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Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's article «Staged incidents as the Western approach to doing politics», published in Izvestia newspaper

Today, the Russian Armed Forces, together with the self-defence units of the Donetsk and Lugansk people's republics, are delivering on the objectives of the special military operation with great resolve to put an end to the outrageous discrimination and genocide of the Russian people and eliminate direct threats to the security of the Russian Federation that the United States and its satellites have been creating on Ukrainian territory for years. While losing on the battlefield, the Ukrainian regime and its Western patrons have descended to staging bloody incidents to demonise our country in the eyes of the international community. We have already seen Bucha, Mariupol, Kramatorsk, and Kremenchug. The Russian Defence Ministry has been regularly issuing warnings, with facts in hand, about upcoming staged incidents and fakes.

There is a distinctive pattern that betrays the provocations staged by the West and its henchmen. In fact, they started long before the Ukrainian events.

Take 1999 – the village of Račak in Serbia's Autonomous Province of Kosovo and Metohija. A group of OSCE inspectors arrived at the site where several dozen corpses dressed in civilian clothes were discovered. Without any investigation, the mission head declared the incident an act of genocide, even though making a conclusion of this kind was not part of the mandate issued to this international official. NATO immediately launched a military aggression against Yugoslavia, during which it intentionally destroyed a television centre, bridges, passenger trains and other civilian targets. Later, it was proved with conclusive evidence that the dead bodies were not civilians, but militants of the Kosovo Liberation Army, an illegal armed group, dressed in civilian clothes. But by that time the staged incident has already taken its toll, offering a pretext for the first illegal use of force against an OSCE member state since the signing of the Helsinki Final Act in 1975. It is telling that the statement that triggered the bombings came from William Walker, a US citizen who headed the OSCE's Kosovo Verification Mission. Separating Kosovo from Serbia by force and setting up Camp Bondsteel, the largest US military base in the Balkans, were the main outcomes of the aggression.

In 2003, there was the infamous performance by US Secretary of State Colin Powell in the UN Security Council with a vial containing white powder of some sort, which he said contained anthrax spores, alleging that it was produced in Iraq. Once again, the fake worked: the Anglo-Saxons and those who followed their lead went on to bomb Iraq, which has been struggling to fully recover its statehood ever since. Moreover, it did not take long before the fake was exposed with everyone admitting that Iraq did not have any biological weapons or any other kinds of WMDs. Later, British Prime Minister Tony Blair, who was one of the masterminds of the aggression, recognised that the whole affair was a fraud, saying that they “may have been wrong” or something like that. As for Colin Powell, he later tried to justify himself by claiming that he was misled by the underlying intelligence. Either way, this was yet another provocation that offered a pretext for delivering on the plan to destroy a sovereign nation.

There was also Libya in 2011. The drama had specifics of its own. The situation did not go as far as direct lies, like in Kosovo or Iraq, but NATO grossly distorted the UN Security Council resolution, which provided for a no-fly zone over Libya in order to “ground” Muammar Gaddafi’s air force. It did not fly to begin with. However, NATO started bombing the Libyan army units who were fighting terrorists. Muammar Gaddafi died a savage death, and nothing remains of the Libyan statehood. Efforts to put the country back together have yet to succeed, with a US representative once again in charge of the process, appointed by the UN Secretary General without any consultation with the UN Security Council. As part of this process, our Western colleagues have facilitated several intra-Libyan agreements on holding elections but none of them materialised. Illegal armed groups still reign supreme on Libyan territory, with most of them working closely with the West.

February 2014, Ukraine – the West, represented by the German, French, and Polish foreign ministers, de facto forced President Viktor Yanukovich into signing an agreement with the opposition to end the confrontation and promote a peaceful resolution of the intra-Ukrainian crisis by establishing a transitional national unity government and calling a snap election, to be held within a few months. This too turned out to be a fraud: the next morning, the opposition staged a coup guided as it was by anti-Russia, racist slogans. However, the Western guarantors did not even try to bring the opposition back to its senses. Furthermore, they switched immediately to encouraging the coup perpetrators in their policies against Russia and everything Russian, unleashing the war against their own people and bombing entire cities in the Donbass region just because people there refused to recognise the unconstitutional coup. For that, they labelled the people in Donbass terrorists, and once again the West was there to encourage them.

