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## Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's interview with French TV channel TF1, Moscow, May 29, 2022

17-22 minutes

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**Question (translated from French):** The special military operation in Ukraine is going on for three months. Since its beginning, Russia has faced problems both on the battlefield and the international scene, where it is being accused of war crimes. What is the result of this military operation? Can you sum it up now? Is it a success or, more likely, a failure? A few days ago, you said: "The "collective West" has declared total hybrid war against us... We did everything in our power to avoid a direct clash. But they issued a challenge and we have accepted it." What did you mean? How do you want to respond? Does this mean that the third world war could start in a week or in a month and that a nuclear strike will be delivered?

Could you begin by summing up this operation? Is it a success or, more likely, a failure?

**Sergey Lavrov:** Unlike our Western colleagues, we are not chasing after the external effects. Nor do we regard the international actions we take as aimed at winning someone's approval or achieving success, as you said. We are doing what we are forced to do. We are defending people and the Russian language, which has been exposed to direct discrimination and aggression by the Poroshenko and Zelensky regimes in

Ukraine. We are defending Ukraine from nazification, which has persisted there for years, with the West's direct connivance. The West did not care what was happening to the Russian language and education and the Russian media, which were simply outlawed. We have for years knocked on various doors in Europe and the United States, urging our Western colleagues to make Ukraine fulfil the commitments it has assumed under numerous European and international conventions. But the West was deaf to it, as it was deaf to the fact that Ukraine publicly refused to implement the UN Security Council resolution which endorsed the Minsk agreements, agreements signed by France and Germany. We have tried to convince the West for years that Ukraine should not be dragged into NATO. There have been five waves of NATO's expansion as it is, with its military infrastructure brought closer to the Russian borders despite the promises that were given at the time when the USSR was breaking up. Dragging Ukraine into NATO meant creating a direct threat right on the border of the Russian Federation.

The hypocrisy of the West's position can best be judged by its reaction to the US and NATO decisions with regard to the situation in Yugoslavia in 1999, Iraq in 2003, and Libya in 2011. All these military adventures were launched at the initiative of the US, which claimed that those seats of tensions were a threat to the United States. The threat, as you understand, was thousands of kilometres away from the American coast.

Nevertheless, everyone obediently followed Washington's policy aimed at destroying first Yugoslavia, next Iraq, and finally Libya. During these conflicts, there were over one million civilian casualties. But no one batted an eye. Everyone thought that this was normal because the chief sovereign was giving law to all

and sundry. The only exception was the “Iraqi crisis,” when France and Germany made an attempt to object to Washington’s absolutely unjustified and unacceptable actions. In all other cases, all European countries blindly agreed that the United States had the right to declare a threat to its security as existing in any part of the world and do whatever it pleased.

It did not take Russia just one day to declare that there was a threat to its security. Russia spent long years calling on the West not to turn Ukraine into an anti-Russia, or create a military threat to the Russian state from the territory of Ukraine, or put up obstacles to the Russian language, education and culture. The West’s response was “we couldn’t care less.” It turned a blind eye to the threat which existed directly on our border and which we had been warning about for years. How would France react if Belgium, for example, banned French? Or what would England do if Ireland banned English? Just imagine for a moment that Finland banned Swedish. The European mind is unable to imagine this. But the whole of Europe did not care a dime about how they were treating Russian.

Russia’s military operation was inevitable. We tried to reach out to the West for a long time. In December 2021, we once again suggested that both the US and NATO sign a European security treaty with Russia. They did not hear us. Back in 2009, Russia proposed a European Security Treaty, which would enshrine in law the principle that security should be equal and indivisible and that no country on the European continent shall strengthen its security at the expense of the security of others. This was signed by all NATO and OSCE members. But despite this political document and its commitments, NATO continued to expand in disregard of Russia’s concerns and its security interests. In 2009, we suggested signing an agreement that

would make this political commitment juridical. They told us to forget about this. Legal security guarantees can only be given to NATO members. We were patient for a long while. In December 2021, yet another attempt was made.

On February 7, 2022, President of France Emmanuel Macron came to Moscow. Perhaps he was not indifferent to how the situation was developing. He held interesting talks with President Vladimir Putin, including on the problem we are now discussing. Addressing a news conference following the talks, President Putin went on record as saying that we were ready to seek agreements on security guarantees for Ukraine, Russia and all European countries, but guarantees that would not involve NATO's expansion. President Macron also repeatedly mentioned the need for new European security architecture, but the United States is not allowing [them] to do anything. Neither will it. The US has bent Europe to its will. We see France striving to promote the concept of strategic autonomy. President Macron has consistently advocated this position. But we do not see any enthusiasm in this regard among other countries of Europe. Even the Germans are saying that German and European security is impossible without NATO.

