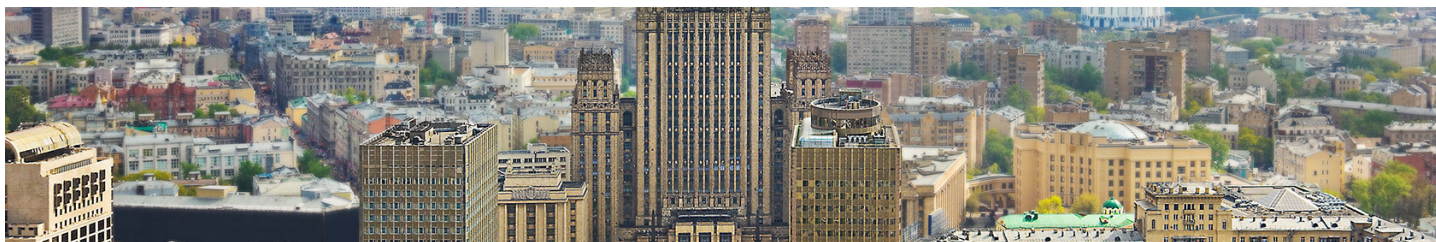


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Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's interview with the BBC TV channel, St Petersburg, June 16, 2022

Question: Did President Putin, before taking the decision and announcing the start of what he calls a special military operation, consult you on whether he should?

Sergey Lavrov: Every country has a decision-making mechanism. In that case, the mechanism existing in the Russian Federation was fully employed.

Question: Did he consult you?

Sergey Lavrov: Again, there are things we do not speak about publicly. There is a mechanism for taking decisions. It was followed in full.

Question: I am asking because you have been foreign minister for 18 years, and invading a sovereign neighbouring state is a foreign matter. The President surely assumed that there would be international repercussions. I thought he would consult you.

Sergey Lavrov: You are an experienced journalists well-aware of the realities in Russia, around Russia, and in the post-Soviet space. Your question seeks to cancel everything prior to February 24 of this year. For eight years, we had been promoting the necessity of implementing the Minsk agreements, unanimously endorsed by the UN Security Council, with the help of our intelligence agencies, Foreign Ministry, and Defence Ministry.

Throughout those eight years, we were insisting that Donetsk and Lugansk (which initially, as you may remember, in 2014, declared their independence in response to the neo-Nazi coup d'état in Kiev) should sign the Minsk agreements, which guaranteed Ukraine's territorial integrity and sovereignty. When nowadays Chancellor Olaf Scholz claims that Russia must be forced to reach agreements with Ukraine, agreements that would respect the territorial integrity and sovereignty of the Ukrainian state, I have a feeling that he is not of this world but someone from "outer space." Because all those eight years we were trying to ensure the implementation of agreements which

guaranteed the territorial integrity of the Ukrainian state.

Question: But the situation changed four months ago ...

Sergey Lavrov: The situation has not changed. We are going back to what the Minsk agreements were coordinated for: protecting Russians in Donbass, who have been betrayed by the French and Germans. The British also played a leading role. All our Western colleagues kept saying they were unable to make Kiev honour the Minsk agreements.

Question: If the goal is to protect Russians in Donbass, why have more civilians been killed in the DPR and LPR in the four months since the start of the special military operation than in all of last year?

Sergey Lavrov: Did you also watch German ARD television and the main French TV channel, which declared recently that a maternity clinic and a marketplace had been shelled by the Russian army killing dozens of civilians? They declared without any qualms that this had been done by the Russian military. Just like they claimed some time ago that a railway station in Kramatorsk had been hit by Russia. Although the Western journalists proved that the missile had come from the territory controlled by the Armed Forces of Ukraine.

Question: Last year, eight civilians were killed in the LPR and DPR, and seven the year before. While every death is a tragedy, that did not constitute the genocide Russian officials often invoke. With these numbers in mind, can you say that invading Ukraine was a reasonable decision?

Sergey Lavrov: We did not invade Ukraine. We announced a special military operation after being left with no other means to make it clear to the West that it is engaging in criminal activity by dragging Ukraine into NATO, by coddling and dotting on a neo-Nazi regime, whose president Vladimir Zelensky said in September 2021 (you didn't tell your viewers about it, did you?) that, if someone in Ukraine feels Russian, they should leave for Russia. He said that publicly. When a CNN correspondent told him that the Azov Regiment was listed as an extremist and terrorist organisations by some Western countries, the US, and Japan, Vladimir Zelensky shrugged his shoulders and said they had many such battalions and regiments, and they were what they were.

