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Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's interview with Russian and international news media, Moscow, December 26, 2024

Question: Talks are the top priority, no question about it. Many opinions are heard coming from the diplomatic circles, experts, and other sources. To put it in plain terms, they are trying hard to see both of us make peace. The question is, though, who are we supposed to talk to in Kiev? President-elect Trump's presumptive special envoy for Ukraine Keith Kellogg has come up with an initiative. What's your take on the situation?

Sergey Lavrov: Much has been said on this subject. President Putin has repeatedly addressed this issue, including during the Direct Line and during the Valdai International Discussion Club meeting before that, as well as other events.

Empty talk is not an option for us. Everything we have heard so far was rhetoric about the need to come up with some kind of a ceasefire. However, not much is done to hide the fact that the purpose of a ceasefire is to buy time and to flood Ukraine with weapons, to help it get back in shape, to carry out additional mobilisation, and so on.

Ceasefire is a road leading nowhere. We need binding legal agreements that will lay out the conditions for ensuring Russia's security and the legitimate security interests of our neighbours. However, they should exist in an international legal context that would preclude chances of violating these agreements. These agreements must address Ukraine crisis' root causes. The two main ones include, first, the violation of the commitments not to expand NATO to the east and the aggressive absorption by NATO of the geopolitical space all the way up to our borders. This is what they had in store for Ukraine. They keep talking about it to this day. The second root cause includes the Kiev regime's absolutely racist actions following the coup. The extermination of everything Russian, including language, mass media, culture, and even the use of the Russian language in everyday life, was

officially greenlighted and then codified into law. Of course, that includes outlawing the canonical Ukrainian Orthodox Church.

We are told that Russia is allegedly putting forward preliminary conditions. In fact, these are not preconditions, but demands to act in line with previous agreements. As it turns out, they lied to us when they assured us that NATO would not expand eastward. They lied to us when they emphasised their commitment to a settlement based on the UN Charter fully forgetting that this Charter stipulates more than the principle of territorial integrity and also includes the principle of equal rights and self-determination of peoples. It took the General Assembly quite a while to consider the relationship between these principles before it resolved by consensus in its wisdom that the territorial integrity of all states whose governments abide by the principle of self-determination and, therefore, represent the entire population living within the borders of the territory in question must be respected.

How can Kiev's Nazi regime represent the interests of the residents of Crimea, Donbass, or Novorossiia, whom it declared terrorists right after the coup and launched a military "anti-terrorist operation" against them?

China and Brazil's initiatives on Ukraine crisis put accent on the need to abide by the UN Charter. The principle of territorial integrity is mentioned from time to time. We are talking to our Chinese and Brazilian friends, as well as other countries that work with us in promoting the well-intentioned initiative that the UN Charter has many more facets to it than just the principle of territorial integrity. The principle of self-determination of peoples is no less important. If it were not for it, there would likely be issues with decolonising African and other peoples. This principle laid the international legal groundwork for decolonisation which echoed the African peoples' unwillingness and impossibility to live under the colonisers' rule.

By the same token, the residents of Crimea, Donbass and Novorossiia are unwilling and unable to live under the Nazi rule in Kiev. So, the principle of self-determination of the peoples is coming into force. They have one the self-determination part. The residents of Crimea did so in 2014, and Donbass and Novorossiia in 2022. These realities have been included in our Constitution.

If we want to have a serious conversation, we need to treat the principles of the UN Charter not selectively, but consistently in their entirety and interrelation without, of course, forgetting the much-beloved-by-the-West principle of respect for human rights. They did not come up with it. It is laid down in the UN Charter.

The very first article of the Charter states that everyone must respect human rights regardless of gender, race, language, and religion. Russian language has been legally exterminated in Ukraine. The religion - the Canonical Ukrainian Orthodox Church - has been banned, too. So, I believe everyone who is sincerely willing to help identify ways to settle the crisis cannot ignore its root causes.

As a reminder, in his global security initiative dedicated to all kinds of conflicts and principles underlying their resolution which he advanced in February 2023, President of the People's Republic of China Xi Jinping highlighted in the text of this document the importance of identifying and addressing the root causes of any conflict in order to resolve it.

