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## Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's interview with RT television channel, Moscow, December 22, 2021



**Question:** The United States continues to ignore Russia's proposals on collective security mechanisms and requests that the red lines that Moscow has marked are not crossed. One of them concerns NATO's eastward expansion. In this context I have two questions. What is the reason for its silence? How long will Russia wait? In principle, can the collective West accept Russia's proposals for a peaceful coexistence?

**Sergey Lavrov:** This is probably the most important question now. I cannot say that our initiatives are being ignored. President of Russia Vladimir Putin spoke in detail about this at the expanded meeting of the Defence Ministry Board yesterday. He said that the issue had been on the agenda of a recent videoconference with US President Joseph Biden, who expressed readiness to

look at Russia's concerns. We have presented our vision for possible agreements. One document is a draft treaty on security matters between the Russian Federation and the United States. Another is a draft agreement on addressing security issues in Russia-NATO relations. NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg regularly makes inadequate statements. He is planning to leave this post soon, though. His term will expire at the end of the year. The rumour is that he will become Norway's next central bank governor (or at least he is applying for this post). A central bank governor must clearly and precisely comply with the organisation's fundamental operating principles. European and Euro-Atlantic security is based on several principles that were coordinated and signed at the top level in the form of political commitments, including the fundamental principle of equal and indivisible security. According to it, as the heads of state and government agreed explicitly, no single state or group of states in the Euro-Atlantic region and the OSCE space will strengthen its security by infringing on the security of others.

Mr Stoltenberg has said openly and quite arrogantly, pompously that no one may violate the principles of the Washington Treaty, under which the doors are open to any aspirant wishing to join the North Atlantic alliance. We are not a member of this organisation or a signatory to that treaty. But we signed a much broader Euro-Atlantic document, which applies to the whole of the region and includes the principle of indivisible security. If Mr Stoltenberg thinks that NATO members can brush off this principle, which has been formalised in the documents signed at the top level, he should indeed look for a new job, because he is clearly underperforming in his current position.

As for the real reaction of our American colleagues (not the rhetorical one I have just mentioned), I would describe it as business-like. A series of talks have been held at the level of foreign policy aides to the presidents of Russia and the United States. During the latest conversation the parties coordinated the modalities for their further collaboration. It has been agreed that the first round early next year should be bilateral contact between the American negotiators and our own. They have been named, and they are acceptable to both parties. After that, we plan to use the negotiating platform to discuss the second document – the draft Russia-NATO agreement – in the foreseeable future, preferably in January.

The other day President Vladimir Putin spoke by phone with President of France Emmanuel Macron and Federal Chancellor of Germany Olaf Scholz. They indicated their interest in these matters as well. President Putin has

reaffirmed that we would propose discussing security guarantees at the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE).

There are three possible tracks. There is agreement on the necessity of using them, at least between Moscow and Washington. I see no reason why this approach should run counter to the interests of any state in our common region. The Americans have said that they are ready to discuss some of the concerns we have put on paper, that our other concerns are unacceptable to them, and that they have their own concerns as well. We are ready to discuss them, but they have not yet presented them. After we coordinate organisational matters, there will be a lot of hard work on the essence. But, as President Putin has said, it cannot last forever, because the situation around us has been going from bad to worse in recent decades. NATO's military infrastructure is approaching our border. We were deceived at every turn, starting with verbal promises and ending with the political commitments set down in the Russia-NATO Founding Act. This time, as President Putin has said, we want to see legally binding guarantees. Even though we know that the West can easily violate legally binding guarantees and pull out of these agreements, as happened in the case of the ABM Treaty, the INF Treaty and the Open Skies Treaty. Nevertheless, it is much more difficult to draw legally binding guarantees in words, as the President has said, than verbal promises or political commitments. We are ready for this work. We will do our best to make our message loud and clear. I hope that this, together with our efforts to ensure a reliable defence capability, will convince our partners to take us seriously.

**Question:** As you know, RT has launched its German broadcasting service, but in less than a week the Eutelsat 9 satellite “removed” our channel, under pressure from a German regulator. They are threatening to take us to court and close us. YouTube, in turn, where we also offered our stream, deleted our channel on its launch day. Is the Foreign Ministry aware of these developments, and to what extent? Do you intend to undertake anything specifically to support our network and journalists?

