

[mid.ru](https://www.mid.ru)

Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's interview with Al-Arabiya channel, Moscow, September 21, 2020

20-26 minutes

Question: I would like to start by asking you Sir about a few topics and Libya is on the top of them, the threat of a possible regional war starting from Sirte still looms large. We now hear about understandings reached between Russia and Turkey on a comprehensive ceasefire in Libya.

If this is the case, can you explain to our viewers in a more detailed way Russia's efforts to implement such a ceasefire and will there be any kind of guarantees that the ceasefire will hold, while Russia and other international actors seek a United Nations-sponsored political solution for the crisis?

Sergey Lavrov: Well Libya is not just the concern of Russia and Turkey.

Libya is a huge headache for many international players and many efforts have been undertaken for the last 5 years or so by various countries in Europe and elsewhere, in the region, to try to put the war out and to overcome the disaster created by NATO aggression in 2011 in gross violation of the Security Council resolutions.

And the Libyan statehood which had been destroyed by the

aggression is still to be assembled, re-assembled I would say, and Russia and Turkey are among those who would like to help.

Russia from the very beginning unlike many outside players established and maintained contacts with each and every of the Libyan parties, each and every of Libyan politicians, be it in Tripoli, Be it in Tobruk, be it in Benghazi, Sirte and elsewhere and I believe this is the only way to promote what all of us want to see namely a Libyan-led, Libyan-owned political process culminating in restoration of the Libyan statehood, a solution of all the issues regarding the future of Libya on the basis of the balance of interest of the 3 constituent parts of this country.

And apart from Russia and Turkey, France, Italy, Emirates, at various stages of the Libyan drama participated in promoting some kind of a dialogue and a very important role was played by the Berlin Conference which adopted a declaration, endorsed eventually by the Security Council, and lately, I would mention also Cairo Declaration which was supported by Saleh and Haftar, and then there were initiatives of Saleh and Seraj on the ceasefire, so in fact it is the wish and the efforts of the Libyan parties themselves which Russia and Turkey want to support and to encourage, and the consultations which took place several days ago in Ankara between Russian and Turkish diplomats and representatives of the Ministries of Defense, they were aimed at helping the parties to consolidate the cessation of hostilities which was established defacto for the last couple of months, and to make it legitimate and legal, that was the effort and I hope that we all can succeed.

There are some countries who don't want this Libyan crisis to end the way the Libyans want to, and who still want to play the Libyan card and geo-political games, but I hope all sincere international,

European and regional players would concentrate on the positive agenda as agreed at the Berlin Conference.

Question: So as I understand it from you Sir, you have not reached the agreements yet and they are not finalized, but will there be guarantees for the ceasefire from any party?

Sergey Lavrov: Well the agreement is to be reached by the Libyan parties themselves, and Russia and Turkey can only use their good offices to persuade the parties to consolidate the situation on the ground so that no fighting is resumed, and then to come back to the implementation of the Berlin agenda including the 5+5 military committee, including economic issues, first of all the solution of the oil problem, and of course political reform, constitutional elections and so on.

Question: Has a fair mechanism for exporting and sharing oil revenues between the Libyan parties without foreign interference, has it been discussed?

Sergey Lavrov: Well this is being discussed by the Libyan parties. This was raised during the contacts between Saleh and Seraj.

This is being discussed now with the people in Tobruk including the representatives of the Libyan National Army. All we do is to encourage them to sit down and to agree on how they share the natural resources given to them by history and by God.

Question: Does Russia support the call for a complete, a complete arms embargo to all parties in Libya and the departure of all foreign forces from Libya?

Sergey Lavrov: Well we cannot support the call because we did support the resolution of the Security Council which established

without any calls a mandatory arms embargo on any supplies of arms to Libya and of any supplies of arms from Libya, and this embargo holds, and everybody must respect this, this was reconfirmed by the Berlin Conference, the European Union volunteered to establish a new Operation "Irini" to monitor the implementation of this embargo on the strict basis of the Security Council resolution requirements, and that is where we are, everybody must respect this.

Question: But how about respecting the call by many Libyans and the international actors for the departure of all foreign forces from Libya?

