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## **Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's interview with the radio stations Sputnik, Govorit Moskva, and Komsomolskaya Pravda, Moscow, April 19, 2024**

**Question:** Every day, we hear threats from the West, alluding to their determination to achieve a “strategic defeat” over Russia. These threats are escalating in severity. Recently, the commander of the Estonian Armed Forces, Martin Herem, openly discussed the possibility of targeting two Russian cities in the event of any provocation. The Economist, a British publication, appears to rejoice over Ukraine's alleged development of a drone capable of bombing Siberian regions. Leaders like Johnson echo sentiments that winning “on the battlefield” is imperative for maintaining Western hegemony, suggesting a readiness to escalate tensions regardless of the cost. All of this points to the potential for a large-scale conflict. What are your thoughts on this? Do you perceive such a scenario as a real possibility?

**Sergey Lavrov:** The escalating rhetoric surrounding the notion of defeating Russia and the supposed existential implications it carries for the future of the West seem less about assertiveness and more about desperation and hysteria. These sentiments are no longer concealed. Former British Prime Minister Boris Johnson openly stated that allowing Russia to emerge victorious would mean the demise of Western hegemony. Such a statement can be seen as an acknowledgment of violating the fundamental principle of the UN Charter – the sovereign equality of states. This is a matter that warrants attention from the International Court of Justice.

Similar sentiments are echoed in other declarations, such as “we will lose our influence” and “Russia will reshape the world together with China, Iran, North Korea, Syria.” These assertions do not denote self-doubt; rather, they indicate a realisation that there is, as they openly acknowledge, a “battle” to maintain their hegemony, which essentially translates to the establishment of a new multipolar world order. While we may be getting tired of the term, we can reframe it as an

equitable, just, and democratic international order where every nation adheres to the principle of the UN Charter – the sovereign equality of states.

Aside from the fear of losing hegemony, they openly, perhaps inadvertently, reveal that the US is in control, with everyone else falling in line under its authority. NATO's Deputy Secretary General (from Romania), Mircea Geoana, recently remarked that the world is entering an era of intense competition between the West on one side and Russia and China on the other. He asserts that Moscow, Beijing, and others are increasingly attempting to undermine American power to varying degrees. It is notable that the North Atlantic Alliance emphasises American power rather than Western or NATO power. Therefore, according to the Romanian NATO deputy secretary general, Washington relies on its European allies, which underscores the essence of NATO's existence, as articulated by one of its key spokespersons and representatives. Such statements abound in the current discourse.

Here is another candid admission among many. The EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Josep Borrell, who occasionally offers insights such as the one about the “blooming garden” surrounded by a “jungle,” recently remarked (perhaps in a moment of frustration or agitation) that the West is not fighting for Ukraine but against Russia. There is a plethora of such statements. Estonia threatened to destroy Lake Baikal and fill it with rocks (which has already been commented on). This is hardly a topic worthy of a serious discussion.

Estonia, Lithuania, and Latvia have taken centre stage in wagging their fingers at us, asserting their readiness to send troops and engage in combat. This represents a significant shift within NATO, moving away from a time when Americans and European heavyweights had the final say. Now, it's Poland, the Czech Republic, the Baltic states, and Bulgaria (particularly under current leadership) that are setting the agenda, with the larger European powers expected to fall in line. French President Emmanuel Macron has nervously suggested the possibility of sending French soldiers. Later, someone said that there may have been a misunderstanding, but he confirmed that everything had been stated correctly. There is information indicating that in addition to French mercenaries in Ukraine, there may also be instructors, possibly operating under some form of cover, alongside other military and intelligence personnel from European countries.

Our position on this matter is simple and straightforward: the West was reluctant to have fair talks. We put forward an idea to sign a treaty on European

security in 2008 and 2009. There was one simple thing to it. The 1999 Istanbul Charter for European Security had indivisibility of security enshrined at the top level. Countries are free to choose alliances, but they cannot do so if by strengthening their security they undermine the security of others. It was stated explicitly that all OSCE participants (presidents and prime ministers signed it) undertake that no country, no group of countries and not a single alliance within the OSCE space will claim dominance.

Back then, almost immediately NATO reprised its policy of dominance. We told them that the Istanbul Charter was a political declaration with political commitments that had been made not by “third secretaries” from embassies, but by presidents. We proposed codifying it, since they were unable to comply with the commitments made at the top level, and to adopt the European Security Treaty (legal obligations) using the same language.

We were told that only NATO members can obtain legally binding security guarantees. We noted that we had earlier signed the OSCE document stating that no one would claim dominance. We were told it was just a “political statement.” Later, they claimed that the assurances not to expand NATO were “verbal,” but when the Russia- NATO Founding Act was concluded, they said it was in writing, but “not quite” legally binding.

Our patience was unparalleled. President Putin repeatedly mentioned several times that he pushed himself to keep the shreds of trust for quite a while, hoping that something would “sprout” from the leftover “seed” if the West comes to its senses and behaves in a dignified and civilised manner. Nothing happened. In 2008-2009, the European security treaty was tossed out after they refused to discuss it with us. There were two treaties: one with NATO and one with the OSCE (but a legally binding treaty this time).

In late 2021, President Putin (after delivering remarks at our Ministry) instructed the Ministry to draft proposals reflecting the current state of international affairs. The West outright refused to discuss them. I was among the people involved in this process. Ministerial delegations at the level of deputy ministers met first.

In January 2022, I had talks with US Secretary of State Antony Blinken in Geneva. He said that there may be no commitments regarding the non-expansion of NATO, adding that they had withdrawn from the INF Treaty, because Russia had “violated” it earlier. I reminded him that when Washington withdrew from the Treaty, Moscow agreed (since they believed it was the only way out of the situation

for them) to declare a unilateral moratorium. We suggested that the Americans do the same.

