



## Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's interview with The International Affairs journal, August 2023



**Question:** The world has entered a period of confrontation between various global development concepts: Russia's, China's views and, in general, the non-Western approach as opposed to the policy of Western domination. Was this inevitable, given their civilisational differences, different approaches to the use of force and international law, and different understanding of the role of international institutions? What do you think is Russia's role and mission in the context of current challenges?

**Sergey Lavrov:** I certainly agree that the concept of Western domination promoted by the United States and its subordinate countries does not provide for the harmonious development of all of humanity. On the contrary, we must deal the Western minority's never-ending striving for military, political, financial and economic expansion. Their slogans change: they promote globalisation, then Westernisation, Americanisation, universalisation, liberalisation, etc. But the essence remains the same – they strive to subordinate every independent player and force them to play by the rules that are beneficial to the West.

Today, one can hardly deny that the Americans and their satellites are trying to slow down the natural evolution of international relations and the formation of a multipolar system, or even reverse the process. They are not averse to using inappropriate and illegal methods, including the use of force or unilateral sanctions (not approved by the UN Security Council), information and psychological warfare, etc, in order to bend the world to suit their needs.

Today's West is steered by people like Josep Borrell who divide the world into a blooming "garden" and "the jungle," where the latter clearly applies to most of

humanity. I dare say, this racist worldview certainly prevents them from accepting the onset of multipolarity. The political and economic establishment in Europe and the United States reasonably fear that the transition to a multipolar system will entail serious geopolitical and economic losses, the final dismantling of globalisation in its current form tailored according to Western templates. They are primarily spooked by the prospect of losing the opportunity to exploit the rest of the world, fuelling their own fast-track economic growth at the expense of others.

The current generation of Western leaders has made no secret of their refusal to accept the logic of historical development, which is evidence of their professional degradation and loss of the ability to correctly analyse current events and anticipate future trends. The ill-conceived policy pursued by the United States and its followers has made the current aggravation of the international situation inevitable despite our many years of attempts to prevent it, which is another manifestation of that degradation. I am referring to the full-scale crisis of European security, the blame for which lies entirely with our former partners.

In this context, modern Russia sees its mission in maintaining a global balance of interests and building a fairer architecture of international relations. Russia's updated Foreign Policy Concept approved by President Vladimir Putin on March 31, 2023, spells out our views in a systematic manner. We believe that creating favourable conditions for the peaceful and steady development of humanity on the basis of a unifying agenda should be a universal priority. One of our key objectives in this respect is to revive the UN's ability to play a central role in coordinating the interests of its member states.

We are not alone in this endeavour. More and more countries in the Global South and East are becoming conscious of their national interests. They are beginning to spell them out and pursuing policies focused on asserting these interests in the spirit of international cooperation. These states are increasingly advocating the formation of a more equitable world order through the reform of the existing formats of interaction or the creation of new ones to address specific problems concerning security and development. We support this trend because we have a clear understanding that it is the future.

**Question:** While on a visit to Moscow in 1987, British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher said: "The nuclear deterrent is a deterrent. It has been the best peace policy for 40 years." Today, the possibility of using nuclear weapons is widely discussed in the public domain. Some participants in the debate believe that the employment threshold has been lowered in the face of threats to the very existence of Russia. Others regard this approach as absolutely unacceptable. What is your opinion on this point?

**Sergey Lavrov:** Indeed, a lot has been said recently about the role of nuclear weapons in Russia's foreign policy. Let me remind you that the terms of their possible use by Russia have been set out in doctrinal documents. What is important to understand is that Russia's nuclear deterrence policy is strictly defensive. It is aimed at maintaining the nuclear weapons capabilities at a

minimal level needed to ensure the guaranteed protection of this country's sovereignty and territorial integrity and prevent an aggression against Russia and its allies.

In the context of deterrence, possessing nuclear weapons is for today the only possible response to certain significant external national security threats. The developments in and around Ukraine have confirmed that our concerns are well-grounded. Let me remind you that NATO – an organisation that has proclaimed itself a nuclear alliance – has grossly violated the principle of indivisibility of security and is focusing on a “strategic defeat” of Russia. The collective West has used our forced retaliatory actions designed to protect our external security contour as a pretext for switching to a fierce confrontation involving a range of means of hybrid warfare.