You mentioned Keith Kellogg who was “announced” President Trump’s special envoy for Ukraine. He recently stated that they had seen an attempt by Russia and Ukraine to reach an agreement within the framework of the Minsk process, which failed. So let’s not repeat it, he said. Of course, Mr Kellogg has yet to delve deeper into the Ukraine file, but the Minsk agreements were not an attempt, but duly signed documents guaranteed by an additional declaration made by the leaders of Russia, Ukraine, France, and Germany, which said that Euro-Atlantic security would take into account the interests of all countries, and that efforts to create a common space from the Atlantic to the Pacific would be revived. It said a lot of things. None of what was included in that declaration, as well as in the Minsk Document itself regarding the Ukrainian regime’s obligations, has been implemented. However, that document was agreed upon, signed at the top level and unanimously approved by the UN Security Council.

Perhaps, Mr Kellogg needs to take a closer look into that. The Minsk agreements were not an attempt. It was about a UN Security Council resolution that was trampled on with the encouragement coming from the United States. President Poroshenko who signed the document on behalf of Ukraine and former German Chancellor Angela Merkel and French President Francois Hollande admitted two years ago that they were not going to act upon them. They needed to buy time to flood Ukraine with weapons. These same ideas remain floating in the air, but they are much less binding than the Minsk agreements. They pursue the same goal, though, which is to buy time for the Nazi regime.

As President Putin said, we are willing to consider serious and concrete proposals. It is probably too early to speculate and to guess on the coffee grounds. I

hope that the Trump Administration, including Mr Kellogg, will look into the root causes of the conflict.

We remain open to consultations. If someone finds it hard to understand where we stand, even though we made it clear on many occasions, we are ready to reiterate our position. We are open to talks, if they focus on the substance and the root causes and the principles mentioned by President Vladimir Putin in his speech at the Foreign Ministry in June. Importantly, they do not constitute preliminary conditions of any sort. They represent a demand to fulfill what everyone signed up to when adopting the Charter of the United Nations.

Question: In a recent interview, you said that the environment turns toxic as soon as anyone sees an American or a European talking to you. Europeans actually run away when they see you. Given this attitude from Western politicians, is it even possible to resolve any serious international issues? Is diplomacy still active in international affairs, as a foreign policy tool?

Sergey Lavrov: We could continue lamenting our Western colleagues' new methods in foreign affairs, but it will get us nowhere. They have made a political decision to isolate Russia in every sense. In addition, they have been making insane demands on other countries: they are to avoid any Russian representatives, to stop visiting them or receiving visits from them, and to sever trade ties with Russia while buying more expensive energy resources at a loss. These are the new methods of Western diplomacy, which has been reduced to threats, sanctions, punishments and blackmail.

Josep Borrell, who stepped down as EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy some time ago, recently admitted – unburdened by official duties – that the West has failed to isolate Russia. The European Union has promised to help Kiev for as long as needed, but they cannot do it indefinitely, he added. Speaking about sanctions, he bluntly said that China has replaced Europe and the G7 as Russia's trade and economic partner. I do not think that Josep Borrell had that “epiphany” last week. Everyone has known all along that Western sanctions were harming the populations of the countries that apply them.

When America was hit by a hurricane, President Biden failed to notice it at first, but later travelled to the affected area, where the victims were paid ridiculous compensations of \$700 per person. That sparked mass protests against the government's treatment of its own citizens while sending over \$150 billion to

Ukraine over the last couple of years. France suffered a crop failure, an agricultural crisis, and farmers' protests. German industry actually collapsed.

It is up to them to decide what to do. The Americans prefer to get rid of competitors; it is their policy. Now they are "taking out" Russia, and beginning to do the same with regard to China. They are restricting the export of certain US-made microelectronic chips to China, trying to contain the country's technological growth. However, the Chinese people, like the Russian people, will continue to do what they deem necessary for their development. But the methods [the Americans are using] are perfectly clear.

In addition to Russia and China, Europe has also to a large extent fallen victim to the US policy of eliminating any competition. We see this. We are ready (we have repeatedly stated this) to talk to any Western representatives who are willing to have an equal dialogue, find a balance of interests, and make mutually beneficial arrangements. Several European countries are already willing to talk on an equal footing, such as Hungary and Slovakia. Other EU members are also slowly beginning to ask for confidential talks. So far, few dare to do this openly.

