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## **Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's interview with Mediaset, Italian television network, Moscow, May 1, 2022**

**Question:** After your statement about the possibility of a nuclear war, of the third world war, the whole world is asking: is there a real risk of that happening?

**Sergey Lavrov:** It looks like by the whole world you mean Western media and politicians. This is not the first time I note how skillfully the West twists what Russia's representatives say. I was asked about the threats that are currently growing and about how real the risk of the third world war is. I answered literally the following: Russia has never ceased its efforts to reach agreements that would guarantee the prevention of a nuclear war. In recent years, it was Russia who has persistently proposed to its American colleagues that we repeat what Mikhail Gorbachev and Ronald Reagan did in 1987: adopt a statement reaffirming that there can be no winners in a nuclear war, and therefore it must never be unleashed.

We failed to convince the Trump Administration, because it had its own ideas on this issue. However, the Biden Administration agreed to our proposal. In June 2021, at a meeting between President of Russia Vladimir Putin and US President Joseph Biden in Geneva a statement was adopted on the inadmissibility of a nuclear war. Let me stress: this was done at our initiative.

In January 2022, five permanent members of the UN Security Council adopted a similar statement at the highest level, also at our initiative: there can be no winners in a nuclear war. It must never be unleashed. In order to achieve this goal, President Vladimir Putin proposed convening a summit of the five permanent members of the UN Security Council. This proposal was supported by our Chinese colleagues and France. The United States and the United Kingdom, which always defers to it, are holding back this important event for the time being.

After I said this, I urged everyone to exercise utmost caution not to escalate the existing threats. I was referring to the statement made by President Vladimir Zelensky in February that it had been a mistake for Ukraine to give up its nuclear weapons and it was necessary to acquire them again. There was also a statement made by the leadership of Poland about their readiness to deploy American nuclear weapons on their territory, and much more.

Somehow there were no questions from the media about the statements made by Vladimir Zelensky and Poland. Or after the statement by Foreign Minister of France Jean-Yves Le Drian, who said suddenly: Let us not forget that France also has nuclear weapons. This is what I was talking about. When Western journalists take words out of context and distort the meaning of what I or other Russian representatives actually said, this does them no credit.

**Question:** Several days ago, President Vladimir Putin said Russia had “unparalleled weapons.” What did he mean?

**Sergey Lavrov:** Everyone knows this well. Three years ago, during his Address to the Federal Assembly, President Vladimir Putin presented the latest Russian innovations. First of all, these included hypersonic weapons. He gave a frank and detailed explanation that Russia began developing them after the United States withdrew from the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty. Back then President George W. Bush, answering the question why his country was destroying this essential document, which ensured global stability to a large extent, told President Vladimir Putin they were going to withdraw from the treaty to create an anti-missile system that would not be aimed against Russia. He said they were concerned about North Korea and Iran, and “you can do whatever you want in response.” They will also consider this as not aimed against the United States.

We had no choice but to work on hypersonic weapons because we knew perfectly well that the US missile defence system would not be aimed at North Korea and Iran but against Russia and then China. We needed weapons that were guaranteed to overpower missile defences. Otherwise, a country that has missile defence systems and offensive weapons may be tempted to launch the first strike thinking that a response will be suppressed by its missile defence systems.

This is how we developed these weapons. They are described in detail in specialised publications. We don't hide that we have them. We were even ready to hold talks with the US on including a discussion on the new systems that have already been developed or will be developed in the future in the treaty on strategic stability that would replace the current New START. Today the Americans have suspended all these talks. We will rely on our own resources.

**Question:** When UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres was visiting Kiev, the city was hit by missile strikes. What would you say in response to Western media and President Vladimir Zelensky who regard these strikes as a provocation against the UN?

**Sergey Lavrov:** We gave constant warnings. When he announced the launch of the special military operation, President Vladimir Putin said it will be aimed against the military infrastructure in Ukraine used to oppress civilians in the east of the country and create a threat to the security of Russia. They know very well that we are attacking military targets in order to deprive the Ukrainian radicals and the Kiev regime of the opportunity to receive reinforcements in the form of weapons and ammunition.