**Sergey Lavrov:** Make no mistake, we are aware of these developments. Foreign Ministry Spokeswoman Maria Zakharova has commented on this matter many times. We are keeping a close eye on the environment in which Russian journalists work abroad, since discrimination against them has been all too common. RT and Sputnik have yet to be accredited by the Elysee Palace. Just a few days ago, President Vladimir Putin talked to his French counterpart, Emmanuel Macron, on the phone, and during the conversation he pointed out this fact, expressing hope that our French colleagues would do everything to

enable the Russian media, including RT, to operate in France in the same journalist-friendly environment as the French journalists enjoy in Russia.

We would like the same principle to apply to RT in Germany and to any other Russian media outlet facing discrimination abroad. I believe that what happened in Germany was outrageous. From the outset, the German authorities went to great lengths to generate negative publicity about the channel, targeting the general public, as well as officials, even though some officials did try to distance themselves from what the German “regulator” was doing. It all started with attempts to block banking services, after which they refused to register the channel and prevented Luxembourg from doing so. Our colleagues in Serbia have been able to register the German-language RT channel as per the European Convention on Transfrontier Television, to which Germany is a party and must abide by its provisions.

By all accounts, they will now try to shift the blame to social networks like YouTube, pretending that it was their initiative and that they are guided by their own in-house “criteria,” while the German state has nothing to do with this. This is not the way things are. The German state must be involved, since Germany has undertaken to ensure freedom of information and assumed these commitments. It is not YouTube who is to blame but the state on whose territory arbitrary actions of this kind take place.

We have been witnessing discrimination against the Russian media for many years now. Quite often, we have been tempted to respond in kind, in a tit-for-tat manner. However, until recently there was a prevailing belief that we did not want to go along the same path of “strangling” the press and the media, following in the footsteps of our Western partners. That said, just as with efforts to ensure Russia’s security, this patience has its limits. I cannot rule out that this unacceptable situation will persist, leaving us with no other choice but to respond.

**Question:** There have been important developments in Latin America over the past twelve months. For example, Chile has recently held its presidential election, handing the victory to Gabriel Boric, a left-wing politician. The left also carried the election in Honduras. It remains in power in Nicaragua and Venezuela. At the same time, the United States continues to treat this region as pertaining to its sphere of influence. Do you believe that the shifting political winds in some of these countries can be interpreted as Latin America becoming more mature, from a political standpoint, or this region still “belongs” to the Americans, as they continue to believe, remaining their “soft underbelly,” so that Latin American countries remain guided by the rules the United States sets in

the spirit of the recent Summit for Democracy.

**Sergey Lavrov:** Over the past 50 or 60 years, and maybe even a longer period, the political landscape has changed in Latin America many times, swinging either to the left, or to the right. Today, we are witnessing a new round, with the arrival to power of vital forces who are focused on the national interests of their countries. I do think that this reflects a more general trend: the neo-liberal project has failed abysmally. Here is what I want to emphasise: the Russian Federation has never proceeded in its relations with Latin America depending on what government is in power. We want to promote friendship and mutually beneficial cooperation with countries and their people, instead of just working with specific governments depending on their political preferences. Unlike the United States, Russia does not view Latin America as an arena for geopolitical games. The current US administration has not repeated the statements we heard from former National Security Adviser to Donald Trump, John Bolton, who said that the Monroe Doctrine was still relevant. From a practical standpoint, however, this policy, this mentality lives on, including in the specific policies the United States promotes.

We work with all countries without exception, as well as with subregional organisations in Latin America and the Caribbean. Only in the past twelve months we had contacts with our colleagues from Mexico, Venezuela, Bolivia, Brazil, Guatemala, Nicaragua, Honduras, Cuba, and Belize. I had a meeting with representatives of the Central American Integration System on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly in New York, and on the sidelines of a G20 meeting I met with my Argentinian counterpart. We have always emphasised our commitment to making our bilateral ties politics-free.

As for multilateral structures and organisations, like most Latin American countries, we will stand for the values, norms, purposes, and principles enshrined in the UN Charter. Last year, Venezuela initiated the establishment of the Group of Friends in Defence of the UN Charter. It has rapidly gathered more than 20 participants. I do believe that more countries will join this mechanism, including those from Latin America. To an extent this is a response to the attempts by the United States and its closest allies to “move away” from international law and proceed in their statements, arguments and politics from the “rules-based world order” of their own making. They are the ones who shape these “rules” within their narrow circle, where no alternative points of view can be heard, and where there are no disputes. Accordingly, this does not provide fertile ground for truth to emerge.