The EU has a tough discipline policy. The new head of European diplomacy, Kaja Kallas, dictates to everyone what they should or should not do. We will see how effectively the Brussels bureaucracy, which is already being compared to a more stringent version of the Soviet authoritarian system, will be able to convince the member states that it knows better, when it comes to their populations' sentiments and needs.

Question: China and Russia have been seeking to consolidate the Global Majority and enable the Global South to combine its efforts. During the BRICS Summit in Kazan, our media corporation, together with VGTRK, held a roundtable discussion for BRICS media representatives, during which all the participants spoke out in favour of creating a mechanism for accessing unbiased and truthful information. In 2025, China will be hosting the SCO Summit. Together, our two countries will mark 80 years of Victory over Nazism. What kind of steps, in your opinion, should the countries of the Global South, China and Russia take, including in the media sector, to preserve the post-World War II international order and ensure peace across the world?

Sergey Lavrov: It is our understanding, and there is a broad recognition that Russia and China have a real stabilising effect on international relations.

Let me illustrate the positive bearing Beijing and Moscow have on the international landscape by referring to the way we have been working together within BRICS. Countries representing various continents, civilisations, religions, and cultures work together within this framework. Nevertheless, in their efforts they act in accordance with the agreements we regularly sign within BRICS. It would not be an exaggeration to say that these agreements cover human activities and undertakings in all their aspects, including military and political matters, security, economics, culture, and education.

BRICS has become extremely popular. There were delegations representing 35 countries at the Kazan Summit, as well as heads of six multilateral organisations, including the United Nations. This high level of attendance demonstrates how important this structure has become and that there is a growing interest for forging closer ties with BRICS on the part of other organisations of the Global South and East which have been seeking to assert their independence in international affairs.

I strongly believe that sustainable development of the multipolar world is impossible without establishing interaction between these associations of a new type, where there are no “superiors” and “subordinates”, no “bosses”, no orders that must be obeyed, as is the case in the European Union and NATO.

Hopefully, there will be room in this multipolar world order for our Western colleagues. They will not disappear from our planet. That said, the way they will position themselves, and the way they will overcome the mental shock of losing their dominance after enjoying it for five centuries – all this will depend on their political culture, the way they view their status in present-day reality, and whether they are able to act accordingly while respecting the legitimate interests and achievements of other countries, including the BRICS countries.

As for the BRICS media dimension, we believe that there is a need to be more effective, in a good way, of course, in explaining the principles underpinning BRICS. There have been too many rumours and planted fakes about this group in the West for making the countries of the Global South across Africa, Asia and Latin America wary of working with BRICS.

Promoting media cooperation is also instrumental for reinforcing the group’s standing and enabling the Global South to play a bigger role in universal structures in general, including the United Nations, APEC, SCO, the Group of Twenty, and other formats. Russia and China have been working in tandem in all these

frameworks and play a consolidating role in the way we have been treating the countries of the Global South.

You have mentioned the upcoming anniversary of Victory in World War II. Our two countries, China and Russia, have suffered more than any other countries from Nazi Germany and militarist Japan. The leaders of our two countries have agreed to mark the upcoming anniversaries in a worthy manner. We will be celebrating the 80th anniversary of Victory in the Great Patriotic War and in World War II in Europe on May 9, 2025, while on September 3, 2025, we will mark 80 years of Victory in World War II in the Far East.

I strongly believe that the BRICS media-related structures and other frameworks in which Russia works with China will be effective and proactive in covering these events.

We are looking forward to further strengthening media cooperation within BRICS. In September 2024, Moscow hosted a Media Summit as part of its chairmanship. Held by TASS News Agency and supported by China, it brought together representatives from 60 media outlets and 45 countries. In October 2024, there was the roundtable you have mentioned, titled BRICS Media Dialogue, held at Kazan University. I am certain that we must have regular events of this kind and that we need more of them.

This paves the way for alternative media platforms for people in the Global South and East, as well as those in the West who are interested in learning the truth about what is happening outside of the EU and NATO perimeter. In fact, there have been more and more people of this kind lately.

Question: Moscow has consistently maintained that it is ready for negotiations. A few minutes ago, you also reaffirmed this. President Vladimir Putin said at the news conference that Moscow was ready to negotiate with legitimate authorities, while Vladimir Zelensky has no legitimacy. With whom are we to negotiate in this case? How does Moscow see the completion of the special military operation?

