



Russian Foreign Minister Completes Africa Tour

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Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov visited four African countries on 23-27 July. The aim of his tour was to break Russia's international isolation and maintain African states' positive neutrality towards it, as well as to promote Russia's narrative of the West's "responsibility" for triggering the food crisis because of sanctions.

Which countries did Lavrov visit and why?

The Russian foreign minister visited Egypt, the Republic of Congo, Uganda, and Ethiopia. Egypt, the largest importer in the region of wheat, mostly from Russia and Ukraine, has been hit hard by the food crisis. This month, Rosatom began construction of a nuclear power plant in the country and the state is considering joining BRICS, which includes Russia. Congo and Uganda on 2 March abstained from voting on the UN General Assembly resolution condemning the Russian aggression. Both countries are authoritarian and ruled by leaders seemingly for life. As a sign of support, Russia is signalling it backs the succession of power in Uganda within the ruling family. The Ethiopian government leans towards Russia as an alternative to the traditional alliance with the West, as Western countries have criticised Ethiopia's war in the Tigray province. Lavrov's visit to Egypt was timed so he could appear at the Arab League forum, and visit to Ethiopia enabled hosting a meeting of states' ambassadors to the African Union (AU).

What was Lavrov's message?

Before the visit, newspapers in all four countries published an article by the foreign minister in which he praised Africa's stance on the war as resisting the hegemony of the West, which he said was exerting "unprecedented pressure" on the continent's states to join the sanctions. He accused the West of sparking the food crisis. During the visit, the Russian minister cited the history of colonialism and alleged a threat of its return, presenting Russia as an honest partner. His visit to Ethiopia, which coincided with the mission of the U.S. special envoy to the Horn of Africa, was partly to rebut Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky's earlier speech to

AU representatives. Lavrov also promoted the 2nd Russia-Africa summit, which would be held in 2023.

How did French President Emmanuel Macron respond to Lavrov's statements?

The French president was in West Africa at the time and described Putin's war as "colonial" in nature. He also declared he supported opening French archives to investigate the repression of Cameroon's independence movement in the 1950s. While in that country, he pointed to France's current reflection on its past colonial mistakes, contrasting them with Russia's actions in the former Soviet region and elsewhere. At the same time, Macron pointed out the hypocrisy of many African countries not admitting that Russia's aggression against Ukraine constitutes a war and is colonialism. By offering investments in local agricultural production capacity under the FARM programme (under the aegis of France, the EU, and the WFP), Macron demonstrated that the West can actually improve the food situation in Africa than, unlike Lavrov's empty rhetoric. In Benin, Macron assured the continuity of support in the fight against terrorism, warning Russia against attempts to oust the West in this area.

Was Lavrov's visit successful by Russia's standard?

The foreign minister's Africa tour gave the impression that Russia was returning to normal in world diplomatic circles. In this context, with the Russian minister in Ethiopia, the announcement by U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken of his plans to meet Lavrov was less controversial. Much of Lavrov's journey was not public, however; in the Republic of Congo, talks took place in the isolated president's residence 400 km from the capital, Brazzaville, (possibly about Russia

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using the Pointe-Noire port as an export hub in the region); in Ethiopia, the visit included a confidential meeting with the ambassadors to the AU at the Russian embassy. So, it is not clear whether and to what extent the tour will translate into action, but if, however, the announced visit of the Ukrainian

Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba to the region takes place, he will certainly point out weaknesses in Lavrov's arguments.