

US-RUSSIA HIGH LEVEL TALKS

Here follows a sketchy picture of the content and the results of last Monday (Jan. 10) talks in Geneva, between Wendy Sherman, Deputy Secretary of the US State Dpt. and Sergej Ryabkow, Deputy Foreign Minister in MID.

- Deliberations lasted for 8 hours and were held in a professional climate of candor and directness.
- As things have evolved and positions petrified over the years, both sides implied that they did not move from their respective positions. This was to be expected in the first coming together of the negotiators. We should not forget that the last straw was delivery of Turkish UAVs to Ukraine and their success in operations against the insurgents of Donbas which forced Moscow to raise the antes by submitting before Christmas 2021 legal draft documents to NATO countries addressing core issues of stability on the European continent.
- The US side claimed readiness to address Russia's legitimate concerns, but we do not know what part of those concerns is viewed by Washington as legitimate.
- The Russian side, feeling beleaguered and encircled by NATO assets from south, west and northwest, is technically demandeur in the talks, as it strives to extract international legally binding guarantees that Ukraine, a part of the legacy of the Rus, will not become one day member of the Atlantic Alliance. Moscow cogently demands withdrawal of US missile bases in Romania, Poland and elsewhere, as well as of other offensive weapons of all kinds and removal of permanently stationed personnel not only from Ukraine, but also from the Baltic Republics and Poland.
- It seems that no narrowing of differences has been registered. But even holding the - meeting, with subsequent briefing of the NATO Council, convening the NATO - Russia Council - dormant for the last 4 years - calling an extraordinary session of OSCE plenum, means that Russian grievances have been taken very seriously in the Potomac.
- Russia will not be granted any formal assurance of not bringing Ukraine in NATO's fold. Yet, it is highly doubtful that Ukraine will ever become part of the Alliance's club, enjoying article 5 of NATO Charter solidarity. Instead, it will continue to enjoy multifaceted support short of article 5, as the case has been so far.

This page thinks that we will see the 1987 INF Treaty prohibiting deployment in Europe of short and medium range (500-5000km) land-based missiles resurrected and revisited in an adjusted form (Pres. Trump had departed from this Treaty in 2017). The same might mutatis mutandis come true with regard to the CFE Treaty on conventional forces in Europe, negotiated primarily in Vienna and signed in Paris, October 1990 (which Russia withdrew from in 2015). This means that after the exploratory talks to set the agenda are completed, a long, new round of bilateral/multilateral negotiations will commence which might not yield fruits before 2023.

In spite of the appearances, EUs role in this should not be underestimated. European Allies will heavily affect the decision making. They will try to extract compromises ensuring their own security and prosperity.

Things come to a head, as we explain below:

- The OSCE Minsk process regarding Ukraine, fathered back in 2014 by the Normandy Group's two Europeans, France, and Germany, lies in a coma. Both countries need to decisively re engage and reenergize this peace process, admittedly a bitter medicine for Kiev. A not very benign neglect in the last two years, contributed to the present deadlock.
- STRABO's view is - without prejudice to the Minsk Protocol of February 2015- that declaring Ukraine a permanently neutral country, no matter its size, bound by international legal guarantees, would help square the circle. Austrians possess the requisite know-how.

**STRAVO of Amaseia,
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