President Putin's initiative clearly stated that they can come and see for themselves what things really are, if they still suspect that our Iskander systems deployed in the Kaliningrad Region are equipped with medium-range missiles that are prohibited by the Treaty. In return, though, we want to be able to go to Poland and Romania, where they have built missile defence bases equipped with the facilities whose manufacturer (Lockheed Martin) claimed in an ad that they were dual-purpose and can be used to launch prohibited ground-based medium-range missiles (the Americans deployed these bases and facilities even before the Treaty was terminated). They refused. We suggested a fair deal where they come to us and look at what they suspected us of, and we, in turn, would go and see what their ad looks like in real life. They said no.

I told Antony Blinken about our package of proposals. They are concerned about the developments surrounding Ukraine, even though they are the ones creating a crisis situation. He said NATO was out of question. However, we should come to terms with regard to our proposal about medium-range missiles, meaning that they can now be deployed in Ukraine as well (since they are not banned any longer), and the United States will be willing to limit their number in Ukraine.

I'm not sure what else I need to say for everyone to understand why the special military operation became inevitable when Ukraine (under a blatantly Nazi regime that banned everything Russian) was flooded with weapons, which fact we saw as a direct threat to our security, traditions and legitimate interests.

**Question:** We have transitioned smoothly to Ukraine; no matter what one may say, this is the main issue. They are saying openly all the time that they want to destroy us. In effect, we do not suit them the way we exist. To do them credit, they are not concealing this. All steps, mentioned by you, are heading in this direction. In turn, Russia always says that it is ready to negotiate. Who will we negotiate with? Even if we hold talks, they will deceive us once again "tomorrow." Why should we negotiate with people who do not keep their promises?

What do we want to get in the final count? We say we are ready for talks and that our stated goals (demilitarisation and denazification) will be achieved. However, it will be impossible to achieve our goals if the incumbent authorities, or any other of the same breed, stay in power.

**Sergey Lavrov:** Chief of the Office of the President of Ukraine, Andrey

Yermak, is listed among the world's 100 top politicians. However, Vladimir Zelensky is not included in the list.

**Question:** They say that Andrey Yermak controls all processes. This is a “side view”. We will fail to achieve our goals as long as these people stay in power. Whom do we want to see there? How should this work out?

**Sergey Lavrov:** First, about the goals, motives and conditions for our future talks. President of Russia Vladimir Putin is constantly reminding everyone that we always prefer talks to fights and wars.

We already had some experience. After the Ukrainians realised that they had overdone it, while shelling Donbass and promoting direct genocide methods against the Russians on their own territory (as they had believed), they suggested launching talks two or three weeks after the special military operation began. We immediately agreed. There were several rounds of talks in Belarus and online. Later, we went to Istanbul where the Ukrainians laid their proposals on the table for the first time. We accepted them after a certain discussion. They included an obligation to abolish legislation discriminating against national minorities (primarily the Russian minority) and to stop supporting movements that glorified Nazism, relied on Nazi ideology and were outlawed by the International Military Tribunal in Nuremberg.

Regarding territorial aspects, the Foreign Affairs magazine published certain “memoirs” the other day, and they obviously serve as a justification of sorts. I will explain why. The magazine noted that the United States and the United Kingdom had, indeed, told Vladimir Zelensky not to sign the document because they grew apprehensive after learning that the proposal aimed to establish a group of guarantors responsible for the security of Ukraine, including Russia, China and the West. Their refusal was allegedly not motivated by a desire to continue the war at the cost of Ukrainian lives, to wear down the Russian Federation and to kill Russian citizens. Their reasoning is amazing. What would happen, they ask, if the document is signed but will not be implemented, and someone would attack Ukraine? What if Russia itself attacked Ukraine? In that case, they would have to fight Russia as guarantors of Ukraine's security. However, they do not want to do it. This is an intricate logical twist.

At the time, there was this idea of having Russia as a guarantor, alongside all the other P5 countries, plus Germany and Türkiye. But the logic they have is that if you act as a guarantor or if you are invited to act in this capacity, while another guarantor fails to abide by the agreement, you would have to go to war against this

guarantor. They judge everyone by their own standards. For them, failing to comply with their commitments is no big deal. This is why they believe that someone would violate the deal at some point. This is how it happened in February 2014. France, Germany and Poland signed everything and assumed their role as guarantors, only to do away with all these commitments the next morning. The same goes for the Minsk agreements, as former Chancellor Angela Merkel, and former presidents of France and Ukraine, Francois Hollande and Petr Poroshenko, proudly recognised. This is an interesting observation.

After all, the West must be factoring our response into its projections all while plotting against us. They are trying to put themselves into our shoes, while sticking to their own mentality. As for their mentality... Only recently, Mark Episkopos, a prominent American political scientist, chastised the West, including from a purely utilitarian and pragmatic standpoint. Take sanctions, for example. Usually, they are designed to change the way their subject behaves. If you want them to be effective, you need to adjust these sanctions based on the response from those who endure them. The West has been carelessly expanding its sanctions without giving any thought to the possible outcomes. But the outcome was clear to begin with, even before the special military operation when the Crimean sanctions, as well as a host of other sanctions, were already in place. The result was clear. We pulled together, and I do hope that we will become even more focused. We have to go further, as Vladimir Putin said many times. We pulled together and decided not to depend on them in any sectors where they can restrain or hold back our development, and possibly in other sectors too.

Today, they pride themselves for getting rid of Russian gas. First, supplies have been on the rise in many countries, including France. Italy took pride in claiming that over the past three years the share of Russian gas in Italian imports declined from 90 percent all the way down to zero. This is what German Chancellor Olaf Scholz boasted of when describing his efforts to reduce the country's dependence on Russian energy imports, while promising to end the dependence on them completely down the road. Many European have been making statements along the same lines, including the Netherlands, and almost all Western and some Eastern European countries. But at what cost? How much did they have to spend and how have their spending on serving their people increased? Nobody answered these questions. Still, people can see through these ramifications.

