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Russia Won’t Go to War With 'Nazi' Ukraine, Lavrov Says

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Evgeny Maloletka / AP / TASS

Russia will not wage war with Ukraine, which exhibits “all of the characteristics of a nazi regime,” Russia’s foreign minister has said in a controversial interview.

The Kremlin has been accused of fomenting a deadly four-year conflict between Kiev and pro-Russian rebels in eastern Ukraine. Tensions flared last month after Russia seized three Ukrainian navy vessels off the annexed Crimean peninsula, prompting Kiev to impose martial law in regions and ban entry to Russian men aged 16 to 60.

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“We won’t go to war with Ukraine, I promise you that,” Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said in an interview with the Komsomolskaya Pravda tabloid on Monday.

“It’s the Russian-speaking citizens of Ukraine who live in the Donbass [region of eastern Ukraine] that are at war with the Ukrainian regime, which has all of the characteristics of a nazi regime ,” he said

The diplomat said Russian intelligence indicates that Ukrainian troops are planning “an armed provocation” on the Crimean border around the time when Ukraine's martial law expires on Dec. 25.

“It’s a nasty, petty provocation. Our respective services are taking all the needed steps to prevent such excesses from happening,” Lavrov said, vowing that “there will be hell to pay” in case of conflict.

When prompted to officially label Ukraine “a nazi state,” Lavrov retorted that “Ukraine is a state with a nazi regime.”

Moscow has regularly denied that any Russian troops are fighting in the region in any official capacity.

In comments later on Monday, Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov agreed with Lavrov's assessment, saying: "it is indisputable that certain manifestations of neonazism are playing out in Ukraine."

"Neonazis [in Ukraine] don't hide their views at all... they glorify nazis and publicly pledge their dedication to the ideology of these nazis," Peskov was cited as saying by the state-run RIA Novosti news agency.

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