A great danger in the context of the Ukrainian conflict is linked with the fact that the United States and NATO countries, while gearing up for confrontation, run the risk of becoming involved in a direct armed clash between nuclear powers. We think that this course of events can and must be prevented. This is why we must remind everyone about the existence of enormous military and political risks and send sobering signals to our opponents.

I want to stress that our country is fully committed to the principle that a nuclear war would be unacceptable and proceeds from the premise that there can be no winners in such a war. Therefore, it must never be fought. The leaders of five nuclear powers reaffirmed this message in a joint statement of January 3, 2022. In the present environment, this document has acquired added importance: it follows from its logic that it is imperative to prevent any military confrontation between the nuclear powers since it risks escalating into a nuclear conflict. At this stage, therefore, the crucial task is for every nuclear state to remain committed to these understandings and exercise maximum restraint.

**Question:** Russia and the West are tittering on the edge of a direct clash. Don't you think that the spike in anti-Russian sentiments has reached an unprecedented scale? What do you think about the threat of these tensions escalating? Can we witness a replay of the tragic events of the 20<sup>th</sup> century with its two world wars?

**Sergey Lavrov:** Indeed, Western countries have literally pulled out all the stops after the past couple of decades when they pretended to be civilised and adequate international partners. However, there is also the flip side of the coin here, since the Global Majority saw the true face of those who went as far as aspire to a monopoly in defining the so-called universal values.

Many of our former partners have been concealing their Russophobic nature under the veil of hypocrisy, but have now shown their true face in all its glory, if I can say so. Still, we must not forget that this did not begin yesterday. For many years, they have been cynically transforming our neighbouring country into a hostile military bulwark against Russia by nurturing an entire generation of politicians ready to declare war on our shared past, culture and everything Russian, in general.

The Western capitals have openly recognised that carrying out the Minsk agreements designed to bring about a settlement in the Ukraine conflict was never part of their plan. In fact, all they wanted was to buy some time to prepare a military scenario and deliver weapons to Kiev.

I think that the essential thing we must understand in this regard is that the West wants to do away with our country as a serious geopolitical rival. It is for this reason that Washington and Brussels have unleashed a hybrid war against us. In addition to this, we are facing sanctions pressure at an unprecedented scale. The Americans have been using both sticks and carrots to prevent our partners from engaging in economic and other kinds of cooperation with Russia. They have not hesitated to use subversive methods and perform acts of sabotage, as was the case with the explosion of the Nord Stream pipelines under the Baltic Sea. They are also making outrageous efforts to disconnect Russia from international cooperation mechanisms in culture, education, research, and sports.

It is obvious that all these aggressive measures are designed to weaken Russia and wear it out. They want to force us to deplete our economic, technological and defence capabilities as much as possible, curtail our sovereignty and force us to renounce our independent foreign and domestic policy.

About 50 countries formed the so-called Ramstein coalition to provide military aid to Ukraine. They have been de facto drawn into an armed conflict on the side of the Kiev regime, which, let me reiterate, has not hesitated to use terrorist methods. The West is sending huge arms shipments to Ukraine, including cluster and long-range munitions. NATO instructors contribute to planning the operations of the Ukrainian Armed Forces, which rely on NATO intelligence.

In monetary terms, the Zelensky regime received over \$160 billion in foreign aid during the first year of the special military operation, including \$75 billion in military aid. By the way, according to The Heritage Foundation, a Washington-based NGO, the United States has already allocated about \$113 billion to Ukraine, which is \$900 per household plus \$300 in interest for servicing the corresponding debt. These are huge amounts of money, especially considering the challenging situation in the global economy.