At this point, it is worth noting that, as it was soon revealed, the killing of protestors on the Maidan was also a staged incident, which the West blamed either on the Ukrainian security forces loyal to Viktor Yanukovich, or on the Russian special services. However, the radical members of the opposition were the ones who were behind this provocation, while working closely with the Western intelligence services. Once again, exposing these facts did not take long, but by that time they already did their job.

Efforts by Russia, Germany, and France paved the way to stopping the war between Kiev, Donetsk and Lugansk in February 2015 with the signing of the Minsk Agreements. Berlin and Paris played a proactive role here as well, proudly calling themselves as the guarantor countries. However, during the seven long years that followed, they did absolutely nothing to force Kiev to launch a direct dialogue with Donbass representatives for agreeing on matters including the special status, amnesty, restoring economic ties, and holding elections, as required by the Minsk Agreements which were approved unanimously by the UN Security Council. The Western leaders remained silent when Kiev took steps which directly violated the Minsk Agreements under both Petr Poroshenko and Vladimir Zelensky. Moreover, the German and the French leaders kept saying that Kiev cannot enter direct dialogue with the Donetsk and Lugansk people's republics, and blamed everything on Russia, although Russia is not mentioned in the Minsk agreements even once, while remaining basically the only country that kept pushing for the agreements to be implemented.

If anyone doubted that the Minsk Package was anything but yet another fake, Petr Poroshenko dispelled this myth by saying on June 17, 2022: “The Minsk Agreements did not mean anything to us, and we had no intention to carry them out... our goal was to remove the threat we faced... and win time in order to restore economic growth and rebuild the armed forces. We achieved this goal. Mission accomplished for the Minsk Agreements.” The people of Ukraine are still paying the price of this fake. For many years now, the West has been forcing them to accept an anti-Russian neo-Nazi regime. What a waste of energy for Olaf Scholz with his calls to force Russia to agree to an agreement guaranteeing Ukraine's territorial integrity and sovereignty. There already had been an agreement to this effect, the Minsk Package, and Berlin with Paris were the ones who derailed it by shielding Kiev in its refusal to abide by the document. The fake has been exposed – *finita la commedia*.

By the way, Vladimir Zelensky has been a worthy successor to Petr Poroshenko. During a campaign rally in early 2019, he was ready to kneel before him for the sake of stopping the war.

In December 2019, Zelensky got a chance to carry out the Minsk Agreements following the Normandy format summit in Paris. In the outcome document adopted at the highest level, the Ukrainian President undertook to resolve matters related to the special status of Donbass. Of course, he did not do anything, while Berlin and Paris once again covered up for him. The document and all the publicity accompanying its adoption turned out to be no more than a fake narrative promoted by Ukraine and the West to win some time for supplying more weapons to the Kiev regime, which follows Petr Poroshenko's logic to the letter.

There was also Syria, with the 2013 agreement on eliminating Syria's chemical weapons stockpiles in a stage-by-stage process verified by the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), for which it received the Nobel Peace Prize. After that, however, there were outrageous provocations in 2017 and 2018 staging the use of chemical weapons in Khan Shaykhun and Duma, a Damascus suburb. There was a video showing people calling themselves the White Helmets (a would-be humanitarian organisation which never showed up on territories controlled by the Syrian government) helping alleged poisoning victims, although no one had any protective clothing or gear. All attempts to force the OPCW Technical Secretariat to perform its duties in good faith and ensure a transparent investigation into these incidents, as required by the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC), failed. This, however, did not come as a surprise. The Western countries have long privatised the Technical Secretariat by having their representatives appointed to the key positions within this structure. They contributed to staging these incidents and used them as a pretext for US, British, and French airstrikes against Syria. Incidentally, they carried out these bombings just a day before a group of OPCW inspectors arrived there to investigate the incidents at Russia's insistence, while the West did everything to prevent this deployment.

The West and the OPCW Technical Secretariat it controls demonstrated their ability to stage fake incidents with the would-be poisonings of the Skripals and Alexey Navalny. In both cases, Russia sent multiple requests to The Hague, London, Berlin, Paris, and Stockholm, all left without a reply, even though they fully conformed with the CWC provisions and required a response.

