

HIGHLIGHTS

PULSE OF PEACE IN DONBAS



28 December–5 January, 2021

BIDEN AND PUTIN TALKS: THE U.S. IS READY TO TAKE TWO APPROACHES TO RUSSIA

On December 30, 2021, US President Joe Biden had a telephone conversation with Russian President Vladimir Putin. The talks were [initiated](#) by the Russian side. Joe Biden [warned](#) Russia of massive sanctions from the U.S. and its allies and partners if escalation along the Ukrainian borders continues. He also expressed support for diplomatic negotiations in bilateral and multilateral formats, including talks on strategic stability between Russia and the United States (January 9-10 in Geneva), as well as NATO (January 12 in Brussels) and OSCE (January 13 in Vienna). EU diplomatic chief Josep Borrell [insists](#) that the EU must play an active role in future U.S.-Russian negotiations on security around Ukraine, as they affect the future of the entire European continent.

A senior U.S. administration official [noted](#) from the conversation that the U.S. is prepared to take two approaches depending on Russia's actions - a diplomatic one leading to de-escalation, or a path focused on containment, with serious costs and consequences if Russia decides to undertake further invasion of Ukraine.

Joe Biden also [said](#) that steps against Ukraine will lead to a stronger U.S. presence in Europe, and that progress in further negotiations with Russia will only be possible if it decides to de-escalate. According to a [report](#) published the same day, December 30, by the Conflict Intelligence Team, the movement of Russian troops to the borders with Ukraine continues and Surface-to-air missile (SAMs) were added to the detected camps and equipment depots.

According to Russian President Vladimir Putin, sanctions against Russia may lead to a breakdown in relations with the United States and Western countries, and Russia will behave as the United States would behave if offensive weapons were located near its borders, [said](#) Russian presidential advisor Yuri Ushakov.

Analysts believe that the conversation between the two presidents has somewhat reduced the likelihood of a new round of confrontation with Russia, but their views on the prospects of sanctions differ – [reports](#) Radio Liberty.

Following the [talks](#), a group of 24 former U.S. national security officials and experts on Russia issued a statement urging the U.S. to release measures agreed upon in case Russia attacks Ukraine. In their view, the move could influence the Kremlin's position by creating an idea of the scale of a potential economic strike. They also noted that the Biden administration should encourage NATO allies to be more active in strengthening Ukraine's defense capabilities, demonstrating that the entire Alliance opposes Russian aggression, while escalation would lead to a permanent presence of U.S. and Alliance forces in the Baltic states and the Black Sea region. In addition, a statement should be sought from the G7 heads of state condemning Russia's threats against Ukraine, working to use other forums, including the OSCE and UN, and holding consultations to prepare for a possible humanitarian crisis.

In response to this [call](#), the chairman of the Federation Council Commission on Information Policy and Interaction with the Media Alexei Pushkov said that the release of such information could allegedly derail the negotiations.

BIDEN AND ZELENSKY TALKS: THE U.S. EXPRESSED SUPPORT FOR UKRAINIAN SOVEREIGNTY

On January 2, 2022, U.S. President Joe Biden and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky had a telephone conversation. The key topic was the situation in eastern Ukraine and its borders. During the conversation, the USA once again confirmed its unwavering support for Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity and its European integration aspirations. Volodymyr Zelenski [welcomed](#) the active role of the United States in resolving the escalation on the borders of Ukraine, noting the importance of the international legal measures planned for January 2022, including the US support for the Ukraine-NATO commission meeting.

Joe Biden [assured](#) that the United States, together with allies and partners, would take decisive action if Russia continued its invasion of Ukraine. He also expressed support for confidence-building measures to de-escalate tensions in Donbas and active diplomacy to promote implementation of the Minsk agreements in support of the Normandy format. He also noted Ukraine's persistence and efforts to return to full compliance with the ceasefire on the line of contact in Donbas, the head of the Office of the President of Ukraine Andrey Yermak [said](#).

JOSEP BORREL, HEAD OF EU DIPLOMACY, VISITED DONBAS FOR THE FIRST TIME

On January 4, 2022, European Union High Representative Josep Borrell [arrived](#) in Ukraine with a working visit. His purpose was to demonstrate EU support for Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity in connection with the threat of military escalation by Russia and to support reforms. He [was](#) the first head of European diplomacy to visit Donbas since the conflict began.

During a joint briefing with Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmitry Kuleba in Stanytsia Luhanska, Josep Borrel, recalling Russia's proposals on security in Europe and the negotiations on this issue expected in different formats in the coming weeks, [stressed](#) that a discussion on European security is impossible without the participation of the European Union and Ukraine, and the issue of dividing spheres of influence between the states cannot be on the current agenda. He also reiterated the European Union's full support for Ukraine's territorial integrity, sovereignty and independence, stating that the main goal at the moment is to reduce tensions on Ukraine's borders both through negotiations and through explicit statements of the EU's unwavering support for Ukraine. In his turn, Dmytro Kuleba stressed that Ukraine and the European Union are united in the fact that Russia has no right to divide Europe into zones of influence, noted the importance of practical assistance provided by the EU to strengthen Ukraine's security, and expressed gratitude to the European Union and Josep Borrel for supporting Ukraine and its reform program, humanitarian assistance provided to regions affected by the aggression of the Russian Federation.

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UKRAINIAN GOVERNMENT SIMPLIFIED THE PROCEDURE FOR CROSSING CHECKPOINTS

The Government of Ukraine has [simplified](#) the procedure for crossing the entry-exit checkpoints in the Donbas by [amending](#) a number of regulations governing the entry and exit to the temporarily occupied territory of Ukraine. The changes were made at the initiative of the Ministry of Reintegration.

From December 31, 2021 the requirement for mandatory installation of the "Day at Home" application when crossing the checkpoints and self-isolation is abolished. Those who cross the contact line will be tested for COVID-19 free of charge. If the test proves positive, the person will be able to either undergo a 10-day observation or return to the temporarily uncontrolled territories of Ukraine. The changes were initiated by the Ministry of Reintegration.

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Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Reintegration of the Temporarily Occupied Territories of Ukraine Iryna Vereshchuk [stressed](#) that the previous procedure for crossing checkpoints significantly complicated the lives of residents of the ORDLO, representing a barrier to reintegration. Only 0.28% of all tests conducted at checkpoints had a positive result, which allows us to conclude that such restrictions are inappropriate, making the right to freedom of movement more difficult to exercise.

Iryna Vereshchuk also [noted](#) that Ukraine has no grounds for the recognition of vaccination with the Russian Sputnik V, and certificates of testing for COVID-19 issued on the territories of the so-called "L/DPR" will not be recognized.

EX-HEAD OF THE "DPR" PRISON "ISOLATION" COOPERATED WITH SECURITY SERVICE OF UKRAINE

Denis Kulikovsky, former commandant of the illegal place of detention of the so-called "DPR", de-facto prison "Isolation" had been cooperating with the Security Service of Ukraine since at least 2019 – according to an investigation [conducted](#) by Radio Liberty in cooperation with the Bellingcat investigative community. He was detained by Security Service of Ukraine officers on the night of November 9, 2021, and had been living in Kyiv for the past two years. The investigation was trying to get an answer to the question why he had not been arrested earlier.

There are at least 10 more people suspected of violence against people illegally held in the "Isolation". As Bellingcat found out, three of them have Russian citizenship, obtained under a simplified procedure for residents of the temporarily uncontrolled territories of Donbas.