Nevertheless, the Western leaders have been repeating the same mantra saying that they will support Kiev for as long as it takes. Of course, fighting until the last Ukrainian is their choice, as well as the choice of Vladimir Zelensky's clique. That said, the United States does not have the best historical record when it comes to supporting its allies. Suffice to remember its abrupt withdrawal of military aid to South Vietnam in 1973 and to Ashraf Ghani's regime in Afghanistan in 2021, as well as the fact that these moves immediately caused the downfall of the governments loyal to the United States. Today, Ukraine depends almost entirely on the Western financial allocations and arms deliveries.

The future looks rather grim for the Kiev authorities and their patrons. The longer the armed clashes last, the less appetite will the Western investors have

to contribute to post-conflict recovery in Ukraine, and the weaker their faith in Ukraine's success on the battlefield, or its ability to preserve its statehood in any form or within any borders. I am not even mentioning whether Kiev would be able to service its government debt. Taxpayers in Western countries will have no choice but to carry the burden of the unpaid debt, causing more inflation and lower living standards.

There is also another thing the West must understand: Russia will use all means to defend its people and its vital interests. It would be better for our opponents to understand that confrontation with Russia is futile and switch to more civilised, i.e., political and diplomatic means for achieving a balance of interests.

**Question:** Several politicians, in particular, President of Belarus Alexander Lukashenko and Prime Minister of Hungary Viktor Orban, have repeatedly said that ending the conflict in Ukraine should be agreed between Russia and the United States. Do you share this point of view?

**Sergey Lavrov:** This statement makes sense if it implies that Ukraine is a puppet of the Americans, and important issues need to be discussed with them. The problem, however, is that the United States has no intention of ending the conflict. As I have already said, their officially declared objective is to inflict a "strategic defeat" on Russia, to weaken us as much as possible militarily, economically and politically. Therefore, Washington continues to insist that a settlement can only be negotiated on Ukraine's terms, meaning the notorious Zelensky peace formula. In our opinion, this position amounts to a pointless ultimatum. It makes no sense to demand that we agree to a solution that hurts our fundamental security interests and opens the door for further lawless treatment of ethnic Russians and Russian-speaking people in the new territories and the regions controlled by the Armed Forces of Ukraine.

Let me remind you that in December 2021, we made a drastic attempt to convey our concerns to Western capitals by submitting two draft agreements – on security guarantees with the United States and on security measures with NATO member states. However, our initiative was arrogantly rejected. Instead of negotiating, they directed all their efforts at increasing the production of weapons and ammunition for Ukraine, provoking a further escalation of regional tensions.

Our approach is consistent and totally transparent. We have always said that we are ready for a meaningful dialogue, and we have spent years and put in great efforts trying to get Kiev to implement the Minsk agreements. As you know, from the first days of the special military operation, Russia has been open to discussing ways to achieve its goals and objectives through political and diplomatic means. We immediately responded to Ukraine's proposal to start talks and we took part in them until the Ukrainian side interrupted them in April 2022 at the West's bidding. Later, on September 30, 2022, Vladimir Zelensky signed an executive order ruling out any negotiations with the Russian leadership. Therefore, it was Kiev, manipulated by its external patrons, that sabotaged diplomatic efforts.

Now, multilateral meetings have been convened in different cities, Copenhagen or Jeddah, which were held without Russian representatives, in the hope of convincing developing countries to support Zelensky's peace formula. At the same time, Moscow is being accused of "reluctance" to negotiate, while any arguments about the need to take into account our country's vital interests are immediately dismissed. It is clear that such an approach hardly demonstrates an intention by the West to negotiate with Russia.

Unfortunately, it is clear from the above that the prospects for negotiations between Russia and the West are non-existent at this stage. In addition, the Kiev regime's Western sponsors are constantly pushing them to up the ante. And we regard the Westerners' hypocritical calls for talks as a tactical ploy to buy time once again giving the exhausted Ukrainian troops a respite and the opportunity to regroup, and to send in more weapons and ammunition. But this is the path of war, not a peaceful settlement process. This much is clear to us.

**Question:** The second Russia-Africa Summit was held in St Petersburg not long ago. Following the summit, President Putin spoke highly of the current level of Russia-Africa relations and their prospects. What areas hold the greatest promise for cooperation?

