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Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's interview with the Prensa Latina Cuban news agency, Moscow, March 30, 2023

Question (retranslated from Spanish): With the special military operation underway in Ukraine, what are the Russian diplomacy's main areas of focus?

Sergey Lavrov: Our Ministry and all of Russia's foreign policy activities are in plain view. We issue comments and give assessments practically every day. We have nothing to hide. The goals and objectives of the special military operation were clearly spelled out by President Vladimir Putin in his address in February 2022 and remain unchanged.

We can no longer tolerate the policy of the West, which has once again resorted to Nazi theory and practice in order to declare a hybrid war on the Russian Federation. This time it is waged by the Ukrainian military on orders coming from the regime in Kiev. According to Ukrainian leaders, they will lose unless more offensive weapons continue to be supplied to Ukraine. This is a telling confession which means only one thing: the West is directly participating in this war. Without the West, the war would have ended a long time ago and the threats that have been looming over the Russian-speaking people of Ukraine since the 2014 coup would have been eliminated. Teaching in Russian was outlawed in Ukraine, as well as the use of the Russian language in everyday life, not to mention the fact that Russian-language media have been closed down as well. The West was using this regime to not only destroy everything that is Russian, which has always, throughout the history of these lands, existed in modern Ukraine, but also to create in Ukraine a direct threat to the security of the Russian Federation, including by setting up military bases and other NATO infrastructure.

We had no other choice after our attempts to achieve a political settlement through the Minsk agreements and later in December 2021 through the treaty with the United States and NATO on mutual guarantees and equal indivisible security

were rejected.

Anyone who takes an interest in ongoing developments and has at least some objectivity understands perfectly well what is at stake. We have nothing to hide. We are fighting for our country's security which has been incrementally chipped away by the West over the past thirty years, primarily by the United States, which destroyed every strategic stability treaty there was. We are conducting the special military operation for the people whom the Kiev regime declared terrorists and publicly threatened to destroy.

We are defending the lives of these people and their right, in full accordance with the UN Charter and international conventions, to decide on their future life on the lands that belonged to their ancestors for centuries. This decision was made in Crimea in 2014. In 2022, it was made in the Donetsk People's Republic, the Lugansk People's Republic and the Zaporozhye and Kherson regions. This is the reality that no one can sweep under the rug.

Question (retranslated from Spanish): We are aware that Russia is facing a wide-scale economic war. The West is waking up to the fact that this policy is falling apart and is trying to pressure other countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America into joining its policy. How would you comment on that?

Sergey Lavrov: This policy failed, as did the West's plan to drastically degrade Russia and to inflict a "strategic defeat" on Russia "on the battlefield" using Ukrainians and an increasing number of Western mercenaries who die on the battlefields in Ukraine.

Three-quarters of the countries around the world, primarily in Asia, Latin America, and Africa, have not joined the sanctions. They are being constantly blackmailed and threatened with severing access to funding or creating problems with the IMF or World Bank loans. They demand that they vote at the UN and other international organisations in support of resolutions condemning the Russian Federation. This is what is happening.

We are aware of the unscrupulous and almost thuggish methods that are used to obtain these votes. We are well aware of that. They use everything to blackmail them: from bank accounts in US banks to the fact that the children of ambassadors or public figures are studying at Western schools. It cannot be called diplomacy. These are purely below-the-belt blackmail methods. I can't even recall anything like that happening during the Cold War.

However, three-quarters of the world – a group of countries that we call the

Global Majority – sometimes vote in a way that is not quite to their liking; they do not join the sanctions and are not going to. More countries are waking up to the fact that playing the West's game and blindly following in its wake can be dangerous for themselves in the long run. No one can be sure who the Americans will designate as a threat next year or the year after that, a target to be attacked, isolated or punished in order to improve odds during a presidential campaign in the United States or midterm elections to Congress. Everything the Americans are doing is tied to their self-serving interests.