The problems we are talking about have become particularly grave in connection with the situation in Ukraine. The ferocity which the West displayed defending its "baby," the Kiev regime, has shown that this regime has been painstakingly fostered for years to create a threat for the Russian Federation, undermine its legitimate place in the security architecture, belittle its real role, and put it in a subordinate position.

I have mentioned President Macron's visit and his good and trust-based relations with President Vladimir Putin. Regrettably, France is playing a pro-active role in fomenting Ukrainian

nationalism and neo-Nazism. We are sad to see this. Paris is active in supplying arms, including offensive arms, to Ukraine. It is urging Ukraine to fight to the “victorious end” and “inflict a defeat on Russia.” This is to say that the West did not just fail to hear our years-long appeals to come to terms on an equitable basis but has consciously ignored them. This means that the West has never wanted an equitable association and cooperation with the Russian Federation.

Today, we have a better understanding of what was going on, of what caused the “euphoria” after the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the USSR. At that time, everyone was talking about common human values and a common destiny of Europe from the Atlantic to the Urals and the Pacific. These were just fine words. As soon as it came to implementing these slogans in real life, Europe was seized by a syndrome of rejection.

We do not want to say that the path to resuming the dialogue has been cut off. But we will judge European intentions solely by its actions. We have learned an important lesson. In this sense, the situation is different from what it was after the end of the Cold War.

As for the operation itself, it is going to plan.

**Question (translated from French):** Let's talk about the war in Donbass where hostilities have intensified. I spent three months in Donbass, travelling between Donetsk and Lugansk. I also went to Mariupol several times. The city is in ruins, I saw much suffering. The fighters told me the war would continue and be bloody. Will the battle for Donbass be the final one? Will the special military operation be limited to the liberation of Donbass? Will there be real peace talks? What are you demanding of Ukraine today?

**Sergey Lavrov:** We have only one demand, which President of Russia Vladimir Putin has expressed since the very start of the special military operation. We demand that the Kiev regime stop killing civilians in Donbass, as it has been doing for eight long years since the 2014 coup, and despite the signing of the Minsk agreements, and with support from Paris and Berlin.

We urged Germany and France to stop this rampage and withdraw their support for a regime that was killing its own citizens. They replied that they understood why Kiev did not want to talk to Donetsk and Lugansk. They understood and supported this. Contrary to what was written and signed by the President of France and the Chancellor of Germany, they actually rejected a direct dialogue between Kiev and the self-proclaimed republics.

I would like to draw your and your audience's attention to one point. Without recalling the long-standing Western practice of pumping Ukraine with arms as an enemy of Russia (this was obviously a deliberate policy) it is hard to understand what is happening there now. There were reasons that did not leave us any choice but to defend the Russian people who live in Ukraine and are citizens of that country, to defend the Russian language and culture. Imagine if Belgium banned the French language. What would President of France Emmanuel Macron do? Go to the polls and tell his voters to accept this? I doubt it.

We have goals: to demilitarise Ukraine (there should be no weapons threatening Russia on its territory); to restore the rights of the Russian people in line with the Constitution of Ukraine (the Kiev regime violated it by adopting anti-Russia laws) and the conventions (in which Ukraine takes part); and to denazify Ukraine. Nazi and neo-Nazi theory and practice have deeply permeated daily life in Ukraine and are codified in its laws.

We drew the attention of our Western “friends” to this but they only shrugged. Now it is clear that they even considered this useful. Their goal was to create a threat to Russia and contain it.

Yes, people are dying. But the operation is taking so much time mainly because the Russian military has been ordered to avoid any attacks or strikes at civilian facilities. They can only attack military installations and concentrations of manpower and combat hardware. This is why we are proceeding differently from the Ukrainian army and neo-Nazi battalions that are using civilians as human shields.

If you visited these places, you must have seen (or heard) that these battalions are deploying heavy weapons in residential areas, close to schools, hospitals and kindergartens. They regularly shell Donetsk, causing damage to civilians. Our clear goal is to push the Ukrainian army and the battalions beyond the limits of the Donetsk and Lugansk republics.

As for other territories with people who do not want to break ties with Russia, these people can decide this issue themselves. I don't think they would want to return to the neo-Nazi regime that has made its Russophobic attitudes very clear. The people themselves should decide.

**Question (translated from French):** Will the battle for Donbass be the last one? Many Europeans are wondering if there will be other hostilities after Donbass.

**Sergey Lavrov:** I just answered this question. The liberation of the Donetsk and Lugansk regions, recognised by Russia as independent states, is an absolute priority.

As for other territories of Ukraine where the special military operation is being conducted, their residents need to decide their future themselves. They must choose for themselves

where they would like to live – in a President Zelensky-created environment (with a ban on Russian education, media, culture and language in everyday life) or in an atmosphere where they can bring up their children the way they want, without following the dictates of Vladimir Zelensky and his team.

