The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Ukraine Allies Denounce 'Cynical' Russian Meeting at UN

By Amelie Bottollier-Depois for AFP and Peter Hutchison for AFP

April 25, 2023



Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov (2nd R front) attends a UN Security Council meeting in the Security Council Chamber at the UN Headquarters. **Russian Foreign Ministry / TASS**

Kyiv's allies on Monday slammed Russia for a Security Council meeting chaired by Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov about protecting the United Nations charter, which Moscow itself violated by invading Ukraine.

"By organizing this debate Russia is trying to portray itself as a defender of the UN charter and multilateralism. Nothing can be further from the truth. It's cynical," said European Union ambassador Olof Skoog.

On the first anniversary of the war in February, the UN General Assembly voted by an overwhelming majority to repeat its demand for the "immediate" withdrawal of Russian troops from Ukraine.

"If Russia cares about effective multilateralism, that is the first way to prove it," said Skoog, surrounded by representatives from the 27 EU countries.

Russia holds the rotating presidency of the Security Council in April and organized the meeting as one of its "signature" events of its tenure.

In a note to member states laying out the premise for the meeting, Russia denounced the "unipolar world order" that took effect after the end of the Cold War.

It said that "presented a serious challenge to the efficiency and stability of the United Nations system."

"Today the world is facing another deep-reaching systemic transformation. Namely, natural and rapid decline of unipolar world order and the emergence of a new multipolar system," the note said.

Before the meeting, Lavrov said the United Nations system was "enduring a profound crisis," and accused western countries, particularly the United States, of being responsible.

"It's not all about Ukraine," he told reporters.

"It's about how international relations will continue to be shaped through the establishment of a sound consensus on the basis of balance of interests or through aggressive and volatile advancement of Washington's hegemony," Lavrov added.

Sitting next to Lavrov during the meeting, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres condemned Russia's invasion of Ukraine as a "violation" of international law and the UN charter.

The war "is causing massive suffering and devastation to the country and its people, and adding to the global economic dislocation triggered by the Covid-19 pandemic," Guterres said.

He added that the world faces "unprecedented and interlocking crises" and "the multilateral system is under greater strain than at any time since the creation of the United Nations."

"Tensions between major powers are at an historic high. So are the risks of conflict, through misadventure or miscalculation," Guterres told diplomats.

Washington's UN ambassador, Linda Thomas-Greenfield, clutched the world body's charter in her hand and stressed the importance of defending its values.

"Our hypocritical convenor today, Russia, invaded its neighbor in Ukraine and struck at the heart of the UN charter," she told the meeting.

Facing Lavrov, Thomas-Greenfield made a direct plea to him to release detained U.S. journalist Evan Gershkovich and detained former U.S. Marine Paul Whelan.

"Using people as pawns is a strategy of weakness," she said, urging Lavrov to look into the eyes of Whelan's sister, who was in the gallery of the chamber, and "see her suffering."

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