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Russia's Goals in Ukraine No Longer Solely Focused on the East – Lavrov

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Russia's Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov. **Russian Foreign Ministry**

Russia's "geographical goals" in Ukraine have changed to include not only the breakaway Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics of eastern Ukraine, but a number of other regions as well, Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov told state media Wednesday.

"Now, [our] geography is different. It is not only the DNR and LNR, it is also the Kherson region, the Zaporizhzhia region and a number of other territories," he said in an interview with the state-run RIA Novosti news agency and Kremlin-backed RT network.

Lavrov linked the change in objectives to the West's supply of weapons to Kyiv.

He said Russia cannot accept that "in the parts of Ukraine that [President Volodomyr] Zelensky or the one who will replace him will control, there are weapons that will pose a direct threat to our territory and the territory of those [eastern Ukrainian] republics that have announced their independence."

“If Western countries supply long-range weapons to Ukraine, [these goals] will move even further,” Lavrov said.

In the past month, the United States’ delivery of HIMARS medium-range rocket systems has allowed Ukraine to attack Russian positions beyond the front lines more frequently and with greater accuracy.

Experts said the comments are a major signal that Moscow is seeking to annex southern and eastern Ukrainian lands it has captured in its five-month invasion.

Despite President Vladimir Putin’s claims that Russia does not intend to permanently occupy Ukrainian territories, officials in the Moscow-installed administrations of Ukraine’s Kherson and Zaporizhzhia regions have expressed plans to hold referendums to join Russia.

“The legitimization of referendum preparations seems to have begun,” tweeted political analyst Tatiana Stanovaya, founder of the R.Politik think tank.

Russia previously recalibrated its objectives in Ukraine to focus on the country’s east in April following a failed attempt to storm the capital Kyiv.

After capturing the entire Luhansk region in eastern Ukraine in early July, Russian forces are expected to continue their offensive in the coming weeks, in a fierce battle to take full control of the Donetsk region.

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