At the same time, I do see that the current US administration is beginning to be a little bit more pragmatic in its assessments of these developments. They are starting to explore other options regarding Venezuela. They are beginning to understand that they will have to engage in dialogue with the government of President Nicolas Maduro, who consolidated his mandate in the election. Similar developments are unfolding in Bolivia with the restoration of a genuine democracy after the quite questionable undertakings of the previous governments, and the list goes on. I hope that Washington understands and perceives the reality in a country like Nicaragua as it is. We want extra-regional powers to proactively contribute to shaping a Latin American and Caribbean identity as a major centre of gravity in the emerging multipolar world order. We value our relations with regional and subregional structures in this region, especially the Council of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC), with which we have a mechanism for political consultations. We had to put these contacts on hold during the pandemic. Mexico is currently the CELAC chair and is looking forward to the resumption of our meetings. We will proactively support this attitude. We cooperate, among other things, on high technology, energy, agriculture, space, nuclear energy, healthcare and medicine. Russia has already transferred its vaccine production technology to several Latin American countries – Mexico, Brazil, Argentina and Nicaragua. They are proactive in their efforts to master this technology and set up manufacturing. I think that these relevant contacts will pave the way to a more comprehensive cooperation on pharmaceuticals, healthcare, and medicine.

**Question:** There are many issues that are of interest to our multi-million Arab audience, but, regrettably, we are short of time and cannot ask about everything. We would like to discuss Iran with you. The West proceeds to accuse Iran of continuing nuclear escalation, which, in their opinion, may lead to the collapse of the JCPOA talks. At the same time, Tehran says that the EU is engaging in disinformation instead of serious talks. What is Russia's position and what is needed for these talks to achieve success?

**Sergey Lavrov:** To my regret, our Western partners are attempting to distort facts in the same way as I outlined while answering the previous, the first question. NATO is impetuously approaching our borders, but the escalation is "blamed" on Russia which has armed forces that are not leaving its territory. It is the same here. The Trump administration withdrew from all agreements – the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action itself and the UN Security Council resolution that endorsed it – but the blame is again laid on Iran. When Donald Trump did that, the Iranians took no steps that would be inconsistent with their

commitments under JCPOA for more than a year. It was only after it became clear that Washington's decision was irreversible that the Iranians began using opportunities afforded by JCPOA itself, which concerned Tehran's voluntary obligations, related to some or other aspects of its nuclear programme. They restricted or stopped the implementation of only the voluntary obligations. And each time they emphasised: "Yes, we are doing this, we are increasing the percentage of enrichment or launching more technologically advanced centrifuges, but as soon as the United States returns in full to the implementation of its commitments, we won't be holding things up." It is this principle or understanding that the current Vienna talks are based on. Between April and June, there were six rounds of talks, during which the Americans and the Iranians were not sitting at the same table. A group of coordinators from the European foreign policy service was at work there as were the delegations of China, Russia, France, Germany, and the UK. Following the six rounds of talks, a "package of understandings" was formed, which allowed us to hope that we would be able to definitively come to an agreement. Then, there followed an inevitable pause because a new government was being formed in Iran after the elections. At this juncture, our European colleagues were displaying a sort of fussiness and impatience, urging Iran to do all that as soon as possible. We reminded them that Iran had waited for more than a year for the Americans to return to this understanding and that it withdrew when its wait proved futile. So, it was all quite natural.

I would not overdramatise anything. It is clear that the Iranians have a new team. But they have "mastered" the material quite rapidly and professionally. They have drafted proposals which at first met with a hostile reception from some Western participants, but eventually they admitted that these proposals had the right to exist and could be studied. The work is proceeding precisely in this way. The problems that were arising were related to image rather than substance. Who – the United States or Iran – should be the first to say: "OK, I am back and ready to perform my commitments?" Iran was convinced that the Americans should do that because they were the first to leave JCPOA. The Americans believed that Iran was the first to start violating its commitments and therefore should make the first step regardless of the fact that Washington had carried out none of its obligations at all. Together with our Chinese friends and based on a measure of understanding from the European participants, we insisted on synchronising these moves and elaborating a package of reciprocal steps. This is what the negotiators are doing in Vienna right now. They have paused for a while ahead of Christmas. But the talks will

resume before the end of the year. Iran is confirming that it will return to the full implementation of its obligations, including the application of the protocol additional to the Safeguards Agreement with the IAEA, if the United States resumes full implementation of its obligations and stops threatening it with sanctions that are incompatible with both JCPOA and Resolution 2231. I think that we have a good chance. The important thing is to keep in mind the generally accepted principle that underlies the current proceedings, namely, nothing can be agreed until everything is agreed. We need a good, well-adjusted package, and it is quite real.

