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Lavrov: NATO Needs Russia to Survive Identity Crisis

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Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov **Sergei Karpukhin**

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov has taken a swipe at NATO, claiming the alliance has lost its identity and is using the specter of Russia to rally member states around a common enemy.

"We are deeply convinced that the alliance has lost the meaning of its existence and is feverishly looking for a new one," Lavrov said in an interview with the TASS news agency published Thursday.

"After [the 2001 war in Afghanistan involving NATO forces] it became clear that this cause could no longer hold the alliance together, so Brussels happily jumped at the opportunity to play the Russian card and to portray us as a threat," he added.

Leaders of NATO's member states met last week in Newport, Wales, where they issued

a declaration condemning what was described as Russia's illegal intervention in the Ukrainian civil war.

"We ... demand that Russia stop and withdraw its forces from inside Ukraine and along the Ukrainian border," read the statement published on the NATO website, adding it supported the introduction of sanctions against Russia by the EU and other NATO members.

In light of Russia's annexation of Crimea and perceived support of separatists in the east of Ukraine, Western nations have brought several rounds of sanctions against Moscow, targeting entities and businesses seen to have close ties to the Kremlin.

"Where there is a will there is a way. It was not yesterday that Washington and some European countries decided to isolate Russia," Lavrov said of Western actions.

"If it weren't for Crimea and southeastern Ukraine, the West would have invented something else. The goal was set to unbalance Russia at any price," he added in the interview.

But, despite the strains of recent months, Lavrov also showed he was able to demonstrate a touch of political humor.

Following the annexation of Crimea, T-shirts with the phrase "polite people" — the term President Vladimir Putin used to describe Russian soldiers operating on the peninsula — went on sale in Moscow, proving to be a hit among Kremlin loyalists. Lavrov said he owned several of the garments.

"I particularly like the khaki-colored one with a picture of three guys wearing masks and glasses. A really nice piece of art it is," he said.

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