Mr Episkopos went on say that failing to anticipate the way Russia would

respond to these developments was a huge mistake. The West fails to understand that sanctions can be effective only if the subject is ready to change its behaviour for the sake of having these sanctions lifted. The second point Mr Episkopos made was that if the country subjected to sanctions already said that it was not going to change its behaviour, keeping these sanctions in place would be pointless and careless. This is the kind of policy our would-be colleagues have opted for.

Getting back to the talks, I would like to underscore an interesting point. Western countries are failing to understand that if we are put in a situation where someone seeks to defeat Russia, “strategically” eliminate it as a global player, we will not be intimidated. They would indeed be frightened if someone took on them with the same kind of fury and frenzy, and with the same level of capacity that still exists in the global economy. If anything, this has made us stronger. If the past 250 years were not enough, they should finally draw conclusions from this historical lesson now.

As for the negotiations – we haven’t mentioned this yet, but I hope I won’t be criticised for it – what guarantees did that Istanbul document include? We were ready to provide extremely serious guarantees, as the Ukrainian delegation wanted. Is Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty serious enough? We did not reproduce it verbatim, but agreed upon a formula that was close. What I am saying is, those were very serious security guarantees. However, the document specifically stated that those guarantees did not apply to Crimea or Donbass. This meant that they could not be touched, otherwise no guarantees would work.

In terms of Ukraine’s demilitarisation, the document stated that there would be no military bases in Ukraine. As President Vladimir Putin said during the Russia-Africa Summit in St Petersburg in the summer of 2023, the Istanbul document outlined the limits of the relevant weapons, personnel, etc. It said that the armed forces of Ukraine would hold no manoeuvres or military exercises involving third countries unless all guarantor countries, Russia and China included, agreed. We were ready to sign the treaty.

It also said that the negotiations on other issues would continue, but only after the cessation of hostilities in Ukraine, provision of security guarantees, and abolition of Ukrainian laws of a racist, neo-Nazi, and discriminatory nature. When all this was agreed, Ukrainian negotiators came back and said they disagreed with some details, including the ban on exercises involving third-country forces with the consent of all guarantors. They wanted that clause to say “unless the majority of

guarantors agree.” That was it. That was a red flag, which could mean they had been forbidden to sign the document overnight. Or that they decided to fool “those Russians” even more. This was a short story to illustrate that situation.

At this stage, we always repeat the following (President Vladimir Putin, myself, and Presidential Press Secretary Dmitry Peskov) whenever anyone asks whether we are ready for talks. First, President of Ukraine Vladimir Zelensky has forbidden himself to negotiate with Russia. As Vladimir Putin said answering this question, he should at least take the first step and repeal that order. Secondly, they cannot be trusted. We have been trying to make ourselves trust them for too long.

And yet, we are ready to negotiate. But unlike the Istanbul story, we will not pause the hostilities for the period of negotiations. The process must go on. In addition, the realities on the ground have changed significantly. These realities must be taken into account. By realities on the ground, I mean not only the current dispositions or the line of contact, but also the amendments made to the Constitution with regard to these four new/old Russian regions, our ancestral regions. Everyone should realise this.

Not only are they failing to realise this, but they are not even ready to consider any hypothetical compromises. That much is clear. Vladimir Zelensky's formula, ultimatums, no alternatives.

**Question:** What can you say about a statement by the Swiss Foreign Ministry, saying that Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov was the first person with whom Swiss Foreign Minister Ignazio Cassis discussed the practical details of the planned Ukraine peace conference, and that a real international process cannot happen without both countries. On what conditions could we discuss anything with them?

**Sergey Lavrov:** There is only one true fact in this, that I met with Foreign Minister Ignazio Cassis. We attended a meeting of the UN Security Council on Palestine in New York. I have known him for years. He is from the “Swiss seven” [the seven-member Federal Council] who pass the portfolios around. Cassis also held the post of President of the Swiss Confederation, who is selected every year from among the seven ministers. When Cassis came to New York, he asked me for a one-on-one meeting. We did not keep it a secret. We posed for photographs, after which our delegations left us alone. It was immediately after Davos, where the Swiss held a Copenhagen-format meeting [on Ukraine] on the sidelines of the World Economic Forum at the request of Ukraine. Ignazio Cassis asked me if I saw



his statement for the press after that meeting. Frankly speaking, I did not. He told me that following that meeting on the Ukrainian “peace formula” they came to the conclusion that holding negotiations without Russia was pointless.

I replied that they did not need to meet again to come to the same conclusion if he was an experienced person. If he understood that, why did he host that get-together in Davos? I am not disclosing any secrets by saying this. I discussed this matter with many of my colleagues.

**Question:** We won't be sorry if you disclose a secret or two.

**Sergey Lavrov:** As Swiss Foreign Minister Ignazio Cassis told me, he simply wanted to start the process smoothly so as to be able to adjust it from within. He said that they planned to hold a conference in two parts, that Russia would not be invited to attend the first part, and that later, Russia may be invited there. I asked him what they were going to discuss at the first part. He replied that they would upgrade and finalise Zelensky's peace formula, many aspects of which looked attractive to developing countries.

I told him clearly that there are three things Zelensky and the West want: Russia's surrender and withdrawal to the 1991 borders; the trial of Russian leaders (tribunal); and reparations. They also wrote somewhere between the lines that Russia must assume a commitment on arms limitations in the 200-kilometre frontline zone. Everything else – food and energy security, nuclear safety, humanitarian cooperation, prisoner exchange and the search for missing in action are the ornaments adorning that ultimatum for the sake of attracting Global Majority countries.

How are they being attracted? They tell them that their unwillingness to quarrel with Russia or discuss reparations and a trial was understandable, but they could oversee the food or energy security. They are swindlers of the highest degree based on the posts they are holding in their governments. They are cheats. It is impossible not to see through their frauds, which means that they are doing this deliberately.