Sergey Lavrov: Regarding the Ukrainian regime's legitimacy, President Putin made it perfectly clear during his Direct Line that the Ukrainians should act as they see fit in their country, to bring the situation in Kiev into line with the Ukrainian constitution. If they want their president to have legitimate authority, that potential president should go through elections.

As it is, only the Verkhovna Rada and its chair maintain legitimacy under the Ukrainian constitution, Putin explained. But it is premature to talk about this. Before they set up a negotiating team of the Kiev regime, the root causes of this crisis need to be addressed. We want these causes eliminated. As long as they are in place, there can be no agreement.

I have discussed these root causes in detail, and I hope that anyone who is interested in advancing the negotiations knows what I am talking about. Again, these are not preconditions. These are the steps that all parties to this process and conflict should have taken long ago, in accordance with the commitments they had made, including under the principles of the UN Charter, which must be applied in their entirety and interconnectedness.

With this understanding, we are open to any serious proposals. I hope everyone realises that we will not agree to a temporary ceasefire only to resume the conflict later.

We insist on the need to end this conflict in a sustainable and legally impeccable settlement by eliminating its root causes. I trust that all interested parties will become increasingly convinced that this approach has no alternative.

Question: Moscow also claims to be negotiating with the new forces currently in control in Syria. What is your assessment of these talks? How do you see the future relations between Moscow and Damascus?

Sergey Lavrov: We have never recalled our diplomats from Damascus. Our Embassy continues to operate in Syria, as do many others.

We maintain communication with the new Syrian authorities through our diplomatic mission. We are discussing hands-on issues related to ensuring the safety of Russian citizens and the safe operation of our embassy. We are interested in dialogue on other aspects of our bilateral relations and the regional agenda, and are ready to talk.

As President Vladimir Putin has emphasised, we are open to contacts with all major political groups that are active in Syria. We have been maintaining these contacts for quite some time now. We were in touch with most of them even before the recent events.

I must note that the head of the new Syrian government, Ahmed al-Sharaa, has recently talked to the BBC. In his interview, he described Syria's ties with Russia as long-standing and strategic. We share that approach. We have much in common with our Syrian friends.

We have made a great contribution to liberating Syria from colonial dependence, and training local personnel. Tens of thousands of Syrians received education at Russian universities. As many as 5,000 Syrian citizens are students here now. We are ready to expand educational cooperation.

I hope that, once the new Syrian government structure stabilises, we will be able to resume economic and investment cooperation with the new leaders where we left off, as we have made certain achievements on that track in the past years.

This is not an easy process. It is a transitional period, which will be followed by elections, as was announced. Substantial preparations should be made, and a framework for the election campaign has to be agreed upon. All leading countries have emphasised the need for this process to be inclusive, meaning that all political, ethnic and religious groups in Syria have to be represented.

Again, this is not an easy process, but we are ready to help, including through the UN Security Council and the Astana format, where Russia – along with Türkiye and Iran, and with support from the majority of Arab countries – is ready to play a role in consolidating all processes in Syria and organising the elections so as to ensure that the results are recognised by all and are beyond dispute.

We have discussed this with Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Jordan, Egypt, Qatar, the UAE, Bahrain and Lebanon. Each of these countries has reaffirmed its interest in preventing Syria from repeating the path of the Libyan state after NATO destroyed it – that country still needs to be put back together piece by piece. This has not been very successful so far.

It is important what role Syria's neighbours will play. We have heard Turkish President Erdogan's statement. We understand the legitimate concerns of the Turkish leadership and people about security along the border with Syria, where they have seen repeated incidents involving terrorist groups that are causing unrest there.

These legitimate security concerns must be addressed while preserving Syria's sovereignty, territorial integrity and unity. Recep Tayyip Erdogan expressed the same approach. We support that.

It is important to address the problems in eastern Syria, where the Americans have illegally occupied a significant part of the territory that holds major oil fields and the most fertile soil. They are extracting and exporting the country's resources, directing the proceeds to support US-created separatist groups in eastern Syria. This

must certainly be addressed. Syria must not be allowed to fall apart, even though some would like just that.