On the other hand, I have not heard President Vladimir Zelensky say a word about a situation that is in no way related to either a military plant (whatever it is called) or any other military facilities. I mean the Tochka-U missile strikes at the centre of Donetsk over the recent weeks, or the civil railway station in Kramatorsk and several other places, including Kherson (just the day before yesterday). The reason for these strikes was clearly to terrorise civilians and prevent the people living in these regions from deciding their fate. The majority of people there are tired from the oppression they have been suffering all these years from the Kiev regime, which is increasingly becoming a tool in the hands of neo-Nazis, the United States and its closest allies.

Those who came to power after a bloody unconstitutional coup launched a war against their own people and against everything Russian, banning the Russian language, education, and media. They adopted laws promoting Nazi theories and practice. We have warned them. All our warnings met a wall of silence. As we understand now, back then the West led by the United States already intended to encourage the Ukrainian leaders (Petr Poroshenko and Vladimir Zelensky, who came after him) in every possible way in their desire to create threats for Russia.

Our warnings issued in November and December 2021 about the need to stop NATO's reckless expansion to the east and agree on security guarantees that that will not be related to the accession of new countries to the military-political bloc were rejected. I would even say the answer we received was not very polite: "It's none of your business," "we will expand NATO as we wish," and "we won't ask for your permission."

At the same time, the Ukrainian regime gathered about 100,000 troops along the conflict line with Donbass and intensified strikes thus violating the Minsk agreements and the ceasefire. We had no choice but to recognise these two republics, sign an agreement on mutual assistance with them and, upon their request, defend them from the militarists and Nazis who are flourishing in today's Ukraine.

**Question:** This is how you see it, while Vladimir Zelensky puts it differently. He believes denazification doesn't make any sense. He is a Jew. The Nazis, Azov – there are very few of them (several thousand). Vladimir Zelensky refutes your view of the situation. Do you believe Vladimir Zelensky is an obstacle to peace?

**Sergey Lavrov:** It makes no difference to me what President Vladimir Zelensky refutes or does not refute. He is as fickle as the wind, as they say. He can change his position several times a day.

I heard him say that they would not even discuss demilitarisation and denazification during peace talks. First, they are torpedoing the talks just as they did the Minsk agreements for eight years. Second, there is nazification there: the captured militants as well as members of the Azov and Aidar battalions and other units wear swastikas or symbols of Nazi Waffen-SS battalions on their clothes or have them tattooed on their bodies; they openly read and promote Mein Kampf. His argument is: How can there be Nazism in Ukraine if he is a Jew? I may be mistaken but Adolf Hitler had Jewish blood, too. This means absolutely nothing. The wise Jewish people say that the most ardent anti-Semites are usually Jews. "Every family has its black sheep," as we say.

As for Azov, there is evidence being published now confirming that the Americans and especially the Canadians played a leading role in training the ultra-radical and clearly neo-Nazi units in Ukraine. During all these years, the goal was to insert neo-Nazis into the regular Ukrainian troops. Thus, the Azov fighters would play a leading role in every unit (battalion or regiment). I read such reports in Western media. The fact that the Azov battalion is clearly a neo-Nazi unit was recognised by the West without any hesitation until the situation in early 2022, when they began to change their minds as if on cue. Japan even apologised to Azov recently for having listed it as a terrorist organisation a few years ago because of its neo-Nazi ideology.

Journalists (from some Western media outlet) interviewed Vladimir Zelensky and asked him what he thought about Azov and the ideas that Azov preaches and puts into practice. He said there were many such battalions and “they are what they are.” I would like to emphasise that this phrase – “they are what they are” – was cut out by the journalist and it was not included in the interview that was aired. This means the journalist understands what this person says and thinks. He thinks about how the neo-Nazis can be used to fight Russia.

**Question:** There are several thousand or perhaps tens of thousands of neo-Nazi militants. Can their presence excuse the denazification of a country with the population of 40 million? There are such battalions as the Wagner Group, who also draw inspiration from neo-Nazi ideas, serving with the Russian troops.

**Sergey Lavrov:** We have discussed the Wagner Group a number of times with those who are interested in this topic. Wagner is a private military company that has nothing to do with the Russian state. We explained this to our French colleagues, too; they started to get nervous when the Wagner Group agreed with the Mali government to provide security services. Back in September 2021, my esteemed colleague Jean-Yves Le Drian, as well as Josep Borrell, said directly that Russia had no business in Africa, neither as a state nor with private military companies because Africa is the EU and France's zone. This is what they said to me almost word for word.

