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Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's year-end interview with TASS news agency, December 27, 2022

Question: The launch of the special military operation in Ukraine and ensuing developments, including an unprecedented deterioration of our relations with the West, was the main event of the outgoing year. Do you think the conflict in Ukraine can last a long time, say, five years? What should we brace for? Is a direct military confrontation with the countries that support Kiev possible?

Sergey Lavrov: The actions of the countries of the collective West and Vladimir Zelensky, who is controlled by them, confirm the global nature of the Ukraine crisis. It is no longer a secret that victory over Russia “on the battlefield” is the strategic goal of the United States and its NATO allies. They see it as a mechanism to significantly degrade or even destroy our country. Our opponents are ready to do much to accomplish this goal.

The United States is the main beneficiary of the military conflict as it seeks to reap biggest benefits from it in economic and military-strategic terms. At the same time, Washington is addressing an important geopolitical goal, which is to destroy the traditional ties between Russia and Europe and to overpower its European satellites even more.

The United States is doing everything to draw out and exacerbate this conflict. The Pentagon is openly planning more orders for the US defence industry for years to come, keeps raising the bar for military spending to cover the needs of the Ukrainian forces and wants other members of the anti-Russia alliance to do the same. The Kiev regime is deliberately flooded with the most advanced weapons, including samples that have not yet been put into service in the Western armies apparently in order to see how they will do in combat conditions. The volume of military aid provided to the regime has exceeded \$40 billion since February, which is comparable to military budgets of many European countries. We are also aware of the fact that the US political circles are increasingly thinking about drawing Ukraine into NATO using every available

avenue.

Meanwhile, Westerners are saying they prefer to remain “above the fray” and find a direct face-off between NATO and Russia unacceptable, which is unadulterated hypocrisy. Already now, NATO members have de facto become parties to the conflict: Western private military companies and military instructors are fighting on the side of the Ukrainian forces. The Americans transmit satellite and other reconnaissance data to the Ukrainian command almost in real time and participate in planning and carrying out military operations.

In turn, the regime is trying to drag the Americans and other NATO members even deeper into the whirlpool of the conflict, hoping to make a head-on collision with the Russian Army unavoidable. Just take the November 15 provocation, when a Ukrainian air defence missile landed in Poland, and Zelensky tried unsuccessfully to pass it off as a Russian missile. Fortunately, Washington and Brussels were smart enough not to take the bait, but the incident showed that the regime will stop at nothing.

We keep warning our adversaries in the West about the danger of their course for escalating the Ukraine crisis. With the contingent they have nurtured in Kiev, the risk of the situation spiralling out of control remains very high. It is important to stave off a disaster.

As for how long the conflict may last, the ball is in the court of the regime and Washington, which stands behind it. They can stop this meaningless resistance at any moment. The enemy is well aware of our proposals concerning demilitarisation and denazification of the territories controlled by the regime and elimination of threats to Russia's security coming from these territories, including our new territories – the DPR, LPR, and the Kherson and Zaporozhye regions. There is not much left to be done. All they need to do is fulfil these proposals of their own volition. Otherwise, the issue will be resolved by the Russian Army.

Question: The issue of the hypothetical use of nuclear weapons became particularly acute this year, and even those who are not interested in political news started talking about it. Should we expect this nuclear rhetoric to become more aggressive in 2023?

Sergey Lavrov: First of all, we should address this question to the West. It is with deep concern that we are noting this bacchanalia of propaganda around the issue of nuclear weapons in the United States and the entire West.

On the one hand, they keep spinning the irresponsible narrative that

Russia is about to use nuclear weapons against Ukraine, and citing some statements by the Russian political leadership. In reality, there have been no such statements.

What we are saying is completely different: the Western policy of total containment of Russia is extremely dangerous. It can eventually escalate into a direct armed confrontation between nuclear powers. We have been warning them about this, and we continue to repeat time and again that a nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought.

On the other hand, the West is sending out openly confrontational signals in the nuclear sphere. It appears that they have brushed all propriety aside completely. The infamous Liz Truss made a remarkable statement during the pre-election debates that she was ready to order a nuclear strike. However, Washington has outdone all others. Certain anonymous Pentagon officials actually threatened to launch a “decapitation strike” against the Kremlin. In effect, they are threatening to eliminate the head of the Russian state. If some people are actually nurturing these ideas, they should think very carefully about the possible consequences of these plans.

I am not even talking about the Kiev regime's brazen provocations. Vladimir Zelensky has gone so far as to demand that NATO countries launch pre-emptive nuclear strikes against Russia. This, too, goes beyond acceptable boundaries. However, we have heard even worse from that regime.