**Question (translated from French):** Were the Donetsk and Lugansk republics annexed by Russia?

**Sergey Lavrov:** This is not about annexation. If you have been there, you probably know that in response to the unconstitutional coup in February 2014, when the signatures of France, Germany and Poland were simply ignored (the opposition spit on these signatures and broke the agreement with the president), and in response to the counter-coup and statements by the leaders of the coup about the need to expel Russians and ban the official status of the Russian language in Ukraine, the residents of eastern Ukraine said they did not recognise the coup and did not want to recognise the authorities that seized Kiev, and so they declared self-government. That is when it started. France, Germany and the European Union were silent. Maybe they were happy.

Then they declared the DPR and LPR. In response, Kiev sent troops there and started to bomb Donetsk and Lugansk. Europe remained silent. Then-President of France Francois Hollande created the Normandy format. For many months we tried to stop the conflict. We persuaded Donetsk and Lugansk to give up their declared sovereignty if the Minsk agreements were implemented: it was only necessary to grant a special status to these territories. France and Germany themselves agreed on what this status should be: the Russian language, their own law enforcement agencies and special economic ties with the Russian Federation. None of this was done.



For eight long years they continued to kill civilians. All of Europe was silent and told Russia that if the Ukrainians did not want to fulfill the Minsk agreements, let Moscow fulfill them. Now Vladimir Zelensky is saying he is ready for talks, but first they will retake everything that was under their control as of February 24, and only then they will talk. That is why we had no choice but to recognise the independence of these republics.

For us, this is a military operation under the official request of the sovereign states of the DPR and LPR in accordance with Article 51 of the UN Charter, which recognises the right to individual and collective self-defence. We are protecting these people and helping them restore their territorial integrity.

**Question (translated from French):** President Emmanuel Macron has never suspended communications with Vladimir Putin. Do you want this dialogue to continue? What do you think the goals of this would be? Do you think Russia and France will remain partners, considering the growing Western economic sanctions, French arms supplies to Ukraine, and the reciprocal expulsion of diplomats?

**Sergey Lavrov:** We do not push our company on anyone. If someone wants to talk with us, President of Russia Vladimir Putin will never deny a request from his colleagues to talk by telephone or in person. This is common knowledge. The Foreign Minister and other Russian leaders respond the same way.

You said diplomats are being expelled by both sides. We have not expelled anyone. These sanctions, which are more like hysterics (or even agony, I'd say), were initiated by the West. The speed with which they were introduced and the number of them show that they were not compiled overnight. They were being drafted for some time, and they will not likely be lifted. At

any rate, the United States is telling its allies, albeit not in public, that the sanctions will remain even after all this ends. This is not just about Ukraine, which is just an instrument and a bargaining chip. The real objective is to contain Russia's development. Russia is preventing the West from maintaining a unipolar world, something that Washington has announced with Europe's submissive approval. What geopolitical benefits can Europe gain in this situation? I don't know. Political analysts write that Europe is the main loser in terms of future development.

We have always respected France's efforts to uphold Europe's independence. In his speeches, President Emmanuel Macron is striving to continue the traditions of his great predecessors on "strategic autonomy."

The EU countries have invented a "strategic compass" in order to militarise the European Union, attach a military dimension to it. This is unlikely to produce any benefit because, regardless, NATO already sees the EU as an appendage rather than an independent entity that can decide for itself when and how to use its armed forces. I am confident that the EU will not be allowed to do this.

However, it is, of course, necessary to talk about these things. We should talk if we want justice to triumph on Earth and to see the implementation of the principle that our presidents signed in the OSCE framework, notably, that security must always be equal and indivisible and that nobody can increase its own security at the expense of others.

After all these events have shown the West's true attitude towards Russia, we will only be able to talk from somewhat differing positions, and we can no longer believe any promises.

**Question (translated from French):** Do you expect France and

Emmanuel Macron to join the efforts to complete this “war”?

**Sergey Lavrov:** I have already said that this does not depend on us. If Emmanuel Macron wants to hold talks with Vladimir Putin, I can guarantee you that this request will be met.

We do not push our company on anyone. We hear how all EU leaders without exception publicly accuse Russia of aggression with belligerence. If this belligerence is hiding a desire to resolve the problems that triggered this crisis in European security, we will always be willing to talk. Emmanuel Macron has long-term and confidential relations with Vladimir Putin. If he suggests meeting, his proposal will be accepted.

**Question (translated from French):** As one of the closest ministers to Vladimir Putin, you probably meet with him almost every day. It is rumoured in Europe that he is sick, that he is angry that his initial plans were not fulfilled. Is this true?

**Sergey Lavrov:** President Vladimir Putin appears in public every day. You can see him on screen, read and listen to his speeches. I don't think that sensible people can see in him any signs of illness or indisposition. I will leave this on the conscience of those who spread such rumours despite seeing how he looks every day.