We also explained the situation in Libya, whose authorities invited this private military company to the city of Tobruk, where the Libyan parliament is situated. Italy knows the Libyan situation very well. They are there on commercial terms, like in Mali. There is nothing like that in Ukraine, which has a huge number of mercenaries from Western countries. I believe the talk about the Wagner Group's presence in Ukraine is nothing but a trick to distract attention from what our Western colleagues are doing. The situation around the confrontation at the Azovstal plant in Mariupol, as well as the stubborn, even hysterical desire of Vladimir Zelensky, his team and their Western patrons to evacuate all these people and send them to Ukraine can be explained by the fact that there are many people there who would confirm that there are mercenaries and maybe even acting officers of Western armies on the side of the Ukrainian radicals.

You have asked whether the elimination of several dozen (even thousand) Nazis' influence is worth putting a country with a population of 40 million at risk. This question is not entirely correct. It is a matter of Russia's fundamental security interests. We have been talking about it for several decades. Long before the coup, the West came to Ukraine (this was 20 years ago) and began to tell them that on the eve of each election they must decide whose side they are on: Europe's or Russia's. Later they started encouraging the initiatives that the Ukrainian leadership promoted to be as unlike the Russian Federation as possible. I have mentioned the persecution of the Russian language and the Russian media, the shutdown of Russian-language television channels, the ban on the sale of any printed products in Russian (both from Russia and those published in Ukraine), the Russian Orthodox Church, which is a sacred institution in our state and society, and the adoption of laws to promote Nazi theories and practice. These laws are not adopted for several tens of thousands of militants in radical battalions, but for the whole country.

Western Ukraine stopped celebrating the Victory in the Great Patriotic War. It happened a long time ago. The latest developments have nothing to do with it. They started destroying monuments to those who liberated Ukraine from the Nazis when they started celebrating the birthdays of those who collaborated with Hitler as national holidays (Shukhevich, Bandera and others, Waffen-SS fighters). They started to celebrate as a national holiday the day when the Ukrainian Insurgent Army was created, which was found guilty of collaborating with the Nazis at the Nuremberg Tribunal. This did not happen in the last two or three months but started many years ago. Even before the coup.

The coup took place the day after the French and Polish foreign ministers guaranteed a peaceful settlement in February 2014. The following morning, when the opposition overthrew the government, declared a hunt for the president and occupied the administrative building, we asked them why they could not use the power, the influence and authority of the EU to force the opposition to cooperate. The answer was incomprehensible: Viktor Yanukovich had left Kiev. Many people left their capitals. That same year, in 2014, there was a coup in Yemen. President Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi also left the capital. The difference was that Viktor Yanukovich left Kiev for another city [in Ukraine], while Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi fled to Saudi Arabia. Since that time and until recently, for eight long years, the entire progressive humanity headed by our European liberals demanded that President Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi return as the legitimate leader of Yemen. But in Ukraine, when the President went to another city, there was no need to do anything anymore. We noted that the first statement made by those who staged the coup was about abolishing the regional status of the Russian language. They called on armed militants (also ultra-radicals) to storm the Supreme Council of Crimea. This is how it all began. Nobody wants to remember this now. The EU was humiliated by the thugs who seized power in Kiev following the coup just as the EU is now humiliated by its failure to enforce its decision to create a community of Serbian municipalities in Kosovo. With the EU's mediation, Pristina and Belgrade agreed on this back in 2013, but the EU has shown its incompetence once again.

**Question:** What do you think Italy's role is now?

**Sergey Lavrov:** Italy is at the forefront of those who not only adopt anti-Russian sanctions, but also put forward all sorts of initiatives. It was really strange for me to see it, but now we have become accustomed to the fact that Italy can be like that. I thought Italy and the Italian people have a slightly different view of their history and justice in the world, that they can tell the difference between black and white. I don't want to be inaccurate, but in any case some statements made by politicians, not to mention articles in the media, go beyond all diplomatic and political propriety and far beyond journalistic ethics.

**Question:** Could you tell us what and who you are referring to?

**Sergey Lavrov:** Our embassy has sent us such materials and even filed a lawsuit because there was a violation of Italian law. I don't want to go into detail now or repeat the nasty things that are being discussed. At least I don't associate it with the Italian people, for whom I have the warmest feelings.

