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Russia Accuses West of 'De Facto' Fighting in Ukraine

By AFP

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Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov **Valery Sharifulin / TASS**

Western powers through their support for Ukraine are "de facto" fighting against Moscow, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said Saturday, as Kyiv claimed fresh advances on the ground.

"You can call it anything you want, but they are fighting with us, they are straight-up fighting with us," Lavrov told journalists at the United Nations.

"We call it a hybrid war, but that doesn't change things."

Westerners are "de facto fighting against us, using the hands and bodies of Ukrainians," Lavrov said, pointing to the billions of dollars in Western military equipment provided to Kyiv since Russia attacked last year.

He also indicated the U.S. and British intelligence support and the presence of Western

military advisors.

Officials in Kyiv reported breaking through Russian defense lines in the south.

And its army said that senior Russian navy commanders had been among dozens killed or wounded in a missile attack on Moscow's Black Sea Fleet headquarters in Crimea.

Oleksandr Tarnavskiy, the Ukrainian general leading the counteroffensive around the Zaporizhzhia area in the south, told U.S. media that the advance was still underway.

"On the left flank [near the village of Verbove] we have a breakthrough, and we continue to advance further," he told CNN in an interview released Friday.

Progress had been "not as fast as it was expected — not like in the movies about the Second World War," he added. But it was important, he added, "not to lose this initiative."

Ukraine launched its counteroffensive to claw back territory from Russian forces in June. Progress has been slow, with much of the territory heavily mined.

But Kyiv has in recent weeks reported making strategic advances in the Zaporizhzhia region. And Tarnavskiy did not accept that Ukraine's push could be further slowed in the coming winter months.

"The weather can be a serious obstacle during advance, but considering how we move forward, mostly without vehicles, I don't think [it] will heavily influence the counteroffensive," he said.

Mykhailo Podolyak, an aide to President Volodymyr Zelensky, spelt out Kyiv's position on the prospects of a long, drawn-out war.

"Are the Ukrainian people happy about the prospect of a long war of attrition?" he wrote Saturday on X, formerly Twitter. "Absolutely not. We are following this path only because there is no other way today."

The Tarnavskiy interview was published a day after Kyiv struck Russia's Black Sea Fleet headquarters in the Crimean port of Sevastopol, claiming to have killed "senior" commanders.

Ukraine's army said the strike had happened during "a meeting of the Russian navy's leadership."

Kyiv's intelligence chief Kyrylo Budanov said the attack killed "at least nine people," including generals, in comments to Voice of America.

"The details of the attack will be revealed as soon as possible and the result is dozens of dead and wounded occupants, including senior fleet commanders," the Ukrainian army said.

AFP has not been able to verify this information.

Russia has said one of its servicemen is missing after the attack.

Tarnavskiy said the counteroffensive's success depended not only on what happens on the front, but also on "destroying command centres" that create "a mess on the battlefield."

Strikes on Crimea, annexed by Russia in 2014, improved morale for Ukrainian troops, he added.

"It helps us, but it also gives us hope for the future."

Zelensky was headed for home after addressing the United Nations and talks in Washington with the U.S. Congress and President Joe Biden, who pledged the imminent arrival of U.S. tanks to bolster Ukraine's arsenal.

He also got a pledge of more funding from Canada after addressing the parliament in Ottawa.

The Ukrainian leader took to X on Saturday to announce he had met Sudan's army chief and de facto ruler general Abdel Fattah al-Burhan during a stopover in Ireland.

"I'm grateful to Sudan for its constant support for Ukraine sovereignty and territorial integrity," Zelensky said, at a time when Kyiv is seeking to counter growing Russian influence in Africa.

The two leaders talked of "common security challenges, particularly the activities of illegal armed groups financed by Russia."

Zelensky also said he made a brief halt in the Polish city of Lublin during the afternoon to decorate two Polish volunteers.

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