Sergey Lavrov: Well it depends what do you mean by the demands by the Libyan parties, there is a legitimate government as it were in Tripoli, and there is a legitimate parliament in Tobruk, and unless and until all the Libyans not only from Cyrenaica, Tripolitania and but also from Fezzan, agree on how they want to move their country forward, agree on the political reform, on power sharing, it will be very difficult to understand who is representing the legitimate Libyan government and who should legitimately decide that all foreign forces must leave the country.

So before we can handle the repercussions of the current crisis, started in 2011 by NATO aggression, we must overcome the debris left by NATO in Libya, we must restore the Libyan statehood and then the sovereign and independent Libyan State would decide who is welcome and who is not welcome on its soil.

Question: But of course you understand what I mean by foreign forces that includes of course mercenaries from Syria or Sudan or other countries which are in Libya now?

Sergey Lavrov: Well I answered your question, I answered your question, before the Libyans can decide who is welcome and who is not welcome on their soil, they have to agree what is their state looks like because the Libyan state whatever you thought about Gathafi, it was ruined in gross violation of international law by NATO aggression in 2011.

We are now trying to bring this country back and we welcome all efforts especially the efforts of the regional countries, Egypt, Algeria, Tunis, European countries, France and Italy first of all, but also countries like the United Arab Emirates, and so it's in our common interest to stabilize Libya and to solve all the problems which were raised after NATO aggression when through Libya terrorists, illegal arms trafficking and other criminal elements were penetrating into the Sahel region and in the other direction flows and the waves of illegal migrants flooded Europe. All this is the result of that tragedy in 2011 and we want those who are now trying to bring this country together to remember the lessons of history.

Question: I would like to move to Iran Sir, the issue of lifting the arms embargo on Iran on the 18th of October 2020, could very well lead to an arms race in the Gulf region, if Iran is able to buy arms there will be a race and much, much worse than the one we have now.

Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said that the US will put sanctions on those who violate the arms embargo which will not expire on 18th of October according to Secretary Pompeo and reports say that President Trump is planning to issue an Executive Order allowing him to impose US sanctions on anyone, anyone who violates the conventional arms embargo on Iran? Your thoughts

Sir?

Sergey Lavrov: There is no such thing as an arms embargo against Iran. The Security Council when it was adopting the comprehensive resolution 2231 which endorsed the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, which settled the nuclear issue for Iran and this was adopted by consensus under Chapter 7 of the United Nations Charter, the Security Council in that resolution said that the supply of arms to Iran and from Iran would be subject to consideration by the Security Council and that on the 18th October 2020 this regime of sales to Iran would stop and there is no embargo and there would no limitations whatsoever after the expiration of this timeframe established by the Security Council.

I cannot speak for the Americans because they say many funny things and I know only one thing for sure that when the Americans, as their representatives officially continue to assert, that they still are participants of the JCPOA because of resolution 2231, I can only remind them that they should respect the hierarchy in the American Administration because their boss, President Trump personally signed an official decree dropping the United States from the JCPOA, any say which the Americans used to have as equal participants of the JCPOA has evaporated since then.

Question: But as you know Sir, they argue that 2231 is a United Nations Chapter 7 resolution and it's binding to all members, all members of the United Nations, so even though they have withdrawn from the JCPOA which is an agreement between countries, they cannot withdraw from a Chapter 7 Security Council resolution and hence they argue that any country, any member state of the United Nations is bound by the resolution and hence they are also bound by this resolution and they see the justification

to activate the mechanism.

Sergey Lavrov: You know they want to violate and to challenge the famous English proverb they want to have their pie and eat it. They formally left the JCPOA and the Security Council resolution 2231 provides for any action to be done in order to restore the sanctions regime to be initiated by a JCPOA member and they are not members any longer, and if they continue threatening with sanctions all those who would cooperate with Iran on the firm basis of the strict implementation of the conditions of resolution 2231 then I would not be surprised, because they do these sanctions all over the world, for any reason at all, sometimes even without any reason, I always knew that an elephant is a symbol of the Republican Party but please do not consider the world as a china store.

Question: So do I take it that the snapback as far as Russia is concerned does not exist?

Sergey Lavrov: The snapback does not exist as far as everybody is concerned except the United States. This was subject to discussion in the Security Council and 13 members, 13 out of the 15 members of the Security Council clearly stated that there are no legal political or moral reasons for anything close to snapback and all the statements to the contrary are null and void, this is the assessment of all members of the Security Council except the US and somebody else.