Other pending questions have to do with the Pentagon's covert activities in Ukraine carried out through its Defense Threat Reduction Agency. The traces that the forces engaged in the special military operation have discovered in military-biological laboratories in the liberated territories of Donbass and adjacent areas clearly indicate direct violations of the Convention on the Prohibition of Biological and Toxin Weapons (BTWC). We have presented the documents to Washington and to the UN Security Council. The procedure has been initiated under BTWC to demand explanations. Contrary to the facts, the US administration is trying to justify its actions by saying that all biological research in Ukraine was exclusively peaceful and civilian in nature – with no evidence of any of this.

In fact, the Pentagon's military-biological activities around the world, especially in the post-Soviet countries, require the closest attention in light of the multiplying evidence of criminal experiments with the most dangerous pathogens in order to create biological weapons conducted under the guise of peaceful research.

I have already mentioned the staged “crimes” of the Donbass militia and participants in the Russian special military operation. There is one simple fact that clearly shows how much these accusations mean: having shown the “Bucha tragedy” to the world in early April 2022 (we have suspicions that the Anglo-Saxons had a hand in setting the stage for the show), the West and Kiev have not yet answered the very basic questions about whether the names of the dead were established and what post-mortem examinations showed. Just as in the above-described Skripals and Navalny cases, the propaganda production has premiered in the Western media, and now it's time to sweep it all under the rug, brazen it out, because they have nothing to say.

This is the essence of the well-worn Western political algorithm – to concoct a fake story and ratchet up the hype as if it's a universal catastrophe for a couple of days while blocking people's access to alternative information or assessments, and when any facts do break through, they are simply ignored – at best mentioned on last pages of the news in small print. It is important to understand that this is not a harmless game in the media war – such productions are used as pretexts for very material actions such as punishing the “guilty” countries with sanctions, unleashing barbaric aggressions against them with hundreds of thousands of civilian casualties, as it happened, in particular, in Iraq and Libya. Or – as in the case of Ukraine – for using the country as expendable material in the Western proxy war against Russia. Moreover, NATO instructors and MLRS aimers are, apparently, already directing the actions of the Ukrainian Armed Forces and nationalist battalions on the ground.

I hope there are responsible politicians in Europe who are aware of the consequences. In this regard, it is noteworthy that no one in NATO or the EU tried to reprimand the German Air Force Commander, a general named Ingo Gerhartz, who got carried away higher than his rank and said NATO must be ready to use nuclear weapons. “Putin, do not try to compete with us,” he added. Europe's silence suggests that it is complacently oblivious of Germany's role in its history.

If we look at today's events through a historical prism, the entire Ukrainian crisis appears as a “grand chess game” that follows a scenario earlier promoted by Zbigniew Brzezinski. All the good relations talk, the West's proclaimed readiness to take into account the rights and interests of Russians who ended up in independent Ukraine or other post-Soviet countries after the collapse of the USSR turned out to be mere pretence. Even in the early 2000s, Washington and the European Union began to openly pressure Kiev to decide which side Ukraine was on, the West or Russia.

Ever since 2014, the West has been controlling, hands-on, the Russophobic regime it brought to power through a coup d'état. Putting Vladimir Zelensky in front of any international forum of any significance is also part of this travesty. He makes passionate speeches, but when he suddenly offers something reasonable, he gets a slap on the wrist, as it happened after the Istanbul round of Russian-Ukrainian talks. At the end of March, it seemed that light glimmered at the end of the tunnel, but Kiev was forced to back off, using, among other things, a frankly staged episode in Bucha. Washington, London and Brussels demanded that Kiev stopped negotiating with Russia until Ukraine achieved full military advantage (former British Prime Minister Boris Johnson tried especially hard, and many other Western politicians did too, still incumbent, although they have already proved just as inept).

EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell's statement about this war having to be "won on the battlefield" by Ukraine suggests that even diplomacy has lost its value as a tool in the European Union's staged performance.

In a broader sense, it is curious to see how Europe, lined up by Washington on the anti-Russian front, has been hardest hit by the thoughtless sanctions, emptying its arsenals to supply weapons to Kiev (without even asking for a report on who will control them or where they go), and freeing up its market only to subsequently buy US military products and expensive American LNG instead of available Russian gas. Such trends, coupled with the de facto merger between the EU and NATO, make the continued talk about Europe's "strategic autonomy" nothing more than a show. Everyone has already understood that the collective West's foreign policy is a "one-man theatre." Moreover, it is consistently seeking ever new theaters of military operations.

