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Zelensky 'playing games' on Putin meeting – Lavrov

Talks should have substance, not serve as a stage for the Ukrainian leader, the Russian foreign minister has said



Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov. © Sputnik

Ukrainian leader Vladimir Zelensky's calls for a meeting with President Vladimir Putin are pure theatrics, as any potential high-level talks have no real agenda at this point, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov has said.

Putin is ready to meet with Zelensky, Lavrov told NBC in a rare interview, "provided this meeting is really going to decide something."

The necessary groundwork for such a meeting, the foreign minister stressed, has not yet been done.

"When Mr. Zelensky says the immediate priority is a meeting with Putin, well, it's basically a game. A game he is very good [at playing] because he wants theatrics in everything he is doing. He does not care about substance," Lavrov said.

Moscow sees no point in talks destined to yield no results due to Kiev's position, Lavrov said, pointing out cases where Zelensky has directly defied US President Donald Trump. *"Zelensky said no to everything... He clearly stated that nobody can prohibit him from joining NATO... he publicly stated that he is not going to discuss any territories."*

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Zelensky also needs a meeting with Putin to strengthen his questionable legitimacy, Lavrov said. The Ukrainian leader's presidential term ended more than a year ago, and he has refused to hold a new election, citing martial law. Russia has since proclaimed him "illegitimate".

Lavrov acknowledged that Zelensky is "de facto head of the regime," adding that Moscow is ready to meet him in this capacity. "The issue of who is going to sign the deal on the Ukrainian side is a very serious [one]," he said. "We would need a very clear understanding by everybody that the person who is signing is legitimate."



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Russia maintains that any settlement of the Ukraine conflict must address the root causes of the crisis. Moscow insists that Ukraine must commit to block neutrality, demilitarization, denazification, and recognition of territorial reality on the ground.

Kiev has said that while Zelensky is ready to discuss Ukraine's territorial disputes with Russia, it has no intention to recognize its losses.

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