Question: Let's look at the consequences. Four months have passed. The result: thousands of civilians have been killed; over 14 million Ukrainians have fled their homes; Russian troops sustained considerable losses and a host of sanctions have been imposed on Russia. Do you still call it the right decision?

Sergey Lavrov: I will tell you again: we didn't have any other choice. We have explained this many times, a thousand times. Today, the Ukrainian regime is attacking civilians with your Western weapons just like they did in 2014 when the putschists came to power, when the centre of Lugansk was bombed by aircraft and 50 people were burned alive in Odessa. Does anyone recall this now?

Question: If you didn't attack, there wouldn't have been any weapons from the West.

Sergey Lavrov: We didn't attack anyone. Russians were attacked in Ukraine. Imagine you are English. English or Scottish?

Question: I mentioned the figures to you. Eight dead in the past year, seven...

Sergey Lavrov: I am telling you that the Ukrainian regime is bombing its own population and you are selling weapons to it so it can continue doing this. Now about genocide. Are you English? What if Ireland (not Northern Ireland but the Republic of Ireland) banned the English language? How would the English feel?

Question: They wouldn't invade Ireland for certain.

Sergey Lavrov: Wouldn't you feel humiliated? The Russian language is banned in Ukraine. Try to speak Russian in a street in Kiev when young people with a certain look are walking there.

Question: Why do you consider NATO a threat? Why do people in Russia often talk about five waves of NATO's expansion?

Sergey Lavrov: I think that NATO is a threat because we have been close friends with Serbians for a long time. They told us what the North Atlantic Alliance is about. The Afghans with whom we maintain relations in Afghanistan (and that includes practically all ethnic groups) also told us about the alliance and how it bombed wedding ceremonies. Just because these pilots wondered why some people had got together. They must be bombed, just in case.

I will explain to you why NATO is a threat. Talk to citizens of Iraq and Libya. Their countries were razed to the ground. After this, NATO still claims to be a defensive alliance. We are told not to worry, that Ukraine's accession to NATO wouldn't pose a threat to the Russian Federation. This is what we were told. With all due respect for our colleagues from the North Atlantic Alliance, I must say that Russia has the right to decide for itself what threatens its security and what does not.

Question: There were no NATO troops in Eastern Europe before the annexation of Crimea in 2014...

Sergey Lavrov: Moreover, there was no annexation of Crimea, either.

Question: As a result of Crimea's annexation, there appeared 4,500 troops in 2016, and 40,000 after February 24, 2022. This is the result of Russia's actions.

Sergey Lavrov: You are a clever man. These are facts. I will cite different facts for you. Your entire analysis is based on "cancel culture." You are changing everything that preceded the event that you call an invasion or annexation. What happened in Ukraine on February 21, 2014? What we call a coup d'état. How do you call it?

Question: I was the first to ask you. How do you call it?

Sergey Lavrov: I've already said that this was a coup d'état that took place the morning after France, Poland and Germany affixed their signatures under the agreement between the then president and the opposition leaders. In the morning, the opposition leaders spat in the faces of Germany, France

and Poland which swallowed it. We called this a coup d'état. And how did you call it?

Question: Do events of eight years ago give you the right to do what you are doing?

Sergey Lavrov: This is not about the right. I want to hear your honest response. We called it a coup d'état. How do you call it in Britain?

Question: I wanted to ask you about this.

Sergey Lavrov: I want to understand your logic because if you want me to give you clear answers you must clearly explain to me what you are talking about.

Question: I want to grasp your logic. You say that NATO is a threat. Now you are saying that there is too much NATO on Russian borders. And yet now "there is even more NATO" as a result of Russia's actions. Finland and Sweden are joining the alliance.

Sergey Lavrov: Finland and Sweden have long been subordinate to the Anglo-Saxons as the EU and NATO have drawn closer together. The EU has lost its meaning.

Question: Is the fact that Finland and Sweden are becoming NATO members a failure of Russian diplomacy?

Sergey Lavrov: Sweden and Finland are exercising their sovereign right and they are acting according to their governments' decisions. They also are not overly concerned with public opinion, just as they didn't concern themselves with public opinion in different countries as they carried out the objectives set by NATO.

Question: Does that mean it is not a threat to Russia?