**Sergey Lavrov:** The second Russia-Africa summit held in July in St Petersburg confirmed Moscow and the African countries' strong commitment to continuing cooperation and expanding partnership relations. It also showed the existence of a shared outlook on the world underlying our interaction in the form of traditional spiritual and moral values. Despite the enormous pressure exerted by the West, 48 official delegations and representatives from five leading regional integration associations attended the meeting. Moreover, 27 African countries were represented at the level of heads of state and government. These figures clearly show that the developing countries are receptive to our country's independent foreign policy and that the United States and its allies' efforts to isolate Russia internationally have failed.

Helping strengthen our partners' political, economic and technological sovereignty is the underlying vector of our cooperation with Africa. We stand ready to share experience with our African friends in order to improve the sustainability and competitiveness of their public administration systems, ensure food security, and fulfil national socioeconomic development priority goals. Also, Africa sees Russia as a reliable partner in terms of maintaining military and political stability, settling regional conflicts, fighting terrorism and drug trafficking and other cross-border threats and challenges.

The summit opened up prospects for expanding Russia-Africa cooperation in various areas, in particular, investment, regional economic integration, agriculture, energy, infrastructure construction, subsoil use, ICT, healthcare and education.

Our pilot project to establish a Russian industrial zone in Egypt deserves special mention. It is planned to become a platform for manufacturing and

exporting goods to other countries in the region using the opportunities offered by the African Continental Free Trade Area.

Russia remains a dependable supplier of energy resources, food, fertiliser and medicines to Africa. Humanitarian aid to African countries which need it the most remains one of the most sought-after areas of cooperation.

We have been maintaining our traditional commitment to personnel training. Nearly 35,000 African students are studying at Russian universities, and this number increases every year. There are plans to open branches of leading Russian universities in African countries and to establish other joint educational institutions.

**Question:** Russia's relations with the EAEU and CSTO countries are of particular importance in the current conditions. Cooperation within these structures has been demonstrating positive momentum. This is an obvious fact. At the same time, our partners – in particular, those in Central Asia – are being subjected to serious external pressure aimed at forcing them to join the anti-Russia sanctions. How do you think this can be resisted?

**Sergey Lavrov:** Indeed, our partners in the EAEU and the CSTO are under tremendous pressure from unfriendly states. High-ranking officials from Western capitals have become regular visitors, holding "consultations" on ways to preclude "the circumvention" of the illegitimate anti-Russia sanctions. If we call a spade a spade, these are overt attempts to force our allies to abandon absolutely legitimate cooperation with Russia through threats and blackmail.

We certainly understand that our partners must exercise caution, with the external pressure exerted on them. The mutual trade and economic obligations between us continue to be fulfilled because they meet the interests of the parties and do not violate international law.

Naturally, Russia is taking reciprocal steps to stop further attempts from outside of destructive influence. The EAEU has been working on joint measures to overcome the consequences of the sanctions imposed on Russia and Belarus by making the union's economies more resilient. This has already yielded tangible results. Mutual trade is growing steadily, the share of national currencies in mutual transactions is growing, the number of cooperation projects is increasing, and food and energy security is fully ensured.

Let me give you some more figures. The EAEU market accounts for up to 40 percent of the Central Asian states' foreign trade. More than 10,000 Russian companies and joint ventures operate in the region, creating about 900,000 jobs. In general, Eurasian integration is the key to maintaining the economic stability of the EAEU member states and boosting their citizens' wellbeing.

The same is also true in relation to the CSTO. Our cooperation in this organisation is rooted in the principles of equality and consideration for the interests of all member states. We are confident that our allies are critical of the

West's recent attempts to engage with their countries and will not allow anyone to be dragged into any plans aimed at escalating military-political tensions.

In general, we certainly count on our allies in the EAEU and the CSTO to not take any steps that run counter to their obligations within these frameworks while building ties with third countries and associations. At the same time, lecturing other states or dictating to them which partners to choose or avoid is not what we do. Russia does not forbid any of our neighbours or partners from establishing ties with anyone, but always asks them to consider our legitimate interests. I think they hear us.