We cannot but correlate these escapades with destabilising elements of the US doctrine. Notably, the US has allowed for the possibility of delivering disarming strikes. We have also noted Washington's unlimited criteria as regards conditions for using nuclear weapons. They are talking about certain vitally important interests; however, the US doctrine does not specify them in any way. It appears that these interests can, if necessary, apply to any regions and circumstances.

We continue to urge the West to exercise maximum restraint in this highly sensitive sphere. To minimise nuclear risks, it is necessary to remain committed to the postulate that a nuclear war is unacceptable, as confirmed by the five nuclear powers in their statement of January 3, 2022. In accordance with the document's logic, it is necessary to prevent any military confrontation between nuclear powers because such a confrontation may lead to a catastrophe.

We also drew attention to these fundamental axioms in our November 2, 2022, statement on preventing a nuclear war. For example, the document noted that Russia advocated the creation of an updated and more stable international security system by facilitating predictability and global strategic stability and by

ensuring compliance with the principles of equality, indivisible security and mutual consideration for the interests of the parties.

Question: At present relations between our country and the European Union are at a very low level. Is there a chance that we will shut each other off completely and sever all ties, both cultural and economic? Will Russia appoint a new Permanent Representative to the EU?

Sergey Lavrov: Undoubtedly, our relations with the European Union have deteriorated to a historic low. The reasons for this are well known. Since the beginning of the special military operation, Brussels, following the US and NATO, has declared a hybrid war against Russia. EU chief diplomat Josep Borrell was among the first to voice the opinion that Russia must be defeated on the battlefield.

We see how the EU's ruling circles are acting to the detriment of the fundamental interests and wellbeing of their citizens. They are obediently following the overseas hegemon's anti-Russian course on almost all issues, and sometimes even move into the lead. There are numerous examples of that. It would be sufficient to mention that the US prohibited the European countries to maintain the dialogue with Russia on energy, which provided the Europeans with unprecedented prosperity for decades.

Naturally, there can be no "business as usual" with such partners. We are not going to knock on closed doors or initiate joint projects. Fortunately, the European Union is not our only partner; we have many friends and like-minded forces in other parts of the world. If and when Europe begins to feel the cruel hangover from the current Russophobic zeal and then sobers up, if coherent national-oriented politicians appear there who understand the advantages of an equal and mutually beneficial partnership with Russia, I assure you, there will be no problems on our side. But so far, we have what we have. We are realists. We will continue to work with those few Europeans who value their friendship with Russia. We are not going to cooperate with the Russophobes.

As for appointing a new Russian Permanent Representative to the EU, it is a slow process. The head of the EU delegation came and has been working in Russia since September 2022. In this situation, we need to proceed from the actual scale of contacts against the backdrop of the EU leaders' openly hostile statements on the need to isolate and defeat Russia.

Question: The dialogue with the United States has become a sequence of mutual accusations, and one gets the impression that the two countries literally have nothing to say to one another. Is that really the case? Are the Americans

trying to talk with us, for example, about Ukraine, disarmament or other issues behind the scenes without advertising it?

Sergey Lavrov: Indeed, Russia-US relations are in an extremely poor state. They have become practically frozen through the fault of Washington. Its confrontational anti-Russia policy is becoming increasingly exacerbated and comprehensive. It is objectively impossible to maintain any kind of normal communication with the Biden administration, which is talking about our strategic defeat as its goal.

We spare no effort to make it clear to the Americans that deliberate worsening of relations between the countries is not our style. However, when building a dialogue in any circumstances, we operate on the principle of reciprocity. That is, we normally act according to the “an eye for an eye” principle, but not necessarily in a symmetrical manner.

At this point, we are not going to come up with any initiatives. Among other things, this applies to discussing a potential new strategic offensive arms agreement or agreements, or mutual security guarantees. The United States refused to talk about the latter under the pretext of the Ukraine crisis. We have taken this under advisement. At the same time, we remain committed to the START Treaty, but Washington is eroding its basic principles.

We base our planning on the principle that worked well during the Cold War, which is based on the peaceful coexistence of the states with different political and socioeconomic systems. It may well come in useful in the new geopolitical circumstances.

Given Russia and the United States' special responsibility as two nuclear superpowers for the future of humankind, I believe good relations between our countries would be beneficial for everyone. However, due to Washington's openly hostile actions, we cannot conduct business as usual.

It is now difficult to say anything about full-fledged bilateral contacts between our foreign policy agencies. At various levels, including at the highest level, we have repeatedly pointed out that we are not shying away from a constructive dialogue. However, proper conditions must be created before we can start it and our meetings should not be a perfunctory event, but be filled with specific content. We haven't heard any meaningful ideas on this score from the Americans.

We are willing to discuss security issues both in the context of Ukraine and on a broader strategic level as well. Let's wait until Washington realises inadequacy of its current policies and sees that there is no alternative to building relations with us on a mutually respectful and equitable basis with mandatory

consideration of Russia's legitimate interests.



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