Sergey Lavrov: We shall see how it will end. When and if Sweden and Finland join NATO, we will see what will go into effect on the ground. Whether weapons are delivered there and new contingents deployed. That said, I assure you that nobody is going to listen to either Europeans, or Finland or Sweden. They are telling us now that they will have no foreign troops or military bases. Meanwhile, US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin that the US intends to increase its military presence in Europe, they have not yet decided if it will be permanent, rotational or permanent-rotational. He never said the EU should be consulted. He does not want to hear from European allies. He just decided, and announced that decisions will be made in Washington.

Question: Russia says that Ukraine is fighting Nazis.

Sergey Lavrov: Ukraine is not fighting Nazis. Nazism is flourishing in Ukraine.

Question: Listen to what the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights says. She spoke in May following a monitoring mission and said that the Russian military kept 360 people including 74 children and 5 disabled persons for 28 days in a school basement in the village of Yagodnoye, Chernigov Region, without a toilet and water. Ten elderly people died. Is this fighting Nazism?

Sergey Lavrov: International bureaucrats, including the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and, to my immense disappointment, the UN Secretary-General and many other UN representatives,

are being put under pressure by the West and are often being used to amplify fake news spread by the West.

Question: So Russia is squeaky clean, isn't it?

Sergey Lavrov: Russia is not squeaky clean. Russia is what it is. And we are not ashamed of showing who we are.

May I inquire with you to better understand your media outlet's policy on the Bucha tragedy? Did you report on the frame-up job in Bucha? You definitely said it had been carried out by Russia, right?

The Guardian newspaper published in London later got preliminary forensic results which showed that most people whose dead bodies were shown by all the world's TV channels got their wounds from artillery shrapnel.

Question: Why do you ask? We have little time.

Sergey Lavrov: We have little time but you do not want to tell me why you keep saying untruths, to put it mildly. I asked you a question about how the BBC had covered the events in Bucha.

Question: I wasn't in Bucha. I am in Russia and this is why I am asking you about Russia's position. The purpose of the operation as it was stated by President Putin back then is regime change, isn't it?

Sergey Lavrov: The purpose of the operation is to protect the rights of Russians which have been blatantly ignored not only by the Kiev regime but also by the entire West and the civilised community which refused to implement the Minsk Agreements.

If you did not want to secure the rights of the Russians in Donbass through Kiev's adherence to a UNSC resolution, we will ensure the rights of Russians ourselves. That is what we are doing.

Question: On February 25 of this year, Vladimir Putin addressed Ukrainian soldiers and urged them to take power in their hands because it would be easier for Russia to come to terms with them than with this gang of drug addicts and neo-Nazis in Kiev. This sounds like a direct call for a military rebellion.

Sergey Lavrov: No, it sounds like a direct call for fulfilling their military duty instead of serving Nazis who are cancelling everything that their regime doesn't like, including Russian education, culture and media. They didn't cancel BBC because you haven't told the truth about what was happening there for eight years. I asked you a question: Did you or any of your BBC colleagues go to Donbass during the eight years when Kiev soldiers were bombing civilians there?

Question: Over the course of six years, the BBC had many times contacted the leadership in the separatist-run areas asking for permission to go and see what was happening. We were refused entry every single time. I think if genocide had really taken place there, they would have been interested in letting us come and see but no. Why were we denied entry?

Sergey Lavrov: I don't know why you were denied entry. Our journalists worked there 24/7 and showed the results of bombing by Kiev battalions. You should have gone to the Ukrainian side of the

contact line. They do not have such destruction there.

Question: Recently, your President praised Peter the Great for reclaiming primordial Russian territories and even added that “to return and strengthen is also our lot.” How many more territories and what territories are you going to reclaim?

Sergey Lavrov: President Vladimir Putin said it all. I have nothing to add. I will tell you again: you want to forget everything that preceded this event. You deny, cancel and do not want to hear what happened before February 24 of this year, what happened before the voting in Crimea. You cannot accept that we are very patient. But when our patience runs out, we respond to rudeness and the humiliation of the Russian people, like the coup in February 2014 when power was taken by people who cancelled the regional status of the Russian language and were going to oust Russians from Crimea (they sent armed people there). What did BBC report about this? Nothing at all. You said this was a normal democratic process.

Question: Can you say categorically that Russia won't launch another special operation and won't invade neighbouring territories?