We know without a doubt that our partners, including the BRICS countries which attended previous meetings, every time highlighted the importance of talking with Russia. We are grateful to them for sending this signal. But if the West plans to polish or brighten Zelensky's peace formula, which the West can do excellently, by adding a few nice-sounding but meaningless phrases, such as “equal respect for security interests,” without changing the essence, it will not be the path we are

prepared to follow.

China formulated its position in February 2023. It consists of 12 items. We respect it. Recently, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz went to meet Xi Jinping. Afterward, he told his audience a not-so-decent story about the PRC's alleged support for a "peace conference" in Switzerland.

The Chinese position suggests that it is first necessary to understand the root cause of the crisis and give up the Cold War mentality when all countries saw each other as adversaries and enemies. It is necessary to fully realise the need to find solutions that would consider a balance of interests in the area of security and ensure the indivisibility of security. This is an entirely different approach.

Foreign Minister of China Wang Yi and other Chinese officials have said more than once that they support the convocation of a conference acceptable for both Russia and Ukraine. This means that it is necessary to start not with Vladimir Zelensky's formula. It should be put aside altogether. If they want to talk, let's discuss the foundations on which we are ready to come to terms, as President of Russia Vladimir Putin put it.

Now a few words about the Swiss initiative. They are not very proper in covering our contacts with them. There was only one contact (with Ignazio Cassis) in late January of this year. Leaving aside the Ukrainian content of this conference, we must say that Switzerland simply does not suit us. It is not a neutral country. Switzerland has turned from a neutral to an openly hostile state. It has joined all Western sanctions without exception. Some countries that are not NATO or EU members tried to somehow nuance their actions in this context but Switzerland joined all sanctions. Moreover, several months ago, it approved its foreign policy strategy that compels it to build security partnership not with Russia but against Russia. Therefore, it is very strange that the Swiss so hospitably flung their doors wide open in the hope that they still enjoy a reputation for mediation (to a certain extent). Until recently, everyone found it comfortable to meet in Geneva or Vienna.

**Question:** Regarding Vladimir Zelensky's plans – everything is clear here. It is not discussable. Istanbul doesn't work either, because they are trying to deceive us there. What other option do you have? Is there any alternative? Or some third option? If we are talking about the situation "on the ground", we still have a part of the Kharkov Region under control. It is absolutely unclear what will happen tomorrow in this direction. The situation "on the ground" is changing. What then?

“Until our victory”? Or can we still formulate something as an agreement and give it to them for discussion?

**Sergey Lavrov:** The Russian president has already formulated everything.

Istanbul is past history. The West began to not only supply long-range weapons to the Ukrainians, but also uses Western military specialists to help them modernise many types of missiles, increasing their range. They started hitting civilian targets with these missiles. Once the Ukrainians tried to send drones with a large cargo of explosives to hit one of our strategic airfields. We analysed it: the carrier had been modernised to significantly increase its range. The blowing up of the Crimean Bridge is another example. This continues with regard to Sevastopol, navigation in the Black Sea, merchant vessels and warships of the Black Sea Fleet. Not to mention Belgorod, Kursk and other terrorist attacks.

President Putin put it clearly when answering the question of how to make our territory safe. He said that we should move back the line from which they can target our territory. I understand that Kharkov plays not the least role in this respect.

**Question:** Where are we going to push further? We'll move away from Kharkov and make it safe. These territories will be under fire. Do we have to go further?

**Sergey Lavrov:** We are fully convinced that we have to go ahead with the special military operation.

We are not signalling a willingness to negotiate just for the sake of creating an impression. This is indeed true. But talks with Zelensky are pointless for many reasons. His masters are worried that they will lose their hegemony, that it would mean a geopolitical defeat for the West. Josep Borrell said that it would be difficult for them to accept such a defeat, that their reputation would be damaged. But it is worth nothing to them. Take the Americans: after Vietnam their reputation was well-known to everyone, after Afghanistan, from where they escaped, the same thing. They are now being kicked out of Iraq, and in Syria, they are under military pressure from various groups. Where did the Americans stay, at least for once?

Unless, of course, the goal was to wreak havoc and have everything we have now. If the goal was what they had declared, the Americans failed everywhere. I'll give the example of the small country of Haiti, which the United States has been “in charge of” for over 100 years (since 1915). But they can't do anything about it. Banditry is rampant there, some criminal came to power. They are trying to build bridges with him. They have a country next door, to which they pay great attention,

including in the UN Security Council. Sort things out at least there. We are sorting things out with Ukraine precisely because we are being threatened. And for the United States, the threat is at least drug trafficking coming from Haiti.

**Question:** I fully agree with you that it would be great to continue moving towards independence from the West. We are all in solidarity here. It would be even better to continue our progress towards not being dependent on anyone. What do you think of our relations with China now? Is there any danger for us? Do we run a risk of becoming dependent on China once we've broken dependence on the West? Or even if that happens, it will be all right because we are such great friends forever?

**Sergey Lavrov:** In fact, China is a different civilisation. It operates according to different underlying principles. However, they want to make a profit and they put their own economy, society and security first. These things are fully consistent with their culture.

As such, China is a relatively young state. A civilisation dating back millennia has a history of colonial oppression by various players. And this is well remembered, both the European and Japanese periods. The Chinese never hurry; it is part of their culture and national character. Lao Tzu said in his time that a journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step.

In fact, China had been moving towards its current dominant position in the global economy by subtle steps; before anyone knew it, it was among the world's largest economies. Just 20 years ago, it was a global factory Western brands used to make toys and clothes and things like that. Slowly, slowly... Patience is a most valuable quality that the Chinese people have.

There is no doubt that China has global ambitions right now. Xi Jinping has put forward several initiatives, such as the Community of Shared Future for Mankind, where everyone abides by commonly accepted principles and approaches. Belt and Road is an economic project, aimed at the expansion of Chinese capital, industry, and supply chains – in a good sense. There is also a global security initiative that in many ways resonates with what we have in mind.

