

## **Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's remarks and answers to media questions during the 56th Munich Security Conference, Global Disorder – Other Opportunities for a New Agenda, Munich, February 15, 2020**

Ladies and gentlemen,

This year marks the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Victory in WWII. Sadly, there are attempts to brazenly distort history and to equate the liberators of Europe with Nazi murderers. These attempts will remain on the conscience of those behind them. No one and nothing can belittle the decisive role of the Red Army and the Soviet people in defeating Nazism. At the same time, we will always keep in our minds the spirit of Alliance during the War and the ability of the states to unite and fight the common threat regardless of ideological differences.

Nowadays we are lacking this kind of unity, when the threats and risks to humanity have never been at such an all-time high since the post war period. The strategic stability and non-proliferation treaty system is being destroyed right before our eyes, the threshold for using nuclear weapons is getting lower, regional crises are multiplying and international law is being trampled upon, including through military interference in affairs of sovereign states, illegal sanctions and harsh protectionist measures that undermine global markets and the system of trade. We are witnessing barbarisation of international relations which degrades human habitat.

We need a direct and honest exchange of views on how to save the world for future generations. President of Russia Vladimir Putin proposes starting such a discussion at a meeting of the heads of state representing permanent members of the UN Security Council. To be clear, this is not about creating another private club to take behind-the-scenes decisions about the fate of humanity. Our idea is that the five states which, under the UN Charter, bear special responsibility for maintaining international peace and security, show political will and make recommendations in the interest of improving the entire atmosphere of international communication and restoring trust between all nations.

The credibility crisis is especially acute when it comes to European affairs. The escalation of tension, the eastward advancement of NATO's military infrastructure, the unprecedentedly massive military exercises near Russia's border and pumping inordinate amounts of money into defence budgets create unpredictability. The Cold War patterns have once again become a reality. Before it's too late, it is time to say no to promoting the "Russian threat" phantom or any other threat for that matter, and to go back to things that unite us.

The principle of equal and indivisible security should be the starting point of such a dialogue. As you may recall, it was proclaimed at the highest level in important documents such as the Helsinki Final Act of 1975, the 1990 Charter of Paris for a New Europe and the 2010 OSCE Astana Summit declaration.

In today's world, Euro-Atlantic stability cannot be achieved without truly global cooperation in fighting international terrorism, illegal migration, human trafficking and other cross-border challenges. Many of them have taken on threatening proportions as a result of bloody conflicts in the Middle East and North Africa. The international community must create a favourable environment for the peoples of the countries of that region to resolve their problems through inclusive national dialogue without any outside interference. I believe it is unacceptable to turn the territory of these countries into an arena of geopolitical confrontation and settling accounts, or use terrorists to achieve self-serving geopolitical goals.

Guided by international law, Russia will continue to promote a settlement in Syria as part of the Astana process and UN mechanisms and to help bring the Libyan parties closer together as the only way to restore the country's statehood destroyed by NATO. Russia's Collective Security Concept for the Persian Gulf Region is designed to provide lasting normalisation of the situation in the region. Of course, we will be promoting a balanced approach in our attempts to find a fair solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict based on existing international agreements. We will continue to stress that replacing legally binding decisions on the Iranian nuclear programme with illegitimate unilateral moves is unacceptable.

The negative impact of innovative ground-breaking technology on global stability must be prevented. The initiatives designed to prevent the arms race in outer space and to prevent the militarisation of cyberspace are designed to achieve this. We are prepared to join efforts on other pressing issues of the global agenda, including epidemiological threats. In this regard, I would like to note China's open and responsible approach to international cooperation in combating the spread of the coronavirus.

To reiterate, the global challenges are so huge that countries can cope with them only if they join forces and strictly observe the principles of genuine multilateralism. The attempts, under the banner of multilateralism, to impose someone's own rules and "privatise" the international organisations' secretariats are getting in the way of such efforts. The situation at the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) is an egregious case in point.

It is important to stop these dangerous trends and unequivocally reaffirm the principles enshrined in the UN Charter, including sovereign equality of states and non-interference in their domestic affairs. It is imperative for all the Charter principles to be equally respected by the member countries and the UN and other international organisations' top officials.

Along with the UN, global governance needs flexible multilateral mechanisms that promote a positive agenda and try to strike a balance of interests. This includes the G20 and BRICS, whose participants represent cultural and civilizational diversity of the modern world.