**Question:** As you are aware, Foreign Minister of France Jean-Yves Le Drian has warned of “grave consequences” in the event of Russia invading Ukraine. Can you say why our interaction with Western officials has recently turned into endless threats?

**Sergey Lavrov:** You should ask them about this. This gives me no pleasure, but neither do I have any negative emotions about it. We have become accustomed to our Western colleagues speaking haughtily and making statements that reflect their vision of themselves as power brokers and as politicians who are without sin and can never be wrong. The French authorities have made numerous statements about conducting a “demanding” dialogue with Russia. They continue to make demands of us. I believe that President Putin and other members of the Russian leadership have spoken a great deal during the past few weeks about the “escalation” for which we would be punished, and it seems that they have already prepared a package of sanctions, just in case, like social networks that are encouraging users to buy things for potential use in the future. Our Western colleagues probably think that this principle can also be applied in politics.

We have explained many times that our armed forces are operating in our own territory. We also asked what the Americans, Canadians and the British and their offensive military systems and strike aviation are doing on the border with Russia, for example in the Baltic states. We asked what their warships are doing in the Black Sea in violation of the principles of the Montreux Convention. They have not provided any reasonable explanation, only more threats. Instead of making threats for no reason, our European colleagues would be better to get down to their own direct responsibilities. France, acting together with Germany in this case, should make Kiev comply with the Minsk Agreements instead of trying to deflect attention, as it is doing now, by using the smokescreen of accusations about Russia allegedly aggravating the situation and planning to take



over the whole or part of Donbass or even the whole of Ukraine. This is obvious.

Vladimir Zelensky and his regime are trying to dramatise the Crimean issue. Nothing of this was taking place several years ago. Back then, people hoped that Kiev would implement the Minsk Agreements, one way or another, which Vladimir Zelensky promised to do when he was running for president. But when he assumed office, he became aware that he either does not want to or cannot implement his promise, or that neo-Nazis or the far-right will not allow him to do this. This was when the issue of Crimea was raised as nearly the main symbol of Ukrainian policy, but actually in order to draw public attention away from Kiev's inability to implement the Minsk Agreements. This has led to the establishment of the Crimea Platform and all the accompanying features. This is empty talk and hot air. Everyone is perfectly aware of this, including our Western colleagues who are playing with this "toy." What they must do, instead of playing games, is force Vladimir Zelensky to implement UN Security Council Resolution 2202, which approved the Minsk Agreements. They say openly what should be done, by whom and in what order. It is Kiev, Donetsk and Lugansk. First an amnesty, a special status and elections on conditions coordinated between Kiev, Donetsk and Lugansk under OSCE guidance. Only after that will the Armed Forces of Ukraine resume control over the entire length of the border.

They have proposed reversing the order now, saying "Give our border back to us, and after that we will decide if there will be a special status or not." Take the Ukrainian draft law On the Principles of State Policy of the Transition Period, about which President Putin spoke with President Emmanuel Macron and Chancellor Angela Merkel on many occasions, and which he mentioned yesterday in a conversation with Chancellor Olaf Scholz. The Ukrainian government has submitted it to the Verkhovna Rada. This bill prohibits Ukrainian officials from implementing the Minsk Agreements. It stipulates lustration instead of amnesty, a military-civilian administration instead of a special status, and no elections coordinated with that part of Ukraine. It only stipulates "regaining control over the occupied territories," as they say.

Although France and Germany have promised to dissuade Zelensky from promoting this bill, energetic efforts are being made to include it in the legislative process. They have submitted it to the Council of Europe. The Council's Venice Commission said that in its opinion it is fine. It said something on the legal techniques but did not mention that this bill directly contradicts the relevant UN Security Council resolution.