Question: Forgive me Mr Lavrov, but are the Russian companies and Russian banks willing to face American sanctions?

Sergey Lavrov: Well as I said the Americans lost any talent for diplomacy unfortunately, they used to have excellent experts, now

what they do in the foreign policy area is to put a demand on the table, whether they discuss Iran or anything else, and if their partner says, well I don't think I can do it as you want, let's negotiate, they don't negotiate, they put an ultimatum, they give a deadline and then they impose sanctions, then they make the sanctions extra-territorial.

So I can only say that it is absolutely illegitimate to adopt unilateral sanctions not provided by the United Nations Charter.

Unfortunately this practice is becoming contagious and the European Union more and more is engaging the same tricks which the United States has introduced in the last 10 years or so, because don't forget it all started by the Obama Administration, all those habits to resort to sanctions for no reason at all, they started before this Administration was inaugurated and I can only say that it is if you say whether companies of foreign countries would have to implement the sanctions, I cannot speak for business, business has its own assessment but it is absolutely clear that unilateral actions are illegal and illegitimate and to this effect you can read quite a number of resolutions of the General Assembly.

Question: How does Russia see the road forward to a political solution in Syria, when every step is fraught with countless setbacks and delays.

Many argue that the Syrian Government is counting on a military victory over the opposition with the help of its allies. Is the political solution still even viable for Syria?

Sergey Lavrov: I am fresh from Damascus where I was together with the Deputy Prime Minister of Russia who discussed during this visit the prospects of our economic cooperation and I discussed

the political part of the current situation.

I don't think that anybody who talks to President Assad and to his ministers can conclude that the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic is exclusively relying on the military solution. This is not true. The military confrontation between the Government and the opposition is over. The only two hotbeds on the Syrian soil is Idlib, where Hayat Tahrir Al Sham, which is one of the reincarnations of Jabhat Al Nusra is in charge, but the territory Hayat Tahrir Al Sham controls in Idlib is shrinking.

And our Turkish colleagues on the basis of the Russian-Turkish memorandum they make efforts to continue to fight the terrorists and to separate the normal opposition from the terrorist groups, we support them in this endeavour, so there is no fighting between the government and the opposition there.

And the second hotbed is the eastern bank of the Euphrates River where the illegal presence of the American troops is, combined with the Americans promoting separatist trends, playing with the Kurdish Guard in a very reckless manner I would say.

Their recent decision to bring the American oil company and to start pumping oil for their own purposes without any respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Syrian Arab Republic as resolution 2254 demands, of course this creates a very nervous situation for many countries in this region, Turkey of course.

But countries with the Kurdish population they are all rather concerned that this is playing with fire, we warned the Kurdish population of Iraq, of Turkey, of Iran, of Syria to be a harmonious part of their countries, enjoying all the rights of a national minority, but we also believe that if you try to encourage separatist trends

the region might explode and I hope the Americans understand that they must think not only about the elections which are coming in a month and a half but also about the future of this region, which is one of the most important regions of the world.

And yes I did not answer a question about the political process. The Constitutional Committee resumed its work after the pause which was caused by the coronavirus infection.

Mr Pederson, who is the UN Special Envoy, visited Moscow, he was cautiously optimistic about the process, now they finalized the consultations on the agenda for the next round of the Drafting Committee of the Constitutional Committee, yes it is not going as fast as we would like to, but you cannot say that it is the government which is to blame.

The government could be a bit more forthcoming and we send this message to Damascus including during my visit, but we also see that the opposition is not in its best shape, and there are some internal struggles, internal fighting between the various opposition groups, we think that this all must be secondary to the overriding task to start negotiations on the Constitution in earnest and that is what we impress upon the Syrian parties.

Question: Talks between Russia and Turkey on Idlib faltered and Russia suspended its joint participation with Turkish forces in joint patrols in accordance with the 5th of March agreement this year. Many fear a new major Syrian-Russian renewed military offensive on Idlib. Can you allay these fears?

Sergey Lavrov: I just did I think. There is a Turkish-Russian Memorandum which is fully in force, the joint patrolling of the M4 route was suspended because of the security concerns.

