

Russia: NATO should be 'wise enough' to avoid war

Russia's top diplomat said in an interview published Thursday that he hopes NATO can avoid a large, global war, but said he's worried that NATO has left Russia out of these sorts of discussions.

"I believe everyone will be wise enough to prevent that," Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said about the prospects of war, according to state-run TASS. "However, we are certainly very much concerned about the total absence of any professional dialogue between the Russian military and NATO."

Diplomatic contacts between the two sides slid after Russia's annexation of Crimea and invasion of eastern Ukraine, while U.S.-Russian relations fell even further during a wave of tit-for-tat sanctions in the wake of the 2016 cyberattacks against the Democratic Party. That dynamic has unfolded as both sides undertake military drills in the region, and while the United States and Russia fight over compliance with arms control treaties.

"The Americans and we have made two fundamental statements since the Soviet era to the effect nobody can win a nuclear war and for that reason it cannot happen," Lavrov added. "It might be a good idea to reaffirm this postulate in the current context."

Russia and NATO forces have maintained "deconfliction" communication in Syria, where a complex civil war has brought both sides in close proximity. The most dramatic incident, when Turkish defenses shot down a Russian fighter that violated Turkish air space, sparked a tense period between those two countries but no broader clash.

The dialogue over larger issues that has occurred hasn't gone well, both sides agree. "Attempts were made to use the NATO-Russia Council as another tool to blame all mortal sins on us, and another way of satisfying the whims of our Ukrainian neighbors who dream of sanctions being endlessly perpetuated and want nothing more than Russia to always be subject to intense criticism," Lavrov said.

On the other hand, western officials accuse Russia of lying about their violations of a major Cold War-era arms control treaty.

“We have been trying to send a message to Russia for several years that we know they are violating the treaty,” Ambassador Kay Bailey Hutchison, the U.S. representative to NATO, said during an October 2 press briefing. “But if Russia continues to say they are not violating when the evidence is clear that they are, then diplomacy needs to be strengthened, and we need to look for other ways to bring Russia to the table on this issue.”

Lavrov plans to invoke treaty power that allows Russia to object to a forthcoming NATO-Ukraine military drill. “Ukraine wants to hold NATO drills in the Sea of Azov but it will be impossible to go there because our treaty with Ukraine requires mutual consent for the passage of warships into the Sea of Azov,” he said in the same interview.

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