The SCO, the EAEU, the CIS and the CSTO contribute to developing constructive approaches to Eurasian challenges. President of Russia Vladimir Putin put forward an initiative to form a Greater Eurasian Partnership open to all associations and states of our vast common continent, including EU members.

Colleagues,

Russia is and always has been opposed to coercive measures and has welcomed

political and diplomatic means of resolving disputes, which, let us be honest, inevitably arise due to human nature itself. But peace has never been something you can get for free. It requires constant, sometimes the most laborious efforts.

Prominent nuclear physicist, Nobel Peace Prize winner Andrey Sakharov once said: "Nuclear war might arise from an ordinary war. The latter, as is widely known, arises from politics." It is hard to disagree with that. All diplomats, politicians, the global community, including everyone present here, are responsible for preserving peace. I am sure that we can do it if we take a responsible approach.

**Question:** We all are concerned about the developments in Idlib, but I would like to ask a question about the relations between Russia and Turkey in general; it is a certain riddle to me. How would you describe these relations, are you allies or opponents?

**Sergey Lavrov:** Is this a 'riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma'?

Our relations with Turkey are very good. It does not mean that we have to agree on everything. Actually, I think that there can be no full accord on any issue between any two countries. If there is one, it would look like pressure has something to do with it.

The Syrian conflict appeared at the stage of the so-called Arab Spring, when Libya was destroyed, and Tunisia and some other countries of the region were on the brink of destruction. When extremists, terrorist groups almost besieged Damascus in the summer 2015, nobody thought of any humanitarian norms or a political process; everyone expected a military solution that would result in the overthrow of the Bashar al-Assad government. Russia has answered this legitimate Government's call for help. Now we have managed to help the Syrian Government and the army to reverse the situation, primarily with regard to counteracting terrorism.

At some point we all relied on the UN. The Geneva process was established, and I personally took part in these efforts together with former US Secretary of State John Kerry. The talks were middling at best, and we could not reach any positive result. Later on, our UN colleagues decided to postpone the Geneva meetings until better days. Then, seeing that the impasse had become chronic, Russia together with Turkey and Iran proposed to begin a political process under the auspices of these three countries. Moreover, we suggested that the opposition should be represented not by immigrants who live in other capitals, but by those who had a real influence on the people fighting with the Syrian army on the ground. We managed to do that by launching the Astana process. We are sincerely grateful to Kazakhstan for providing us with a hospitable platform in their capital. I do not want to seem too presumptuous, but, given there are no other examples, the Astana process remains the most efficient instrument to assist the UN in reaching the objectives of Resolution 2254 of the UN Security Council.

It was not easy, because Russia, Iran and Turkey have different goals as regards Syria and the entire region. I will not dwell on it, we all know what I mean. We were united by the desire to prevent the destruction of the Syrian Arab Republic, the cradle of many great religions and civilisations, where Muslims, Christians and other confessional groups have been coexisting for many hundreds and thousands of years. We wanted to establish peace in the country and to begin a political dialogue. We managed to do that, and helped the UN initiate the process which is now underway as part of the Constitutional Committee. It was formed and was ready to operate as early as at the end of 2018. We all know the story: our Western colleagues in fact

categorically demanded that the UN did not support proposals made by the Syrian Government and the opposition. An entire year was spent on infighting over two or three names that our Western colleagues did not like for some reason.

We lost a year. The situation could be different now. Nevertheless, we do not harbour resentment and try to proceed from reality. And the reality is that we have finally convinced everyone in doubt to approve this committee. It has held two sessions, and preparations are underway for a third one. Today I have met with Special Envoy of the UN Secretary General for Syria Geir Pedersen. We are not overreacting at the fact that the committee is making slow progress, but, of course, we do not want to give the impression that it will function forever. Most important is that the Syrians reach an agreement among themselves.

In this sense, our relations with Turkey are very important considering Russia's opportunities, as well as Iran's, by the way, in its contacts with the Syrian leadership and Turkey's ability to influence the opposition and members of military groups on the ground. Let me note that Russia is interested in seeing other countries in contact with the opposition positively influence it as well; first of all, the Persian Gulf monarchies. Our goal is to unite efforts and help create comfortable conditions for the Syrians to work in.

