

## US, Russia hold highest-level talks since Ukraine invasion

### *США та росія ведуть переговори на найвищому рівні після вторгнення в Україну*

*Держсекретар США Е. Блінкен і міністр закордонних справ росії лавров провели коротку зустріч на конференції міністрів закордонних справ G20 у Нью-Делі, відзначивши особисті переговори на найвищому рівні між двома країнами з моменту вторгнення росії в Україну. Зустріч не свідчила про послаблення гострої напруженості між двома націями, з безліччю розбіжностей, скарг і взаємних звинувачень між ними. Незважаючи на те, що повного консенсусу не вдалося досягти, 18 із 20 країн виступили із заявою, в якій закликали припинити війну та вжити негайних заходів для покращення енергетичної та продовольчої безпеки, які сильно постраждали від конфлікту. Відносини між США та росією різко погіршилися через війну росії з Україною, а напруга різко зростає на тлі безлічі розбіжностей.*

<https://www.smh.com.au/world/europe/us-russia-hold-highest-level-talks-since-ukraine-invasion-20230303-p5cp24.html>

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov have talked briefly in the highest-level in-person talks between the two countries since Russia's invasion of Ukraine. But there was no indication of any movement toward easing the intense tensions between their two nations.

The short encounter on Thursday (India time) came as relations between Washington and Moscow have plummeted over Russia's war with Ukraine and tensions have soared amid a myriad of disagreements, complaints and recriminations on other matters ranging from arms control to embassy staffing and prisoners.

US officials said Blinken and Lavrov chatted for roughly 10 minutes on the sidelines of the G20 conference of foreign ministers in New Delhi. But there was no sign of any progress and the conference itself ended with the grouping unable to reach consensus on the Ukraine war.

Still, with relations at perhaps their lowest point since the Cuban Missile Crisis during the Cold War, the mere fact that the two men met showed that, at least for the moment, lines of high-level communication between Washington and Moscow remains open.

At a news conference, Blinken said he told Lavrov that the US would continue to support Ukraine for as long as it takes and would push for the war to end through diplomatic terms that Kyiv agrees to.

Is anyone winning Putin's war in Ukraine – and how might it end?

“End this war of aggression, engage in meaningful diplomacy that can produce a just and durable peace,” Blinken said he had told Lavrov. But, he noted that “President [Vladimir] Putin has demonstrated zero interest in engaging, saying there's nothing to even talk about unless and until Ukraine accepts and I quote ‘the new territorial reality’.”

Blinken said he also urged Russia to reverse “its irresponsible decision and return to” participation in the New START nuclear treaty.

“Mutual compliance is in the interest of both our countries,” Blinken said he told Lavrov. He added “that no matter what else is happening in the world, in our relationship, the United States is always ready to engage and act on strategic arms control, just as the United States and the Soviet Union did even at the height of the Cold War.”

Blinken said he also urged Moscow to release detained American Paul Whelan and that “the United States has put forward a serious proposal. Russia should take it.”

Earlier, Blinken had told the G20 meeting that Russia's war with Ukraine could not go unchallenged.

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US Secretary of State Antony Blinken

"We must continue to call on Russia to end its war of aggression and withdraw from Ukraine for the sake of international peace and economic stability," Blinken said. He noted that 141 countries had voted to condemn Russia at the United Nations on the one-year anniversary of the invasion. Yet, several members of the G20, including host India, China and South Africa, chose to abstain in that vote and despite appeals from top Indian officials to look beyond their differences over Ukraine and forge consensus on other issues, the foreign ministers were unable to do so or agree on a final communique.

Indian Foreign Minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar said there were "divergences" on the issue of the war in Ukraine "which we could not reconcile as various parties held differing views." "If we had a perfect meeting of minds on all issues, it would have been a collective statement," Jaishankar said.

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi had earlier appealed for all members of the fractured G20 to reach consensus on issues of particular concern to poorer countries even if the broader East-West split over Ukraine could not overcome.

"We all have our positions and our perspectives on how these tensions should be resolved," Modi said. "We should not allow issues that we cannot resolve together to come in the way of those we can."

China and Russia objected to two paragraphs taken from the previous G20 declaration in Bali last year, according to a summary of Thursday's meeting released by India. And Blinken lamented that "Russia and China were the only two countries that made clear that they would not sign off on the text."

The paragraphs stated that the war in Ukraine was causing immense human suffering while exacerbating fragilities in the global economy, the need to uphold international law, and that "the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons is inadmissible".

Despite the failure to achieve full consensus, Blinken said it was positive that 18 of the 20 nations had agreed on a statement calling for an end to the war and immediate steps to improve energy and food security that have been badly affected by the conflict.

Lavrov, who did not mention speaking with Blinken when he held a news conference after the G20 session, told reporters that Moscow would continue to press its action in Ukraine. He shrugged off Western claims of Russia's isolation, saying "we aren't feeling isolated. It's the West that has isolated itself, and it will eventually come to realise it".

He said Russia remains open to talks on ending the conflict in Ukraine, but he accused the West of effectively blocking such talks.

"They are calling on us to have talks, but I don't remember any Western colleagues calling on Ukraine to have talks," he said. "They are encouraging Ukraine to continue the war."

Lavrov also mocked US threats against China, which has presented a peace plan for Ukraine that has been applauded by Moscow but dismissed by Washington and its Western allies.

"Our Western colleagues have lost self-control, forgotten their manners and put diplomacy aside, switching exclusively to blackmail and threats," he said.

Russia had no immediate comment on the substance of the conversation, but Russian Foreign Ministry spokesperson Maria Zakharova said Blinken had asked to speak to Lavrov.

It was their first contact since last summer, when Blinken talked to Lavrov by phone about a US proposal for Russia to release Whelan and formerly detained WNBA star Brittney Griner. Griner was later released in a swap for imprisoned Russian arms dealer Viktor Bout, but Whelan remains detained in Russia.

Whelan, a Michigan corporate security executive, has been held for four years on espionage charges that his family and the United States government have said are baseless.

His brother David said the family is grateful that Blinken "took this high profile, rare opportunity to include Paul's freedom in his discussions with Kremlin representatives." But he noted that Paul Whelan turns 53 on Sunday, his fifth birthday in custody. He's held in a prison in the Mordovia region in "sub-zero Celsius temperatures" with heat turned off, David Whelan said in an email.

“Paul continues to suffer ... so for all the statecraft and stonewalling, our brother languishes for another birthday and however many more milestones as a Russian hostage,” he said.

The last time Blinken and Lavrov met in person was in Geneva, Switzerland, in January 2022 on the eve of Russia’s invasion. At that meeting, Blinken warned Lavrov about consequences if Russia went ahead with its planned military operation but also sought to address some complaints that Putin had made about the US and NATO.

Those talks proved to be inconclusive — Russia moved ahead with its plans to invade and Blinken then cancelled a scheduled follow-up meeting with Lavrov that was set for just two days before Moscow eventually invaded on February 24, 2022.