Sergey Lavrov: We believed words for a very long time. Your comrades-in-arms, your compatriots together with other members of the North Atlantic Alliance solemnly proclaimed a principle of indivisible security where nobody has the right to enhance their security at the expense of the security of others. When we said that NATO's five expansions undermines our security, we were simply ignored. Now President of France Emmanuel Macron said they must talk to Russia and should not humiliate the Russians. Do you know who replied to him? Some Czech Foreign Minister Jan Lipavsky. He said Macron didn't understand anything, implying that Russians must be humiliated. What is your attitude to this?

Question: I want to ask you about the Brits who recently got a death sentence ...

Sergey Lavrov: You should do an interview in the Donetsk People's Republic about it.

Question: Russia is the only country that recognises the DPR.

Sergey Lavrov: No, it is not the only one, several more countries have recognised them.

Question: I think the DPR has a lot of influence in Russia.

Sergey Lavrov: We are friends and allies.

Question: In the eyes of the West, Russia is responsible for these people. Do you think the death sentence ...

Sergey Lavrov: I am not interested in the “eyes of the West” at all. I am only interested in international law, according to which mercenaries are not combatants. So nothing in your eyes matters.

Question: They are not mercenaries, they were serving in the Ukrainian Armed Forces.

Sergey Lavrov: This should be determined by the court.

Question: Do you think the court there is independent?

Sergey Lavrov: I am confident they have independent courts there. Do you think your courts are independent? After Alexander Litvinenko's death your "independent" court announced "public process," that is, had the case classified. You did the same with the Skripals. That's your law.

Question: Did the UK government contact you about the fate of these boys?

Sergey Lavrov: I have no information about their contacting us. They are used to doing everything publicly. They began saying they are worried about the fate of their subjects. I do not know if they contacted us or not. They should contact the DPR.

Question: How would you characterise relations with the UK now? Saying they are bad would be putting it mildly.

Sergey Lavrov: I think there is no room for manoeuvre left in the relationship. Boris Johnson and Elizabeth Truss say publicly that they must defeat Russia and bring it to its knees. Come on, do it!

Question: How does Moscow view Great Britain now?

Sergey Lavrov: This is a country which is once again sacrificing the interests of its people for the sake of politicians' ambitions, who only think about the next election and nothing else.

Question: You criticise the countries, which are supplying weapons to Kiev. Who is more to blame – the countries supplying weapons to a country, which is defending its lands, or the country that has attacked it?

Sergey Lavrov: How is it defending its lands, when it bombs its own citizens? Let me remind you once again: Vladimir Zelensky said in September 2021 that those who think in Russian and feel they are Russian should beat it back to Russia. Why don't you talk about that? Why do you ignore past events? Now, when they are shelling their own cities, towns, markets, maternity homes, and hospitals – everything is all right [with you]. You ask me why Russia is waging a "war" – in response to what we are showing. If they do not show in Britain the aftermath of the [Ukrainian] shelling of Donetsk, Kramatorsk and other places, you can certainly watch it here. Do you report anything on that?

Question: You said that you are defending Donbass and the people in Donbass. I told you that since the start of the operation twenty times more people had died ...

Sergey Lavrov: And I told you that those people are being killed by neo-Nazis. I ask you: Do you show the results of the AFU's shelling of towns and villages? Or you don't show them in your reports? You don't show it, correct? That is why you want to squeeze some words of regret from me about the current developments so as to send a report to London and use my words to back up the false version of events in Ukraine, which you keep broadcasting.

Question: You are wrong about that.

Sergey Lavrov: Being in Moscow, you cannot fail to see what journalists in Donbass are showing, what is happening as a result of [Ukrainian] artillery attacks on peaceful towns and civilians. Do you report on that or not?

Question: I want to ask you...

Sergey Lavrov: So that means you don't.

Question: I have been in Russia for almost 30 years. I have toured the country. The phrase I heard most in the villages and cities I visited was "if only there is no war." I understand that your country suffered terrible losses, that is why it beggars belief that your country has "unleashed a war" in Ukraine. I don't understand why it was needed. To ruin Ukraine and the future of your own country?

Sergey Lavrov: I got your point. You have no problems with understanding the political course pursued by Kiev in the past ten years – to cancel anything Russian – do you? You think "if only there is no war" means a possibility to humiliate Russians and Russia (as the Czech foreign minister said replying to Emmanuel Macron who had spoken out against humiliating the Russians). For some reason, nobody is speaking about that. You grabbed what you needed for your line, for the narrative of your broadcasts.

The phrase "if only there is no war" is deeply ingrained in the Russian people. But it also has pride ingrained, what we call self-respect, which they are trying to take away from all the Russians in Ukraine, with your support.