When we were in Beijing, we discussed the promotion of these initiatives with the Chinese leaders. It is clear that Eurasian security is now of key importance in the global context. The Euro-Atlantic model, which provided a framework for international security since the creation of the OSCE, one on which we relied during the Soviet time and later, after the disintegration of the USSR (I will not list

all the documents that we agreed on and that were really intended to ensure equal security), the Euro-Atlantic security represented by NATO (we had mechanisms in place such as the Russia -NATO Council) and the OSCE in its current form have reached their limits.

We want to focus on Eurasian security, which is much more natural. Eurasia is one continent and no players from across the ocean will be involved in this arrangement. Eurasian security will rely on a unification of all existing projects – the EAEU, the CSTO, the SCO, and the CIS. China's Belt and Road Initiative will provide a material foundation for future security arrangements. We will keep the door open for the western part of the continent, for everyone.

Of course, this is our common home where everyone should behave properly and avoid bringing the Americans' aspirations into any of these future constructs. They will certainly try to poke their noses into these processes though, just as they are now getting involved in the Asia-Pacific region, the Indian Ocean and other regions.

But China is a powerful player. When China proposes its initiatives, it never pressures anyone. Beijing can propose an economic project, for example, building a railway in Central Asia, or in Africa, or somewhere else, but all decisions will be made on the basis of a balance of interests. This is the case in our relations with China, and we saw a record increase in trade to \$240 billion last year. It will definitely continue to grow.

High technology accounts for a significant part of our investment cooperation, including nuclear energy, building cutting-edge aircraft, and much more. We are now seeing a large number of Chinese goods. I don't see anything wrong with that.

Chinese cars are competitive. This should give a boost to our automotive industry. There's no growth without competition. We never had competition in the Soviet Union. To be honest, everyone liked it. I had a Zhiguli car. But its quality could have been better if there had been a competitive market. Now the Zhiguli plant in Togliatti, Gaz and Moskvich are trying their hardest. Some say, what kind of Moskvich is it, with half of its parts delivered from China? So what? The Chinese automotive industry also began with complete-knock-down projects.

**Question:** How can you explain the European leaders' extreme hysteria that Russia is about to attack? Does this threat exist? What do you think?

**Sergey Lavrov:** We could say that this is paranoia and forget it. But I think

this is a more cunning plan. They desperately need to make their parliamentarians give them money to continue this war.

The United States has already cooled down somewhat. I do not know how the drama around examining three different bills, including one on Ukraine, will resolve on this weekend. Right now, the Europeans are speaking most ardently in favour of continuing to supply money and weapons to Ukraine: German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, who considers himself the leader of providing assistance to Ukraine, and the militant French President Emmanuel Macron, as well as small bordering countries: the Baltic states, the Czech Republic, and some others.

There are several thoughts. First, the European Union, represented by the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Josep Borrell, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, and President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen, said rudely and in no uncertain terms that Russia was the enemy and it was necessary to destroy it, prevent it from winning and thereby save Ukraine. Their political careers will end if they change anything in their rhetoric. They will be immediately caught red-handed by the opposition.

Second, they need it to get money, while explaining why they have already deprived their people of cheap gas and pipeline oil, why prices have skyrocketed, and why deindustrialisation is happening as a result of sanctions. German concerns are already starting to transfer their production to the US or China. This is exactly what happened when German Chancellor Olaf Scholz was accompanied by German businesspeople on his visit to China. They came not to sign contracts for some mutually beneficial projects, but to come to terms on the transfer of their production to China.

In their view, if now they calm down or just freeze the conflict (they have European parliamentary elections coming in a month, two, three, or four, or nationwide elections in many countries of the European Union), I do not believe that the opposition will lose their chance to show where their policy has led to considering socioeconomic consequences. Their stories about our plans to attack NATO is an attempt to scare their voters and to continue with this policy.

It is incredible that when the special military operation was launched, some people said in the US and Europe that if Ukraine was accepted to NATO, President of Russia Vladimir Putin would not have dared to attack an alliance member. What are they saying now? Ukraine must not lose, because if it loses Vladimir Putin will immediately attack NATO. Can you see any logic here? This is about scaring and

threatening. I do not know how to comment all this.

Head of the Norwegian Armed Forces Eirik Kristoffersen says now that it is time to get ready for a military confrontation with Russia in the Arctic. This is expected from Russia, too. President Vladimir Putin has said repeatedly that there was no reason to attack them. It was them who wanted to draw the NATO border closer to our border. Of course, we will not allow doing this in Ukraine. I do not know what will happen to Western Ukraine. A lot of politicians also voice their opinions on this matter. However, the future of the originally Russian Ukraine, which wants to be part of the Russian world, speak Russian, educate its children in this language, and bring flowers to the monuments of those who shed blood for this land during the time of the Russian Empire, the Soviet Union and the Great Patriotic War, is beyond any doubt.

**Question:** You just said that the opposition will not miss the chance to come down hard on the people who set out on a course to destroy Russia. Are there any people out there (not hawks and maybe not doves, either, but at least relatively reasonable people) whom we could deal with, or, perhaps, are already dealing? How realistic are their chances to make it to offices such as the office of EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy currently held by Josep Borrell, the office of German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, or French President Emmanuel Macron, to name a few?

**Sergey Lavrov:** It's hard to tell, since these kinds of dealings usually take place under the table. No one elects these officials. Once the parliament members get elected, the European commissioners are appointed by a small group of people. Candidates for the post of the head of the European Council, the European Commission and the representative for foreign affairs and security policy are agreed upon the same way.

We have never turned down contacts with any political force, especially such systemic political forces as Marine Le Pen's National Front, or even Alternative for Germany, or a number of other less prominent movements or figures, such as Nigel Farage (United Kingdom), who is actively involved in promoting conservative forces. It is quite telling that they recently held their perfectly legitimate, open, and regular congress in Brussels. Two hours into this conservative conference, which was attended by Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban, Nigel Farage, and many other systemic official politicians, the head of a Belgian capital municipality came there with the police and said they couldn't hold anything there.