It is important that Israel understand its responsibility for the collective effort and refrain from ensuring its own security at the expense of others. This principle, the indivisibility of security, was enunciated a long time ago. One cannot expect to destroy all military facilities in a neighbouring country and then live in peace and harmony until the end of time. This is like “sowing the wind” that will come back to those who do this in a storm of consequences.

Question: Latin America and Russia have long been connected by profound historical, cultural, and human bonds. What tangible measures will Russia undertake in the coming year and beyond to fortify these connections? What priorities does Russian policy hold for the Latin American region?

Sergey Lavrov: You are absolutely correct. The relationship between Russia and the nations of Latin America and the Caribbean has traditionally been amicable. Russians and Latin Americans have long shared a mutual affinity. This mutual respect is also evident in their appreciation of global culture and each other’s cultural heritage, which strongly unites our peoples.

We receive signals from the overwhelming majority of Latin American countries expressing their interest in strengthening and expanding their partnership with the Russian Federation. We are actively engaging in dialogue and cooperation on political matters, through diplomatic channels on economic, cultural, and humanitarian cooperation. The interaction between our countries’ regions and even municipalities is improving.

This is a multifaceted structure of interaction. We are prepared to deepen it to the fullest extent possible, developing it as much as the Latin American countries themselves desire.

Our relations are grounded in equality, mutual benefit, and respect. There is no ideology or doctrine involved, such as the Monroe Doctrine or any other.

We have observed that the Biden administration, during its tenure over the past four years, has on several occasions, through its official representatives, expressed concern over Russia’s delegations visiting Nicaragua or Venezuela, suggesting that this poses risks to US security.

But honestly, have you no shame? Everyone is well aware of the security risks posed by the United States, which maintains several hundred military bases in over 100 countries, yet forbids any relations with the Russian Federation. This is an

unproductive approach. I hope the new administration in Washington will come to realise this.

We have ambitious plans for the coming year. We are planning a number of reciprocal visits, developing our relations not only bilaterally but also with regional structures such as CELAC, ALBA, SICA, MERCOSUR, CARICOM, and many others.

We proceed with the expectation that the year will be fruitful in terms of activities, especially given that in the coming months, we will celebrate a “parade” of anniversaries marking the establishment of diplomatic relations between Russia and various Latin American states: in March 2025 with Venezuela and the Dominican Republic, in April 2025 with Guatemala, in June 2025 with Ecuador and Colombia, in September 2025 with Cuba and Honduras, in October 2025 with Argentina, and in December 2025 with Mexico. Each of these anniversaries will be commemorated with due dignity. We are planning exhibitions, conferences, meetings of public figures, as well as youth and cultural events. These will allow us to outline new perspectives for our relations.

In 2025, we will establish a fully-fledged Embassy in the Dominican Republic. In June 2025, we will be delighted to welcome Latin American guests to the St. Petersburg International Economic Forum, where there is traditionally a Latin American section.

In June 2024, Bolivian President Luis Arce was the chief guest at the annual International Economic Forum in St. Petersburg. This marked the first occasion a representative from the Latin American region participated in such a capacity.

I would also like to highlight other forums taking place in Russia that will be of interest to our Latin American friends, such as the Eastern Economic Forum, Russian Energy Week, the St. Petersburg International United Cultures Forum, and many others.

Despite the coronavirus pandemic and the sanctions war instigated by the West, our trade with Latin America remains stable and sustainable in recent years. Our main trading partners are Brazil, Mexico, Ecuador, Argentina, Colombia, and Chile. We are keen on expanding our trade and investment relationships with Nicaragua and Venezuela, which are severely impacted by the illegal sanctions imposed by the United States.

We are implementing bilateral projects with several countries in various fields, including high technology. We are interested in countries of the continent

strengthening their contacts with the EAEU. Currently, Cuba is the only extra-regional observer in the Eurasian Economic Union. I mentioned cooperation in the educational, humanitarian, cultural, and sports areas, and we are eager to develop these at the fastest pace possible.

Presently, we have nearly 5,000 Latin American university students studying on Russian state scholarships. We know that in some Latin American countries, competitions are held to secure such scholarships, with up to 10 applicants for each scholarship. This is gratifying, and we will increase the annual quotas.

A unique aspect of our cooperation is that 27 out of the 33 countries in Latin America and the Caribbean have agreements with Russia on visa-free travel for our citizens. This is record-high in percentage terms compared to other parts of the world. Russian tourists visit Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Venezuela, explore the sights in Peru, Mexico, Guatemala, partake in the Carnival of Brazil, and enjoy football in Latin America, all without visas. These attractions draw tourists and boost tourist traffic.