Since the Hayat Tahrir Al Sham continues to make armed provocations and to attack the Syrian government positions, they were trying to attack the Russian air force base at Khmeimim and our Turkish colleagues confirmed that it is their commitment to fight the terrorist activities and as I said to separate the normal opposition ready for dialogue with the Government from the terrorists. So there is no need for the Syrian army, for the Alliance of the Syrian Government to attack Idlib, the only need is to attack the positions of terrorists and to eliminate this hotbed of terrorism which is the last terrorist hotbed on Syrian territory of that size, and now our Turkish colleagues have their predominant responsibility under this Memorandum which you asserted to, which you quoted.

Fighting terrorism is task number 1 and I can assure you that the joint patrolling of the M4 route would resume soon, as soon as the situation has calmed down.

Question: But you know Sir when you attack terrorist cells they are embedded between thousands of civilians in that city and its inevitable that civilian victims will fall because of this.

Sergey Lavrov: Well I can assure you that, well there are no operations conducted by Russia in Idlib or by the Syrian government. The only time we use force is when attacked by Hayat Tahrir Al Sham and the force is used in a very targeted manner not to damage civilians and civilian sites, and this is done with much more clear than the way Raqqa was levelled, where still we find a lot of mines, a lot of corpses, nobody is caring for them, so I can assure you that all necessary steps to implement the international humanitarian law as much as possible, have been taken.

Question: All the Gulf states, all parties and the Security Council

always affirm the need for a political solution for the conflict in Yemen. How does Russia view the best approach to a political solution for the Yemen crisis, should the Security Council get more involved or should it show more teeth to those who hinder the efforts for a political solution?

Sergey Lavrov: Well we see the way forward in strict compliance with the proposal by Mr Griffiths who is the Special Envoy for Yemen by the Secretary General, and for the cooperation with Mr Griffiths by all parties including Houthis, including Southern Transitional Council and of course including the Government of President Hadi. Everybody must be cooperative.

We support the efforts of our Saudi Arabia friends to promote dialogue and understanding in the south of Yemen.

We support the United Arab Emirates, and we support the efforts of Mr Griffiths which I believe would bring us to success if everybody including President Hadi cooperates.

Question: The latest Peace Agreements between the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Israel, how does Russia view these peace agreements between these two countries on one side and the State of Israel on the other?

Sergey Lavrov: We would be very much interested in seeing how this all evolves because we have all agreed on the basic parameters for the settlement of the Palestinian-Israel conflict.

There are numerous resolutions of the Security Council and of the General Assembly, there is the Arab Peace Initiative endorsed by the United Nations, there is the Quartet of international mediators, there is the Arab League, there are many players who contributed to the creation of the atmosphere which would be conducive to

peace and stability in the Middle East, of course with respect, with full respect of the rights of Palestinians, and this can only be achieved through a direct dialogue between Israel and Palestine.

We are strongly in favor of this dialogue to be relaunched as soon as possible. We are ready to provide our good offices, be it as part of the Quartet, be it in any other capacity as Permanent Member of the Security Council, and we view the latest developments between Israel and the Emirates, between Israel and Bahrain, as facts on the ground, and we are getting assurances from all our Arab friends that these developments are intended to improve the climate in the region, would in no way be used to the detriment of the rights of the Palestinian people, but we have to see when the dialogue restarts.

We encourage our Israeli colleagues and Palestinian friends to create conditions and to use the good offices of the international community for relaunching such direct dialogue, it is the only way to understand what needs to be done under the present circumstances.

The fact that the annexation was postponed is of course better than you know to see it happen now, but postponing is not resolving the problem, the problem is still there and it is only the direct dialogue which could bring us to mutually acceptable solutions supported by both Israelis and Palestinians.

And yes I heard I think yesterday that Antonio Guterres announced that he is looking for some forms of resuming mediation by the United Nations and it would be very much interesting to see what the Secretary General has to offer.

Question: Sir, you have been very generous with your time with us

and I really appreciate this opportunity. Mr Sergey Lavrov, Foreign Minister of the Russian Federation, thank you Sir for this exclusive interview and we wish you the very best of luck. Thank you.

Sergey Lavrov: Thank you