The second “summit for democracy” chaired by President Joe Biden just ended. The circle of invitees is quite telling. There are no clear eligibility criteria. The only criterion is loyalty not even to the American democracy, but the Democratic Party.

With regard to the sanctions, indeed, we are experiencing some difficulties, but we are overcoming them to the astonishment of the doomsayers who predicted the collapse of the Russian economy, the disintegration of our country, and so on. More recently, President Vladimir Putin has more than once provided detailed assessments of the Government's efforts and the results which, to the surprise of many Western observers and even some experts in Russia, have been achieved.

Our diplomacy is working hard to create proper conditions for these efforts to be as effective as possible. We participate in the talks held by our agencies with their foreign partners to create mechanisms for financing, insuring and delivering products that are not dependent on the West.

I can and I must say that in this work we are inspired by Cuba, which has been living under illegal US sanctions for many decades now. The sanctions remain in place despite the clearly articulated political will of the vast majority of UN members, with the exception of three or four states that lack independence. This position is reiterated year in and year out, but the United States disregards it.

Question (retranslated from Spanish): At the G20 Ministerial Meeting, you mentioned the strengthening of the CELAC integration mechanism. Could you elaborate and tell us more about the prospects for Russia-Latin America cooperation?

Sergey Lavrov: With regard to CELAC and promoting integration processes, we are commenting on what we observe and what the Latin American and Caribbean countries are doing.

We welcome the revival of the CELAC spirit of regional solidarity after a

certain lull and a decline in interest in its activities on the part of a number of Latin American countries. This organisation resumed its role of a priority group which is seen by the Latin American and Caribbean countries as a key tool for advancing their collective interests as part of the emerging multipolar world.

A mechanism for meetings between Russian ministers and the CELAC Quartet has been in existence since 2013. It hasn't met in recent years because of the pandemic-related restrictions. We plan to resume this practice. We sense similar interest coming from CELAC, including the leadership of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, which is currently chairing this organisation. I'm confident that this association holds promise, especially now with the leaders who bet heavily on stronger CELAC from the point of view of the interests of Latin America and each individual country in the region.

You mentioned that I discussed CELAC with journalists on the sidelines of the G20 summit. I believe that as an organisation (if it has a consensus), CELAC can claim independent and permanent participation in the G20 on the terms that were provided to the African Union for joining this association. I believe this will reflect the multipolarity processes in the discussions that are unfolding under the auspices of the G20.

Question (retranslated from Spanish): You mentioned that Cuba has been subjected to an embargo by the United States for many years. They are now applying punitive measures, including against Russia. How do you see the future of Russia-Cuba relations? Undoubtedly, relations between our countries are strategic in nature.

Sergey Lavrov: Yes, the nature of our relationship is described as a strategic partnership. But this is a formal characteristic. Our relations go deeper, are rooted in people-to-people ties, in the sympathy our people feel for each other. There is no doubt that they will continue to develop.

Our cooperation goes back many decades, despite sanctions and various difficulties, when our relations were hindered in every possible way. We have already developed mechanisms and the ability to achieve results, regardless of the restrictive measures imposed by the West. Now together with all our friends and partners we are working on new approaches to establishing supply chains, financing, and banking operations that will not depend in any way on the whims of the United States.

It is not only the Global South, the Global Majority, but also a number of

European countries that want to get rid of them. They too realise that they are being used, including through the SWIFT system. European countries can see what is happening to their economies in a situation where they are being forced to finance not only the war in Ukraine, but also everyday life in that country due to the Kiev regime's inability to work on this or to do anything about it. Europe is losing its competitive edge as a continent that has been forced to give up cheap Russian gas. It is on the verge of de-industrialisation as European businesses are fleeing to the United States. All of this will leave its mark. A reappraisal of everything that is going on, including in the minds of European politicians, has begun. If there are politicians whose minds aren't processing this yet, I am sure that the people of Europe will remind them about it and will try to help them get a sense of reality.



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