**Question:** Let us talk about the role of the United States. Joe Biden continues to openly support Ukraine, supply it with money and weapons; he says that there is an aggressor and Ukraine is under attack.

**Sergey Lavrov:** I have read a lot of things in the American and European media about the connections between Joe Biden's family and Ukraine, so his attention to the current situation comes as no surprise. However, in addition to his personal interest, I cannot rule out that it is also about the fact that Washington is aware of the failure of its long-term strategy to turn Ukraine into a real threat to the Russian Federation and to make sure that Ukraine and Russia are not united and relations between them are not friendly.

In fact, this is not just about Joe Biden. When the Soviet Union broke up, the entire American elite was guided by the "legacy" of Zbigniew Brzezinski, who said Russia without Ukraine is just a regional power, nothing serious. They were guided by this logic when they pumped Ukraine with offensive weapons, encouraging its militarisation with a clear anti-Russia slant in every possible way, and drawing it into dozens of annual military exercises under the auspices of NATO. Many of those exercises were held in Ukraine. In 90 percent of cases, they were directed against Russia. We can also see now that the United States wants to bring its "anti-Russia" project (as President Vladimir Putin said) to a conclusion. We are increasingly hearing statements that "Russia must be defeated," "we must defeat Russia," "Ukraine must win," and "Russia must lose."

We agreed to the talks at the request of Vladimir Zelensky, and they started to gain momentum. In March, agreements were outlined at a negotiators' meeting in Istanbul, based on what Vladimir Zelensky said publicly. He said Ukraine was ready to become a neutral, non-bloc, non-nuclear country if it is provided with security guarantees. We were ready to work on this foundation given the understanding that the agreement would envisage that the security guarantees do not apply to Crimea and Donbass, as the Ukrainians had themselves suggested. Immediately after this proposal of theirs, which they signed and handed over to us, they changed their position. Now they are trying to hold talks in a different way. In particular, they want to receive security guarantees from the West first, although initially these guarantees should have been agreed upon by everyone together, including Russia.



When Vladimir Zelensky said he was ready for Ukraine's neutral non-bloc status, he made a serious step forward, which we welcomed. However, after that, his ministers and the Parliament speaker of Ukraine started saying that they should receive security guarantees but the goal of joining NATO (as stated in their constitution) will remain. Now NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg and the British started saying that if the Ukrainians want to preserve this goal, they have the right to do so. This is what I am talking about.

Now even NATO does not suit the Americans. They didn't hold their last meetings within the framework of NATO (a meeting on support for Ukraine), but simply gathered delegations, because NATO decisions are made by consensus, and they need to decide on all issues quickly and single-handedly.

**Question:** Perhaps their behaviour was affected by what happened in Mariupol and Bucha. In both cases, you spoke about a staged production, a performance. But, for example, a few days ago CNN broadcast a video recorded by a drone on March 13, which shows that there were Russian troops on those streets with the bodies. Could this have caused a change in their approach? Where is the truth regarding these war crimes?

**Sergey Lavrov:** There is only one truth here. On March 30, Russian troops left Bucha. The following day, on March 31, Bucha Mayor Anatoly Fedoruk proclaimed victory in front of television cameras saying that the city had returned to normal life. Only three days later they began to show photographs of these bodies. I don't even want to go into detail, because it is so obviously fake that any serious observer can see it at a glance.

I don't know what affected the US. When the US declares solemnly and dramatically that it is impossible to endure "all this," no one remembers how the US decided that there was a threat to its security 10,000 kilometres away from its borders: in Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya, or Yugoslavia in 1999. No one has any doubt that the US has the right to neutralise those made-up threats (like in Iraq, where it turned out to be fake) in any way it likes.

We warned many times over the years that they are posing a threat to the Russian borders, that this is a red line; we have been saying it for many years. They just nodded. But now I believe they thought the world should only listen to the US, because NATO and the entire European Union accepted that their master sits in Washington. And Washington decided that the world should be unipolar. If you read the statements made by their Secretary of the Treasury, for example, they say so directly.