Next year will present a new opportunity to make concerted efforts to develop multilateral interaction. In September 2025, we will host Intervision, an international song competition. Over 25 countries have already expressed interest in participating, including several Latin American nations.

We welcome and embrace tourists from Latin American countries, eager to showcase Moscow, St. Petersburg, Baikal, Kamchatka, Sochi, Suzdal, and Altai. We have many picturesque locales and historical monuments. There is a form of tourism that involves taking a journey on the Trans-Siberian Railway across Russia to the Pacific Ocean, offering an at-a-glance view of the entire country.

Question: With the Trump Administration to return to the White House soon, Russia hopes to build more pragmatic relations with the United States. However, many officials from the incoming US administration have issued threats to many of Russia's friends and allies in the Global South. In what ways can this affect Russia-US relations?

Sergey Lavrov: We have no illusions or hopes with regard to what the US administration, which is now working on staffing issues, will do when it takes office on January 20, 2025. Let's not speculate on a particular president making certain things better, or someone else moving into the White House having us try different things. Let's not engage in guesswork and wait for the new administration to finalise its policy instead.

We are fully aware that the United States relies on a bipartisan consensus with regard to Russia. This is not a friendly, but, to put it bluntly, Russophobic consensus. Regardless of party affiliation, the ruling elite will leave no stone unturned in order to weaken Russia as a competitor. I already touched on this issue earlier during this news conference. The United States seeks to weaken any competitor, be it Russia, China, or Europe. They have long proclaimed the principle that no country around the world may be stronger than the United States. Clearly, life is tougher than statements or declarations, but in order to realise the inevitability of adopting different behaviour, the United States still has a long way to go. It needs to observe how the situation is actually developing, and to feel the pinch of the multipolar world realities.

So far, Russia is listed as an “adversary” in the US doctrinal documents. Some representatives of the current administration even called it “enemy.” It is also labeled as an “immediate existential threat.” China comes second as a “challenge.” The United States remains consistent in its actions. Nevertheless, we sense signals coming from Donald Trump’s team that show interest in resuming the dialogue, which is absolutely reasonable and normal.

Always, even when relations between countries are marked by hostility, diplomacy is there to maintain the dialogue, to make sure both parties know what message the other side is trying to get across. This is what diplomacy is all about. Diplomats communicate even during wartime. If the signals coming from the new team in Washington to resume the dialogue interrupted by Washington after the special military operation started are serious, we will respond to them. However, the dialogue was interrupted by the Americans, so it is up to them to take the first step.

We are waiting for the Trump Administration to make public its official policy towards Russia. If Washington takes our legitimate interests into account, the dialogue will be productive rather than meaningless. If they are not taken into account, everything will remain as it is.

With regard to the threats uttered by the incoming administration to the Global South and Global East that you mentioned, such as raising tariffs, or punishing those of them that will use currencies other than the US dollar, or non-US dollar-denominated payment platforms, we are not surprised. As I mentioned earlier, putting pressure on competitors and deriving unilateral benefits has always been the distinction of the US policy. This is nothing new. The policy of interfering

in the domestic affairs of sovereign states has long been the hallmark of Washington's methods and it will continue unabated. We must be prepared to handle it.

However, the reality must make the United States realise the actual trends and real processes defining the modern world, and the fact that diktat can no longer be the instrument of choice when it comes to international relations.

Question (retranslated from French): Yesterday, on December 25, approximately a dozen missiles were launched towards Ukraine. Why did this occur on a day that is sacred to hundreds of millions of Christians – Christmas? Are you not concerned about how this was perceived globally?

Sergey Lavrov: Regarding the ongoing hostilities within the framework of our special military operation, or more accurately, within the context of the war that the West, including France, has declared against the Russian Federation and is waging through the Ukrainian regime. I trust that you, as a member of the journalistic profession, have not only observed the events surrounding the actions of our Armed Forces on December 25, this year, but also follow the historical context of the issue, accompanying all these processes, analysing and grasping the epistemology of the problem and its developmental trajectory.