I would like to tell my good friend Jean-Yves Le Drian and my German colleagues that it would be fitting for them to busy themselves with this matter.

This would draw their attention away from their groundless preoccupation with the nonexistent escalation.

**Question:** The Western media continue stoking tension around the Ukrainian crisis. For example, CNN has long been perorating about thousands of Russian soldiers amassed on the Ukrainian border. You have said many times that this effort to build up tension amounts to a special operation, which prompted Russia to make an unprecedented step in November 2021 by disclosing the contents of diplomatic talks with France and Germany. At the time, it was said that this move was designed to prevent the distortion of Russia's position on the peace process in Ukraine. Have you achieved this objective by making your diplomatic contacts public?

**Sergey Lavrov:** I do believe that this initiative has served its purpose. It is not my intention to appeal to anyone's conscience or make someone feel ashamed. This is a matter of diplomacy. Emotions are a poor adviser in this realm. A healthy dose of cynicism is what we need here, as one of my colleagues has said. As far as healthy cynicism is concerned, the talks you have referred to were quite telling. They completely refuted the statements we had been hearing before going public. In fact, there were allegations that Russia was blocking the Normandy format. This is not true. The fact that Kiev seeks to distort the Minsk Agreements and turn them upside down is a matter of grave concern for us. As I already said in my answer to the previous question, the French and the Germans have co-sponsored these documents and are parties to the Normandy format, but they are beginning to side completely with the Ukrainian regime.

They used to tell us that there was no alternative to the Minsk Agreements, which everyone had to implement. On October 12, 2021, there was the Ukraine-EU Summit, during which what Russia "must do" was stated, while Kiev was said to have done a great job, fulfilling its obligations within the Normandy format, as well as the Contract Group. President Vladimir Zelensky recently had meetings with the heads of Germany and France on the sidelines of the Eastern Partnership summit in Brussels. Once again, Kiev's actions to carry out the Minsk Agreements received full support. What this means is that either our colleagues acknowledged their inability to ensure the implementation of the provisions that we set forth together, or they are knowingly seeking to undermine the Minsk Agreements for the benefit of the Kiev regime. How the situation will evolve from here I do not know, but we will insist that these documents are fulfilled in good faith, because there can be no alternative ways

of interpreting them. It is said in these documents that what comes first is the ceasefire, the withdrawal of heavy weapons and restoring economic ties. This has yet to be accomplished. Moreover, some areas of the Lugansk and Donetsk regions are still enduring an all-out trade, economic and transport blockade.

When we issue Russian passports to these people, who find themselves on the brink of dying, as well as grant subsidies to their companies so that they can operate on the Russian market and generate revenue for their employees, we stand accused of undermining the Minsk Agreements.

As for the citizenship controversy, this is ridiculous. The Poles, the Hungarians, and the Romanians issue passports to people belonging to their ethnic groups who live in Ukraine. This has been going on for decades now, and no one was worried about this. But now they are beginning to attack Russia. These are not just accusations coming from the Kiev radicals, but the West is also beginning to sing along. This is sad.

During the Geneva summit, the US President said that he was interested in using opportunities the United States can offer to facilitate the implementation of the Minsk Agreements without undermining the Normandy format – these were his words. He also pointed out that he understood that they provided for granting these territories a special status. Russia actively supported this initiative. We discussed the same approach during US Under Secretary of State Victoria Nuland's visit to Russia. Then Assistant Secretary of State Karen Donfried came here to discuss the Ukrainian affairs. They all reaffirmed the need to decide on the special status for Donbass as per the Minsk Agreements. This is what Secretary of State Antony Blinken told me in Stockholm on the sidelines of the OSCE Ministerial Council in early December 2021.

Let us hope that if the United States understands the need to put an end to the outright sabotage efforts and the scandalous agitations by the Kiev regime, this will only make us happy. Some political observers have been trying to guess whether this will be a question of some kind of "trade." They have been arguing that fulfilling the Minsk Agreements could pave the way to an agreement on containment measures in the context of Russia's initiatives on security guarantees, including guarantees that NATO would stop its eastward expansion and ruling out any deployments of weapons that may be a threat to us in neighbouring countries or locations from where they may pose a threat to the Russian Federation. I will not comment on these attempts at "fortune-telling." What matters to us is that the Minsk Agreements are fully implemented, including the requirement for Ukraine to ensure that the rights of ethnic minorities are respected, as per the Ukrainian Constitution, as well as the

European conventions the Ukrainian state has signed. This also applies to broader security guarantees and bringing more clarity and predictability into the relations between Russia and NATO.