**Question:** The guard got tired.

**Sergey Lavrov:** True, the guard got tired, and they were allegedly sowing some extremist sentiments.

The duplicity of the West and its immutable belief in its own impunity and greatness, as well as its superiority complex are quite notable. The Alternative for Germany gaining a few extra percentage points in the polls sent a wave of accusations of it being controlled by Russia and them being Russian agents. Now, they have caught two Germans who were spying and plotting terrorist attacks at US military bases in Germany and some production facilities that send weapons to Ukraine. Notably, our Ambassador in Berlin was summoned right away.

Two men were plotting terrorist attacks. That is, finding these two “needles in a haystack” wasn’t a problem. However, no one noticed the terrorist attack on the Nord Stream pipelines that took months to prepare and carry out. It was an extremely lucrative project for Germany. The armed forces, the navy and air forces from many NATO countries were involved in making this terrorist attack possible which is now a widely known fact. However, two people who were just plotting terrorist attacks, as they claimed, were found instantly.

The accusation that these opposition parties are stepping up their activities because they are “supported” by Russia in every way, including illegal means, is quite telling. We used to tell the French, the Americans, the British and other EU and NATO members that their embassies in Russia were involved in more than just some rumoured activities. We confronted them with their holding meetings in violation of the established rules. There was a category of employees called locally employed staff. They were hired to do administrative and technical work. Using them as members of local society, they used to send them to the regions where they worked to support the anti-government movement conducted by all sorts of foreign agents, which is outrageous. They can get away with anything while we were advised not to meet with Alternative for Germany.

**Question:** The Alternative for Germany’s premises were searched yesterday. This is the way freedom and democracy work there.

**Sergey Lavrov:** It’s a parliamentary party.

**Question:** We should learn from them.

Out of nowhere came an invitation to join the celebration of the 80th anniversary of the Allied landings in Normandy. Are we going to attend? What is Mr Macron up to? Is it a case of split personality or what?



**Sergey Lavrov:** We have not been invited. This is how they do it. Once they decide to do something, they are unable to stay within the bounds of decency. Decent people first send a letter and then announce it. What they said was, “We will invite someone, but not Putin.”

No one invited anyone. We haven't received anything. If we do, we will definitely tell you.

All I can say is that five years ago Russia was represented by the Ambassador to France during the celebration of the 75th anniversary of the Allied landings in Normandy. Ten years ago, in 2014, a meeting was held that marked the beginning of the Normandy format on Ukraine. It was the beginning of a process that ended with the signing of agreements that neither Germany, nor France, nor Ukraine were going to act upon. That is where we get our allusions from.

**Question:** Maybe it's a good thing that we were not invited.

**Sergey Lavrov:** From the perspective of historical truth and historical justice, there would have been no second front without the heroism and self-sacrifice of tens of millions of Soviet citizens. There would have been no such thing as the second front.

Let me give you another example along the same lines. April 11 marks the International Day of Liberation of the Nazi Concentration Camps. The Germans proudly announced that Russians are not expected to attend this year.

**Question:** Let's turn to the Middle East. There was a strike on Iran this night. Do you think everything that is happening there now can compel Iran to think about nuclear weapons? Even if it has not thought about them before.

**Sergey Lavrov:** I heard such considerations. The Israeli and Western media are disseminating them. I think they are aimed at diverting the attention of the international community from what is happening in the Gaza Strip that is suffering from the humanitarian catastrophe (special reporters of the UN Human Rights Council are already talking about genocide) and depicting Iran as a threat. Those who make such statements want to accuse Iran of planning an attack with nuclear weapons that it doesn't have. The IAEA confirms this fact. Iran is the most verified country among the parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons. Iran has a law and even a fatwah (an order, reasoning, mandatory decision, and a postulate of the supreme leader) that bans this. Iran doesn't need to deal with this at all now.

After Iran's response to the unacceptable strike at its consular office in

Damascus where people were killed, there were contacts between the leaders of Russia and Iran as well as between our and Israeli representatives. We clearly recorded in these conversations the idea that Iran does not want escalation. We conveyed this idea to the Israelis. Iran cannot fail to respond to the flagrant violations of international law and the status of its diplomatic office but it doesn't want escalation. Practically all specialists qualified Iran's answer in this way. Judging by everything, Israel's yet another response on the facilities in Isfahan was much in the same manner (I hope I am not mistaken on this).

**Question:** The conflict between Iran and Israel and the broader conflict in the Middle East, including the one between the Arabs and Israel, and everything that stands behind all this is so complicated that only a specialist can figure out what it is all about. Is there a hypothetical hope that all this can be resolved one day by diplomatic methods, by the efforts of third countries or by our efforts? Or has everything gone too far, so much blood has been spilled and so many feelings abused that this will lead to permanent jihad, permanent fatwah and the smoldering possibility of a nuclear war for centuries to come?

**Sergey Lavrov:** Practically all troubles of the Middle East – rampant extremism and terrorism – are fueled primarily by the Palestinian problem that has been outstanding for 75 years now. It was decided to create two states in 1948. One was established and the other has not been created up to this day.

**Question:** It was reported yesterday that America will veto a draft resolution on Palestine's membership in the UN.

**Sergey Lavrov:** It has already vetoed it. The territories that were assigned in 1948 to both states look quite different now. The UN qualifies many lands that were assigned to the Palestinians as occupied territories. They were not allotted to Israel by the resolution that was supposed to create the two states.

Of course, now the situation is quite different. There was the Six Day War in 1967. And now we are no longer talking about the ideally defined 1948 borders but about the 1967 borders in accordance with a UN Security Council resolution that also envisaged the Palestinian capital in East Jerusalem. In addition, the resolution provided for the return of refugees to Palestine and use of water on a fair basis. These are basic issues.

