a range of security matters, including arms control in the field of intermediate and shorter range missiles, and the "indivisibility of security," a principle that Moscow has accused Washington and its allies of trampling all over by expanding NATO.

But, perhaps most infuriatingly for Vladimir Putin, Western officials refused to budge on Moscow's biggest demand—that NATO ensure Ukraine will not become a member of the alliance.

"Considering the substantial, unprovoked, unjustified and ongoing Russian military build-up in and around Ukraine and in Belarus, we call on Russia to immediately de-escalate the situation in a verifiable, timely, and lasting manner," the letter reads, going on to "reaffirm" support for the "territorial integrity and sovereignty of Ukraine, including Crimea."

"Further Russian increases to force posture or further aggression against Ukraine will force the United States and our allies to strengthen our defensive posture," the letter warns.

The letter also doubles down on a call by Western officials for Russia to withdraw forces "from Ukraine, Georgia, and the Republic of Moldova, where they are deployed without host-nation consent."

Russian troops have occupied the Georgian territories of South Ossetia and Abkhazia since the war in 2008, as well as Transnistria, an unrecognized breakaway state of Moldova.

Details on the contents of the letter from Western officials come after U.S. officials reportedly asked their Russian counterparts to keep the documents secret, a request that was met by Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov publicly stating he thought the documents should be made public.