Let me make another point directly connected with Idlib, which you mentioned at the very beginning: the defeat of terrorism is unavoidable. Our American colleagues have already announced several times that they defeated ISIS and destroyed terrorism in Syria, as well as in Iraq. But let me note that, in addition to ISIS, there also is Jabhat al-Nusra, which is now called Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, which, like ISIS, is considered a terrorist organisation by the UN Security Council. Now it controls a larger part of the problematic Idlib security zone. This is one of the last terrorist strongholds, but at least the only one on the western bank of the Euphrates.

Today I have met with Foreign Minister of Turkey Mevlut Cavusoglu, my colleague and friend. Our agreements with Turkey include ensuring a ceasefire, establishing a demilitarised zone, and, what's most important, separating the normal opposition from terrorists. These agreements do not mean we will stop our uncompromising fight against terrorist groups. This is a difficult task. Terrorists try to use civilians as a human shield. We have seen this in the infamous refugee camp of Rukban and in the Al-Hawl refugee camp, controlled by Kurd squads in cooperation with the Americans, above all, and in other regions of the world. The task is not easy, but contacts are underway between Russian and Turkish experts, diplomats, military personnel and security officers to find ways to execute the Idlib agreements I have mentioned. The next contacts are scheduled for next week.

**Question (retranslated from German):** I find your statements on Syria inconclusive. How can the Russian Government guarantee Syria's sovereignty while Turkey has a military presence in Idlib, Afrin and other parts of northern Syria? It is obvious that Turkey is there to stay. I was not convinced by what you said.

**Sergey Lavrov:** This is not complicated. The purpose of what we are doing in Syria is not to convince you. You are a journalist, as far as I understand. You have every right to view what is happening there based on your understanding of these developments. We are doing on the ground what is required under UN Security Council Resolution 2254. Among other things, it guarantees the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Syrian Arab Republic. It is the UN Security Council that guarantees Syria's sovereignty, not Russia.

Apart from the Idlib problem, the developments on the eastern bank of the Euphrates are the main challenge, since this is where the gravest violations of this sovereignty are taking place with the establishment of parallel government institutions with clear separatist aspirations. We regularly raise this issue with our US colleagues who maintain their proactive presence on the eastern bank.

I have already mentioned the problems associated with the Rukban and Al-Hawl camps. There are also problems with the Al Tanf zone. All this has to do with the sovereignty of the Syrian Arab Republic. We act in strict keeping with the UN Security Council resolutions. Our utmost priority is to fight terrorism, address the humanitarian needs of the population and facilitate the return of refugees. By the way, the European Union is adamant in its refusal to take part in efforts to enable people to return to their homes, waiting for real progress in the political process. Before that, they refused to commit to any efforts until the Constitutional Committee was launched. It is now up and running, but the European Union has not provided any assistance to enable the return of refugees, as we can see.

The UN Security Council resolutions also provide for a constitutional reform and political process as another priority. It is for this purpose that we established the Constitutional Committee. Together with Turkey and Iran, we helped Syrians agree on this essential mechanism. This is what we are doing. It is up to you whether these efforts look convincing or not. We are used to criticism. It helps us find creative solutions. We are looking forward to your feedback and constructive advice.

**Question:** While I see a kind of consistency in what you say about Syria, when you talk about integrity and sovereignty, but when you go to Libya, you do not support a UN-recognised government, but you support Marshall Haftar, which is a recipe for partition. My question is: what do you really want to achieve in Libya, since you back a faction, which basically means splitting the country apart?

**Sergey Lavrov:** I have to disagree with you since the UN Security Council recognised Marshall Haftar and the Libyan National Army he heads as a party to the conflict, as was also confirmed during the recent Berlin Conference on Libya. The UN Security Council welcomed the outcomes of the Berlin Conference on Libya, calling on Prime Minister of the Government of National Accord Fayeze al-Sarraj and Commander-in-Chief of the Libyan National Army Khalifa Haftar to address matters related to respecting the ceasefire, implementing agreements on economic affairs in this country, and advancing the political process (preparing elections, the constitution, etc). Therefore, Khalifa Haftar is not a symbol of separatism but rather a side to the conflict as recognised by the international community, including the participants in the Berlin Conference on Libya and the UN Security Council. This conflict started with the breakdown of the country called Libya following a plainly unlawful campaign carried out, as you remember, by NATO in 2011.

To answer the question on what Russia is doing in Libya, we are trying, alongside other external actors, to help Libyans restore what has been destroyed following an egregious violation of the UN Charter. That is my brief answer to this question.