I think that if this had been done in the past, the Middle East would be much calmer. Not by 100 percent, as this is hardly possible. But Palestinian leaders also made mistakes. Some agreements were signed when Yasser Arafat was in charge.

There were problems on both sides. However, the key is to brace oneself and fulfil what was agreed upon.

When the Quartet of international mediators (Russia, the United States, the European Union, and the United Nations) was still working, the UN Security Council, at the Quartet's suggestion, adopted in 2003 a resolution fixing the Road Map for establishing a Palestinian state within a year. There was a month-by-month, week-by-week schedule. It suited everyone. It considered the territories and all events on the ground by that time.

Now Prime Minister of Israel Benjamin Netanyahu announced the need to create a buffer zone in the Gaza Strip. I don't know how the story of Rafah will end. This is the southernmost point where 1.5 million people live in unbearable conditions. But they would prefer if these people left for Egypt. Meanwhile, the Palestinian state must be uniform, both geographically and logistically. The West Bank of the Jordan River is littered with illegal settlements that even the United States condemns. There are tens of thousands of settlers there. Periodically, they engage in conflicts and shootings with Arabs. A failure to launch the creation of the Palestinian state would not have a good outcome.

Under Donald Trump, the Americans tried to announce that Palestine was what it was now, although it was impossible to drive or walk between these speckles. When everyone started talking about the need to bear in mind the creation of the Palestinian state after the end of the hot phase of the conflict, Prime Minister of Israel Benjamin Netanyahu said he was not going to deal with the Palestinian state at all because he was dealing with the security of the State of Israel.

When a resolution on ceasefire was adopted, US Permanent Ambassador to the UN Linda Thomas-Greenfield said the US abstained from voting, that it did not veto the resolution that was not binding. If it is not binding, then everything linked with the Palestinian state is not binding, either. This is how the Americans will reason. This is a bad situation. We want an end to violence and a solution of humanitarian issues. Most of all, we want the Arabs supported by all sane forces to display initiative and take the issue of creating the Palestinian state into their own hands.

**Question:** How are we faring with matters related to Armenia? We're receiving mixed information.

**Sergey Lavrov:** Like what?

**Question:** Yerevan is claiming that our actions in the CSTO are questionable

and that the EAEU failed to meet their expectations.

**Sergey Lavrov:** Facts are a stubborn thing. Armenia is our ally in legal terms and more. We still believe this is the case. I think there are people in Armenia who understand the importance of Russia for Armenia's security and economic growth. During his address to the parliament, Prime Minister of Armenia Nikol Pashinyan said that Armenia's relations with Russia were going through a rough patch, but their importance for Armenia's statehood, sovereignty, security and economic growth cannot be overstated. He also expressed appreciation for the numerous positive developments that are the hallmark of our relations. I think his words are important, because to a certain extent they represent a reaction to the audacious and disrespectful actions of the West (primarily the United States and the European Union) who seek to accelerate Armenia's separation from the Russian Federation.

Relative to its size, Armenia derives the greatest benefit from its EAEU membership, with 35 percent of its economy driven by participation in the organisation. Last year, Armenia's trade amounted to just over \$20 billion. Of that figure, the EAEU accounted for 37 percent, the EU for 13 percent and the United States for 3 percent. Even from a mathematical standpoint, it would be incorrect to claim that the EAEU has weakened Armenia.

As a small country, Armenia contributes much less to the EAEU than other participants (including financial fees). However, when it comes to decision-making or voting, Armenia enjoys equal rights with every member, including the Russian Federation.

Gazprom Armenia sells natural gas at \$177 per 1,000 cubic metres. Western consumers pay two to three times more. If they were to rely on Western gas for heating, I am uncertain of the outcome. If they were to shut down this major nuclear power plant, as the Americans want them to, and replace it with US-made small modular reactors... I hope Armenians understand the importance of the energy produced by the Metsamor NPP.

All these years, the South Caucasus Railway has benefited from subsidised passenger rates, infrastructure investments, and more. The Zangezur Copper and Molybdenum Combine is the largest taxpayer in Armenia. So, those who are trying to paint a picture of a "little Armenia" being exploited by the Russian Federation or the EAEU should bear this in mind.

The same applies to the CSTO. Unfortunately, after the four trilateral

agreements (1,2,3,4) were signed to ensure a stable and balanced process of normalisation and resumption of all communications, the European Union and the United States started interfering in this process in an attempt to appropriate the results and prevent Russia from implementing the agreements it had achieved.

It played out this time exactly as it did in 2003. Back then, the Kozak Memorandum on Moldova's territorial integrity with special rights for Transnistria was signed. It was initialled, and the leaders were about to leave for Chisinau to sign it.

**Question:** The Moldovan President turned around on his way to the airport.

**Sergey Lavrov:** EU High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy Javier Solana called Mr Voronin and said we planned to keep our army warehouses there for the next 15 years. Allegedly, they want us to withdraw earlier. That's it. Otherwise, they warn against signing it. That's what this was all about.

During the Yerevan summit in 2022, the CSTO fully approved the document (on transferring additional armaments to protect the border, conducting special military exercises and deploying a CSTO mission on the border). All ministers, including the Armenian minister, signed this document. The following morning, as the Armenian Prime Minister was opening the summit, he said there was no consensus, whereas there was a consensus in Armenian society regarding the EU mission. It was supposed to stay there for two months, but its term has now become indefinite. The Canadians and other NATO members want to be part of it. This is no longer an EU mission. It will be a NATO mission.

They say the CSTO is unable to decide on its area of responsibility in Armenia. Armenia isn't sure yet, either. They said they and Azerbaijan were willing to respect the borders under the 1991 Almaty Declaration, which means Karabakh is part of Azerbaijan. They have set up a commission on delimitation. Nikol Pashinyan recently said there were four border villages in the Tavush Region which he is ready to hand over to Azerbaijan. He is now trying to convince the residents that this is the right thing to do. No mention is made of the 1991 borders, which Nikol Pashinyan wanted the CSTO to confirm and to defend during the talks on delimitation. These borders are now subject to change.

