Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov visits Turkey as NATO escalates war in Ukraine

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As the NATO powers escalate their proxy war against Russia in Ukraine, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov visited Ankara, Turkey's capital, on Wednesday for talks with his Turkish counterpart Mevlüt Çavu?o?lu.

Both Lavrov and Çavu?o?lu supported calls to create a "safe grain corridor" from Ukrainian ports on the Black Sea through the Turkish straits. However, the NATO-backed Ukrainian government rejected the proposal, declaring it not credible, according to AP reports.

The Turkish and Russian foreign ministers also discussed resuming peace negotiations between Kiev and Moscow, which were interrupted under pressure from the major NATO powers.

Both plans are incompatible with the plan of the US-led NATO powers to inflame the war in order to bring about regime change in Russia and ultimately realize the imperialist division and plunder of this vast country's resources.

For this, NATO has opened a Northern front in war against Russia. Since Sweden and Finland announced their intention to join NATO in mid-May, with the support of the US and European imperialist powers, Sweden has been turned into a naval garrison against Russia. Meanwhile, Moscow's reactionary invasion of Ukraine, which plays into the hands of Washington, is reportedly making military advances in the east of Ukraine.

The Kremlin faces punishing Western sanctions, including import and export bans as well as the exclusion of major Russian banks from the international SWIFT financial system, making it virtually impossible for Russian companies to trade with the West. In response, it is trying to maneuver with Turkey, a NATO member state, and the pro-US Gulf monarchies.

Before visiting Turkey, Lavrov toured Bahrain, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. According to the *Arab News*, "Lavrov clarified that the members of the GCC will not participate in sanctions against Russia. Moreover, prior to the meeting, Lavrov spoke with Prince Faisal, when the Russian diplomat praised the level of cooperation in OPEC+, as it is known that Saudi Arabia and other member states rejected American pressure to increase crude output after the start of the Russian operation in Ukraine."

After the Çavu?o?lu-Lavrov meeting, which was also attended by military delegations, the two held a joint press conference. "We see a [common] will between Russia and Ukraine to return to negotiations," said Çavu?o?lu, adding that his government sees UN plans to establish a food corridor out of Ukraine under Turkish naval forces watch as "reasonable and feasible." He proposed to host a meeting with the UN and Ukraine in Istanbul.

He added, "If the whole world is in need of the products to be exported by Ukraine and the Russian Federation, we need to establish the adequate method and mechanisms." While Ankara denounces the Russian invasion of Ukraine, and openly supports the Kiev regime, it did not join the US-led sanctions against Russia due to its strong ties with Moscow. Çavu?o?lu said the West should ease sanctions in return for Moscow's agreeing to a "food corridor."

AP wrote, "While food exports are technically exempt from the sanctions, Russia claims that restrictions on its ships and banks make it impossible to deliver its grain to global markets." According to AP, 22 million tons of grain are sitting in silos in the Black Sea ports of Ukraine, "one of the world's largest exporters of wheat, corn and sunflower oil."

During the press conference, Lavrov denied that a global food crisis was caused by the Russian-Ukrainian war. He claimed that the share of Ukrainian grain exports in the global market made up about 1 percent of the total and therefore is too small an amount to be significant, before adding: "Nevertheless, Russia values Turkey's

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efforts to unblock the situation on grain exports from Ukrainian seaports."

On Tuesday before his visit to Turkey, he also said Western countries had created "a flurry of artificial problems" by closing their ports to Russian vessels.

On June 3, Russian President Vladimir Putin said: "If someone wants to solve the problem of exporting Ukrainian grain—please, the easiest way is through Belarus. No one is stopping it," adding: "But for this you have to lift sanctions from Belarus." He also said that British and US sanctions on Russian fertilizers would escalate problems on global food markets.

NATO claims that Russia is responsible for rising food prices and shortages are political lies. Food prices were rising even before the war, as central banks in the centers of world finance debased major currencies with massive printing of money to be handed over to the financial aristocracy. The current cut-off of grain supplies is largely due to US-led sanctions as NATO and Washington call for a "long and painful war" against Russia.

Russia is demanding Ukraine clear sea mines around its ports in exchange for allowing food ships to leave Ukraine. According to the Turkish state-owned Anadolu Agency, Lavrov said "the main problem with the export of Ukraine's grains is the country's President Volodymyr Zelensky's refusal to discuss the clearing of sea mines."

Denying Ukrainian officials' claims on potential Russian naval attacks from a corridor, Lavrov said: "We guarantee that we will not use the demining of Ukrainian ports to attack the country. … We are ready to ensure the safety of ships that leave Ukrainian ports. We are ready to do this in cooperation with our Turkish colleagues."

On Wednesday, Ukrainian Grain Union chief Serhiy Ivashchenko rejected this, however, saying: "Turkey doesn't have enough power in the Black Sea to guarantee the security of cargo and Ukrainian ports." He added that it would take three to four months to remove sea mines.

The European powers' reaction on a possible "food corridor" was not positive. European Council President Charles Michel accused the Kremlin of "weaponizing food supplies," while European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen hypocritically claimed: "Our sanctions do not touch basic food commodities. They do not affect the trading of grain or other food between Russia and third countries."

She added, "And the port embargo specifically has full exemption on agricultural goods. So let's stick to the truth. It's Putin's war of aggression that fuels the food crisis and nothing else."

The Ukrainian Foreign Ministry said Tuesday that Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky and Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdo?an discussed the creation of a safe sea corridor last week. According to the AP, the Ukrainian government called for "security guarantees, such as a supply of weapons to defend against maritime threats and the participation of NATO ships in the Black Sea."

Asked about Ankara's efforts, a US State Department spokesperson said, "[we] appreciate Turkey's efforts to mediate diplomatic discussions. … We strongly support the resumption of grain exports from Ukraine to alleviate global food insecurity that Russia's war has exacerbated." He called for Ukraine to be "fully involved in any decisions" while "any plan should not enable Russia to further its own military aims."

In fact, the Russian-Turkish initiative for a "food corridor" was originally a counter-move to NATO plans to exploit the food crisis to escalate the war against Russia, sending warships to the Black Sea and creating conditions for all-out war between NATO and Russia.

Such a NATO deployment would, however, require the approval of the Turkish government, which controls the straits leading to the Black Sea. Ankara closed the straits to both Russian and NATO warships after Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Whatever the immediate results of talks between Ankara and Moscow, the US-led NATO powers are determined to escalate the war with Russia. Preventing global famine and stopping a war that has already claimed tens of thousands of lives and displaced millions from turning into a nuclear Third World War requires the independent revolutionary mobilization of the international working class against imperialist war on a socialist programme.

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