**Question:** Several days ago, your Ministry published a photo of your predecessor, Andrey Gromyko, meeting with Pope Paul VI. Is this a call for Pope Francis to act as mediator?

**Sergey Lavrov:** I think it was simply the anniversary of their meeting. The Foreign Ministry is posting photos of events from 20, 30, or 40 years ago on its social media accounts.

**Question:** Who can bring peace? Is there such a person, institute, or country? President of Turkey Recep Tayyip Erdogan, and President of France Emmanuel Macron, and Prime Minister of Italy Mario Draghi have tried. Who can get a peace process started that will result in Russia, the West and Ukraine signing a treaty?

**Sergey Lavrov:** It is a good question, but long overdue. All problems could have been solved peacefully by Petr Poroshenko who was elected in 2014 under the slogan "Peace in Donbass." Then he started the war. It could have been solved by Vladimir Zelensky. During his election campaign, he presented himself as the "president of peace." In December 2019, he promised to fulfill the Minsk agreements and adopt a law granting a special status to Donbass within the unbroken territorial integrity of Ukraine. He had every chance. All the cards and even the trump cards were in his hands.

Vladimir Zelensky chose to say publically and arrogantly that he will never abide by the Minsk agreements because allegedly this would mean the fall of the Ukrainian nation and state. Everyone who drafted and approved the Minsk agreements at the UN Security Council kept silent. They said that he could stop implementing them if he wanted but Russia should continue to. That's who could have brought peace.

Vladimir Zelensky can also bring peace now if he stops giving illegal orders to his neo-Nazi battalions and makes them release all civilians and stop resisting.

**Question:** Do you want Vladimir Zelensky to surrender? Is this the condition for peace?

**Sergey Lavrov:** We are not demanding that he surrender. We are demanding that he give the order to release all civilians and to stop resisting. Our goal does not include regime change in Ukraine. This is the specialty of the US. They do it all over the world.

We want to ensure the safety of people in eastern Ukraine, so that they won't be threatened by militarisation and nazification and that no threats against the Russian Federation emanate from Ukrainian territory.

**Question:** Italy is concerned that Russia is suspending gas supplies. What is going on?

**Sergey Lavrov:** A simple thing that all the critics of our actions and everyone who condemns us these days do not want to talk about for some reason. Money was stolen from us (over \$300 billion). Just stolen. A large part of the sum was payment for gas and oil supplies. It was only possible because Gazprom had to keep money in accounts in Western banks (according to your rules). They wanted to punish Russia, so they stole it.

Now they suggest we continue trading as before, and the money remains in their accounts. They will steal it again when they want to. This is the reason. Somehow no one talks about it. What happened to honest journalism?

What we are now proposing is that supplies should be considered paid for not when Gazprombank receives euros or dollars but when they are converted into roubles, which cannot be stolen. That's the entire story. Our partners know this very well. Note that nothing changes for the buyers. They still pay the sums specified in the contract in euros and dollars. It is converted after that.

We have no right to let our own people down and allow the West to keep up its thieving ways.

**Question:** There is a lot of speculation in the West about President Vladimir Putin's health.

**Sergey Lavrov:** Please ask foreign leaders who have talked with President Putin recently, including UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres. I think you will see what I mean.

**Question:** May 9 is nearing. You will be celebrating the liberation from Nazism in 1945. Moscow is holding a parade. What will happen by this time? Is the end of the "war" near?

**Sergey Lavrov:** There was a tradition in the Soviet Union, to do something big and loud for some holiday. Our actions in Ukraine are focused solely on the objectives I have mentioned. They were set forth by President of Russia Vladimir Putin: to protect civilians and ensure their safety, and neutralise threats to them and to Russia related to offensive weapons and nazification, which the West is trying hard to downplay.

I have seen reports on NBC and read the American magazine National Interest. Serious articles are beginning to appear there, warning and cautioning against flirting with the Nazis like in 1935-1938.

**Question:** Will the conflict end by May 9? Is there any reason to hope it will?

**Sergey Lavrov:** Our servicemen will not artificially time their actions to any date, including Victory Day.

We will solemnly observe May 9, like we always do. We will remember everyone who died to liberate Russia and other former USSR republics, to liberate Europe from the Nazi plague.

The pace of the operation in Ukraine depends first of all on the need to minimise risks for civilians and Russian military personnel.



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