So, before we even talk about the CSTO being under obligation to designate its area of responsibility, it is imperative to define Armenia's borders and finish the delimitation process. The Armenian leadership is actively engaged in this now.

They signed a document stating that Karabakh is now Azerbaijan. The Almaty Declaration is in effect. The declaration that was signed with the participation of the European Union says nothing about ensuring the special rights of the Armenian ethnic minority in Azerbaijan.

So, it's wrong to assume that Armenians left Karabakh because of our peacekeepers' inaction.

**Question:** Only Pashinyan's people are saying so. No one else.

**Sergey Lavrov:** I would like to conclude this answer by reiterating what I said at the beginning. Nikol Pashinyan has expressed appreciation for everything they've had with Russia. It is hard to overstate the importance of what our country has done for their security, economy and sovereignty. The aspects of our relationship that we had and continue to have should be valued. I hope Pashinyan will have contacts with the President of Russia, and these matters will be discussed in a candid manner without the influence of arguments planted by our Western detractors.

**Question:** We all hope so, Mr Lavrov.

Since we're talking about our "exes." We all want to live like in that cartoon, the one our "exes" know so well. Remember, "Guys, let's be friends." But it doesn't work out with everyone. It feels like there are fewer and fewer people we can do that with.

Our wonderful neighbour – we all love our "Moldovan beauty." They have announced that they will hold a referendum in the autumn on joining the European Union. However, as you are well aware, the population of Transnistria and Gagauzia are not enthusiastic about this idea. What are your thoughts on this? Looking at the bigger picture, what steps should we take to prevent this from happening repeatedly, as you just mentioned regarding Armenia? That is, while the EU mission has stayed, some succeed while other don't. They are getting further and further away from us. It's frustrating to witness.

**Sergey Lavrov:** Yes, it is frustrating. It's a pity that in 2003 the then President of Moldova Vladimir Voronin didn't have the... There was no need for any courage. They could have just signed the document that had already been initialled. The issue of keeping ammunition depots there would probably have been solved by now. It's all hypotheticals. There are no "ifs" in history.

The West is working aggressively, fervently, without any decency. They portray Maia Sandu as someone who is openly dragging Moldova into NATO either

directly or through a union with Romania.

The same role was assigned to Vladimir Zelensky. First, Petr Poroshenko pulled the country towards NATO, amended the Constitution, and now Vladimir Zelensky. Maia Sandu's actions resemble dictatorial tactics that the West allows its proxies to use when it deems it necessary to take a tough stance against the opposition. It allows and even encourages such behaviour.

Similarly, in Georgia demonstrations portrayed President Salome Zourabichvili as a champion of free speech, even though they have the most lenient law. In the United States, France, Poland, and in many EU countries similar laws exist, imposing fines and criminal liability if one receives money and fails to disclose it, or if the funds are used for unintended purposes. In Georgia, it's straightforward – if an organisation receives more than 20 percent of its funding from abroad, it simply needs to declare it.

If a referendum on joining the European Union were to take place in Moldova now, it's worth noting that Gagauzia has already announced its refusal to comply. This is especially noteworthy given that they are being deprived of their rights and legally entitled subsidies from the budget solely for expressing their views, such as suggesting alternative paths for relations with the Russian Federation, in order to foster friendly relations with all neighbouring countries.

They are doing the same thing with Transnistria. They want to turn it into a hotbed of tensions. They are saying (I am sure you've heard this) that it is necessary to suppress this entity by using armed force. Let Russia suffer another "strategic defeat." But they still have no prospects. Those holders of foreign passports who are ruling the countries supposedly of their origin... I don't think they will enjoy support for long (I won't even mention authority at this point) from the forces that are acting as timeservers, trying to get something for themselves from the situation that the Americans want to bring to a victorious end.

**Question:** Nobody likes timeservers anywhere.

This year, Russia will host a BRICS summit. What challenges, goals and prospects are we facing now?

**Sergey Lavrov:** We have a busy agenda – 250 events.

As for challenges, we must ensure a smooth integration of new members into our team. The number of members has doubled. Over the long years of its existence, BRICS has developed traditions, procedures and understandings, including a culture of consensus and mutual support. We have many working

structures. These new members will participate not only in ministerial meetings and summits but also in sectoral events related to IT, agriculture, and banking. This is a brief response to your question.

One of the goals is to follow the instruction given at the previous summit to our finance ministers (as I've already mentioned) and central banks to draft recommendations on alternative payment platforms. This will be important for safeguarding economic ties and prospects (and we have solid prospects and many plans) from arbitrary actions by the West, which is undermining the trust in the global economic and financial system that it once created, supposedly for the benefit of all humanity.

**Question:** Thank you very much, Mr Lavrov. It seems we have discussed all important issues. If you think that we have missed any questions, is there anything you would like to add?

**Sergey Lavrov:** I would like to wish you to continue developing the Russian media space as you are doing now.

**Question:** Thank you very much. We wish for you to remain the same as you are now. Our whole country and our audience admire you and appreciate your clear-cut, strong language directed at to those who misbehave. We wish you courage on this challenging path.

**Sergey Lavrov:** Now I remember the last thing I wanted to say. We should remind all Ms Sandus, all those who want to steer Armenia somewhere, of the statements made by Josep Borrell that were mentioned today. When he urged the Europeans to continue this war, he said that they were fighting not for Ukraine, but against Russia, which is threatening them. Vladimir Zelensky followed with a statement that they are fighting not for Ukraine, but for their own interests. Enlightenment. Let it come early for those who are also being courted by the West now.

**Question:** I think they are well aware of this, but they are doing it anyway. What do you think about the phrase “If you don’t want to talk to Lavrov, you will talk to Shoigu”?

**Sergey Lavrov:** It’s already on T-shirts.





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