**Question:** What do you think about the likelihood of this situation escalating, an armed conflict, and if this is the case, how will your ministry respond?

**Sergey Lavrov:** Our philosophy has been well known for a long time now. It can be found in the lines of a popular song titled “Do Russians Want War?” We do not want war. President Putin conveyed this once again. We do not need conflicts and we hope that no one else sees conflicts as a preferable course of action. We will strictly ensure our security with the means that we deem necessary. We want the hotheads out there be mindful of this. There are lots of them in Ukraine, and some politicians in the West are trying to add fuel to aggressive actions in Ukraine as well. Their calculus is simple: the more irritants there are at our borders, the more hopeful they will be in their ability to put Russia off balance, so that it does not stand in their way as they try to control the geopolitical territories in question. Speaking at the Russian Defence Ministry Board yesterday, President Putin made it clear that we have all the necessary capabilities to provide an appropriate response, including military-technical, to any provocations that may unfold with regard to us. To reiterate, the path of confrontation is not our choice. It is up to our partners. I see the fact that the leadership of the United States has rather promptly agreed with us upon the organisational framework for further steps (despite a serious amount of work to be done on the substance of the issue), as a positive step in the run-up to the New Year.

**Question:** You mentioned the fact that Germany had changed its stance on the Minsk Agreements. Russia-Germany relations have worsened over the past several years. Official Berlin is blaming Moscow for that. Why is that?

**Sergey Lavrov:** I have already touched on this issue. Listen to what Germany's Defence Minister Christine Lambrecht and President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen (when she worked in the German government and now on behalf of the entire union) are saying. The message is as follows: we are interested in normal relations with Russia, but it must change its behaviour first. I had a good telephone conversation with German Federal Minister for Foreign Affairs Annalena Baerbock. I reiterated my invitation to visit Russia, and she accepted it. I noted the fact that the new German government's coalition agreement contains a thesis about the depth and diversity

of Russian-German ties and a commitment to a constructive dialogue. It has other approaches to relations with Russia as well, including offensive “mantras” to the effect that our civil society is being infringed upon every step of the way, the demands to put an end to destabilisation in Ukraine, and much more.

According to the traditions of German democracy, coalitions must be combined in a variety of ways. This does not always work out in a homogeneous manner. This is life and we take it as a fact of life. The coalition is led by the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD). The most productive periods of interaction, coexistence and mutually beneficial cooperation between Moscow and Berlin are associated with SPD leaders. We hope that the SPD coalition partners will focus more on ways to build a positive agenda. An approach where one side is doing everything correctly and is flawless, whereas Russia supposedly must “change its behaviour, is not viable.

**Question:** The US military presence remains a perceptible threat for Syria's territorial integrity. Russia has repeatedly urged the US to withdraw its forces, but they are still there. How much longer will this problem persist? What could prod the United States into pulling out its troops? What are its true aims?

**Sergey Lavrov:** Its true aims are rather clear. The Americans have never concealed them, for that matter. They have placed under their control the hydrocarbons, the [oil] fields on the eastern bank of the Euphrates, and agricultural lands. This done, they started doing their best to nurture local Kurdish separatism. This is common knowledge. Arab tribes traditionally dwell on parts of the territories where this is taking place. And this does nothing to add harmony or prestige to the US “planners” in Syria, including how they treat the Kurdish factor or take into consideration relations between Kurds and Arabs.

The situation over there is difficult and this has much to do with Turkey's position. Ankara regards Kurdish organisations cooperating with the Americans as chapters of the Kurdistan Workers' Party, which it regards as a terrorist group. The Kurds themselves (specifically the Syrian Democratic Council, the political wing of the Democratic Union Party) should decide what they will do. At some stage, the former US President, Donald Trump, said they were leaving Syria because they had nothing to do there. The Kurds immediately began asking everyone (including Russia) to help them establish a dialogue with Damascus. Several days later, Trump's statement was disavowed, with someone in the Pentagon saying that they were not yet leaving. The Kurds immediately lost interest in a dialogue with the Syrian leaders. Understandably, the Americans will eventually leave. They are getting more problems where they have imposed their rules, including the Rukban refugee camp and the 55-mile zone around Al-

Tanf. But in real terms, they are unable to ensure the functioning of these facilities. Besides, there are many thugs and terrorists among the refugees. I am confident that the Kurds should take a position of principle. We are ready to help them in this. They keep coming to Russia. Not so long ago, President of the Executive Committee of the Syrian Democratic Council Ilham Ahmed was here on a visit.