One element of the geopolitical gambit against Russia is granting the status of an eternal EU candidate country to Ukraine and Moldova, which, it seems, will also face an unenviable fate. Meanwhile, a PR campaign has been initiated by President of France Emmanuel Macron to promote the “European political community,” which offers no financial or economic benefits, but demands full compliance with the EU’s anti-Russia actions. The principle behind it is not either/or but “who is not with us is against us.” Emmanuel Macron explained the gist of the “community”: the EU will invite all European countries – “from Iceland to Ukraine” – to join it, but not Russia. I would like to stress that we are not eager to join, but the statement itself showcases the essence of this obviously confrontational and divisive new undertaking.

Ukraine, Moldova and other countries being courted by the EU today are destined to be extras in the games of the West. The United States, as the main producer, calls the tune and devises the storyline based on which Europe writes the anti-Russia screenplay. The actors are ready and possess the skills acquired during their tenure at the Kvartal 95 Studio: they will provide a voice-over for dramatic texts no worse than the now forgotten Greta Thunberg and play musical instruments, if needed. The actors are good: remember how convincing Vladimir Zelensky was in his role as a democrat in the Servant of the People: fighter against corruption and discrimination against Russians and for all the right things in general. Remember and compare it with his immediate transformation in his role as president. It is perfect Stanislavsky Method acting: banning the Russian language, education, media and culture. “If you feel like Russians, then go to Russia for the sake of your children and grandchildren.” Good advice. He called Donbass residents “species” rather than people. And this is what he said about the Nazi Azov battalion: “They are what they are. There is plenty of such people around here.” Even CNN was ashamed to leave this phrase in the interview.

This prompts a question: what will be the outcome of all these storylines? Staged incidents based on blood and agony are by no means fun but a display of a cynical policy in creating a new reality where all principles of the UN Charter and all norms of international law are attempted to be replaced with their “rules-based order” in an aspiration to perpetuate their dwindling domination in global affairs.

The games undertaken by the West in the OSCE after from end of the Cold War, where it considered itself a winner, had the most devastating consequences for the modern international relations. Having quickly broken their promises to the Soviet and Russian leadership on the non-expansion of NATO to the east, the United States and its allies nevertheless declared their commitment to building a unified space of security and cooperation in the Euro-Atlantic region. They formalised it at the top level with all OSCE members in 1999 and 2010 within the framework of a political obligation to ensure equal and inseparable security where no country will strengthen its security at the expense of others and no organisation will claim a dominating role in Europe. It soon became evident that NATO members do not keep their word and that their goal is the supremacy of the North-Atlantic Alliance. Even then we continued our diplomatic efforts, proposing to formalise the principle of equal and inseparable security in a legally binding agreement. We proposed this a number of times, the last one in December 2021, but received a flat denial in response. They told us directly: there will be no legal guarantees outside NATO. Which means that the support of the political documents approved at the OSCE summits turned out to be a cheap fake. And now NATO, driven by the United States, has gone even further: they want to dominate over the entire Asia-Pacific region in addition to the Euro-Atlantic. NATO members make no effort to conceal the target of their threats, and China's leadership has already publicly declared its position regarding such neo-colonial ambitions. Beijing has already responded by citing the principle of indivisible security, declaring its support for applying it on a global scale to prevent any country from claiming its exclusivity. This approach fully coincides with Russia's position. We will make consistent efforts to defend it together with our allies, strategic partners and many other like-minded countries.

The collective West should come back to Earth from the world of illusions. The staged incidents, no matter how long they go on, will not work. It is time for fair play based on the international law rather than cheating. The sooner everyone realises that there are no alternatives to objective historical processes where a multipolar world is formed based on respect for the principle of sovereign equality of states, fundamental for the UN Charter and the entire world order, the better.

If members of the western alliance are unable to live according to this principle, are not ready to build a truly universal architecture of equal security and cooperation, they should leave everyone alone, stop using threats and blackmail to recruit those who want to live on their own wits and acknowledge the right to freedom of choice by independent self-respecting countries. This is what democracy is all about, the real democracy, not one played out on a shabbily built political stage.



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