I do not wish to dwell excessively on this subject. We have repeatedly voiced our disapproval concerning the supply of Western long-range missiles to the Kiev regime, including the French SCALP, the American ATACMS, and the British Storm Shadow. We have cautioned that the transfer of lethal weaponry would merely escalate the situation and that the Kiev regime is incapable of adhering to the conventions of warfare and international humanitarian law. If you monitor the information that might be “hushed up” in Europe, it is readily accessible in our country on television, social networks, and the internet. There are daily drone strikes or your Western missiles against overtly civilian targets. Civilians are being killed. Ambulances, schools, hospitals, markets, and other civilian sites are being attacked.

None of the Western nations providing arms to the Nazi regime in Kiev has ever admonished it against such blatant violations of international humanitarian law and the rules of warfare. As long as such conduct by the Kiev regime persists (and it is not merely encouraged but directed by the West, including France), we shall respond. But not in the manner the Kiev regime does at your instigation. We are

targeting exclusively military installations, facilities of the military-industrial complex, and other sites associated with the Ukrainian Armed Forces.

On December 20 of this year, when ATACMS and Storm Shadow missiles struck civilian targets in the Russian Federation, we retaliated with precision weapons against the Security Service of Ukraine (SBU) control centre, the Luch design bureau in Kiev, which is responsible for the design and production of Neptun missile systems, cruise missiles and multiple launch rocket systems, as well as the positions of the American Patriot SAM system. All targets were successfully hit. We are striking at the “points” from which our territories and civilian sites are being shelled, leading to civilian casualties.

President of Russia Vladimir Putin has stated that we select targets within Ukraine based solely on threats to the Russian Federation. These may include military facilities and defence industry enterprises. The decision-making centres in Kiev could very well be such targets. It is not in our practice to target civilian sites. These are the tactics of the Nazis in Kiev, supported by the West, and those who supply them with weapons to devastate purely civilian infrastructure and harm civilians.

Question (retranslated from French): In December of this year, French President Emmanuel Macron facilitated a meeting between Donald Trump and Vladimir Zelensky in Paris. Do you believe that the American President might support Kiev more than he indicated during his campaign? What are your thoughts on this meeting initiated by France?

Sergey Lavrov: We have grown accustomed to the numerous initiatives that France frequently announces, conducting various meetings and conferences. I recall that in December 2015, French President François Hollande unexpectedly declared the urgent need to convene a conference on Libya. Participants attended, discussions took place for a day and a half, and subsequently, everyone seemingly “forgot” about it. Nonetheless, the conference was elegantly broadcast on French television.

Our French colleagues indeed have a penchant for playing a proactive role in addressing various issues. We welcome this enthusiasm, though I am uncertain about the outcomes of such “initiatives” and the sincerity of their intentions to play a constructive role.

I will refrain from delving into specifics to avoid any indiscretions. On several occasions, through confidential channels, we have received messages from

our French counterparts offering assistance in establishing a dialogue regarding the Ukrainian issue, excluding Ukraine itself. This approach contravenes the principle repeatedly emphasised by the West: “not a word about Ukraine without Ukraine.” We are open to communication – we are prepared to listen. However, simultaneously, France emerges as the principal advocate for deploying “peacekeeping troops” to Ukraine, it trains combat units of the Ukrainian armed forces on its own soil, and it explicitly states the necessity of continuing to “pound” Russia to ensure Ukraine enters negotiations from a position of strength. Such contradictory behaviour does not inspire confidence in the initiatives of our French colleagues.

Regarding the meeting associated with the opening ceremony of Notre Dame de Paris, I observed no encouraging signals “in the picture.” It seems to me that the focal point of this meeting was indeed the “picture,” as two politicians and a Nazi racist were photographed against the backdrop of the cathedral.

Maria Zakharova: In conclusion to the topic raised by the French journalist, I would like to direct his attention to the fact that precisely a fortnight ago, Prime Minister of Hungary Viktor Orban announced on his social media page that Vladimir Zelensky had rejected his proposal for a Christmas truce.

Question: Speaking about plans for 2025, NATO representative Patrick Turner said the alliance will expand its presence in Ukraine. The alliance’s presence in Ukraine tripled in 2024, he said, and plans are in place to expand it even more next year. What can you say about the bloc’s plans to expand its presence in Ukraine? Should we expect Moscow come up with an official response to these expansion plans?

Sergey Lavrov: NATO is primarily about the United States. US intelligence services, such as the CIA and others, have been present in Ukraine long before the coup broke out. After the coup, they have set camp there. They occupied a whole floor, perhaps even two floors, in Ukraine’s Security Service (SBU) building. The Kiev regime has lost independence after the putsch. No one has any doubt about it. Ukraine is run by Anglo-Saxons and some other NATO and EU countries.

With regard to the reports that you mentioned, the NATO Representation was set up in Ukraine. This position was created by the decision of the Washington summit in July. According to our information, this “mission” has 50 employees on staff. Twenty more are expected to join it next year. Perhaps, this is what the information you mentioned was all about. There is nothing consequential about this

event. Nevertheless, it is just another fact that shows that Washington and its allies are laying their hands on Ukraine and tightening the existing control over all spheres of life of that country, including its security and defence sectors. No doubt, the West encourages Zelensky to act in a way that is beneficial to them.

Look how they openly and brazenly told Ukraine to bring the conscription age down to 18 years, not hiding the fact that it benefitted primarily the United States. US Senator Lindsey Graham, who visited Ukraine and took a picture with Vladimir Zelensky, minced no words in stating that Ukraine possesses a large amount of riches, primarily rare-earth minerals. According to him, Ukraine is “the richest country in all of Europe for rare-earth minerals” and Russia must not “take over the place.” US Secretary of State Antony Blinken is known for still publicly advocating the necessity of war in Ukraine (as he put it) citing financial and economic benefits for the United States. Many fertile lands and mineral deposits of Ukraine have been bought by US corporations quite a long time ago, and this is not a secret.

Everything that we are saying with regard to the Ukraine crisis, everything that President Vladimir Putin has outlined as principles for settling it based on eliminating its root causes, and relying solely on international law and existing West and Ukraine’s commitments, remains in full our non-alternative position.

Question: What is the future of the Astana-format talks, considering that they were highly effective in coordination with all Syrian parties?

Sergey Lavrov: With regard to Syria and the role of the Astana format, I have touched on this subject earlier. It was created following a special nationwide conference of Syrian political and ethno-confessional forces. We have held over 20 meetings as part of the Astana format. The last time we met was in Doha on December 7 just prior to the Syrian events. We had the chance to discuss the situation with my colleagues from Türkiye and Iran with the involvement of UN Secretary-General Special Envoy Geir Pedersen. We continue to exchange assessments and opinions to this day.

Türkiye, Iran and Russia believe this format can be useful at this point as well, especially so since the Arab countries - Lebanon, Iraq and Jordan - have traditionally participated in its work as observers. The Gulf monarchies are interested as well. We said we were willing to help. The Turks and Iranians did the same. Arab countries, which have established contacts with the new authorities in Damascus, are aware of our capabilities. Ahmed al-Sharaa said our relations were

long-standing and strategic, so I think the new Syrian authorities will be able to see what the Astana format can do specifically to help the processes currently underway in Syria.

We have had close ties with the Syrian people since the Soviet times. Back then, our country strongly supported the Syrians' push to get rid of French colonialism. All ensuing years we have contributed to building the foundations of the economy, industry, and the social sphere of the Syrian Arab Republic. We are clear about the fact that the Syrian people are interested in establishing good relations with all "external players" without exception. We believe that this is the right thing to do. That is one of the key factors that will guarantee unity, territorial integrity and sovereignty of the Syrian state. We are ready to contribute to that in every possible way.

Clearly, Ahmed al-Sharaa and his associates are under great pressure from the West. The Americans and Europeans have stepped up their activities. Their goal is not to preserve the unity of all ethno-political forces in Syria, but to secure as much influence and territory for themselves as possible.

As for Western egoism, the new head of Eurodiplomacy, Kaja Kallas, made a statement that said it all when she asked Syria to drop cooperation with Russia. Estonia, the "most important power" of all, said, through its foreign minister, that it will not support the new authorities in Damascus unless they "kick out" Russian military bases from Syria. Can you imagine how "scary" that is? This kind of diplomatic rudeness has become customary. The Ukrainian authorities act the same insulting everyone who does not sing along, and so do our European neighbours. I hope real life will teach them a lesson and they will start respecting the interests of all countries without exception and stop giving the world their neo-colonial attitude.

We will keep working.



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