We are explaining to our Turkish colleagues that we are totally reluctant to encourage trends that Turkey regards as negative. On the contrary, our task is to help implement in practice the requirement to respect Syria's sovereignty and territorial integrity. Taking into account the interests of ethnic minorities is one of the key conditions. The United States is aware that they feel uncomfortable and out of their element there. While they are there, the dialogue between the military is rather effective from the point of view of preventing unpremeditated incidents. There are trust-based consultations on exchanges of views regarding the political process and prospects for implementing the UN Security Council resolution.

**Question:** US National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan said frankly some time ago that the United States was actively trying to overhaul the existing world order by forming new alliances, partnerships and institutions, designed to work in Washington's interests. Are these attempts a serious threat to Russia? What specific steps are the Russian diplomats and national leaders taking to prevent the diminution of the UN's effectiveness?

**Sergey Lavrov:** This topic is not new. I have mentioned the fact that the United States and its allies no longer use the term "international law." They say that everyone must respect the "rules-based world order." This is from the same series. The UN includes a huge number of programmes, funds, specialised agencies, and regional economic commissions, where all countries without exception have their representatives. They are open to the participation of all UN members. But in parallel, platforms with the same agendas are being established outside the UN.

The Paris Peace Forum proclaimed that it would create a mechanism to protect journalists and enforce media freedom. Many other initiatives on ensuring cyber security, strengthening international humanitarian law, etc., were also put forward. But there are UNESCO, the UN Human Rights Council, or any other body where all the rules are coordinated on a universal basis. The UN Charter is also a rule. We are not against rules as such. We are in favour of universally supported rules.

Our Western colleagues see a threat to their interests in a number of areas

(media freedom, access to information, the situation in cyberspace, etc.). According to their claims, coordinating universally acceptable rules at the universal UN venue will allegedly impinge on their interests, which they unilaterally would like to make preferable in this or that sphere of human activities. This is the source of it. The West wants not only governments but also businesses and civil society institutions to be present at venues where they are making their “rules,” thereby eroding the intergovernmental nature of agreements that might otherwise be stable. This is the line, policy, and course that they are actively promoting. We think that this is a wrong interpretation of what is needed today for international relations.

My counterpart, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken, has declared that the United States cannot but play the leading role and define the rules in the modern world. Allegedly, many of his interlocutors (practically all over the globe) tell him each time how fine it is that the United States is back and ordering them around. Mr Blinken added that whenever they failed to do that, someone else stepped in to lead, or chaos reigned supreme. This philosophy is rather egoistic. To overcome the trend for a return to diktat and hegemony, President of Russia Vladimir Putin has suggested convening a summit of the UN Security Council's permanent members. He did this, not because they are more senior than the others but because they bear a special responsibility under the UN Charter, which implies the need to coordinate common ideas on how to strengthen international peace and security. The rest of the international community has accepted these recommendations with interest.

We are promoting this idea, it is in the works. Today, at the preparatory stage, we are discussing the specific parameters. We will actively use it to defend international law and the organisations of which Russia is a member, including the UN, CIS, CSTO, EAEU, BRICS, SCO, and G20. G20 is a “concentrated” image of the entire UN membership. It includes the leading Western nations (G7), the BRICS countries, and their soul-mates. This is the venue where we can and must work out recommendations that are later submitted for consideration by the existing universal formats, primarily the UN.

**Question:** The MH17 court in The Hague denied a request by the defence lawyers to disclose information about witness S-45 and to provide a transcript of interrogation where he argued that the missile that shot down the Malaysian Boeing was not launched from the spot that the investigation claims it was launched from. When will the decision on this case be announced? How will Russia respond to the accusation?

**Sergey Lavrov:** We will respond when the ruling is announced. We are

closely following the process, primarily because the issue is about Russian citizens who are defendants at this point. We are witnessing the attempts to create the impression that this is not a criminal case, but a state problem, since Russia allegedly was behind these people. This is absolutely unacceptable and is a case of carrying out attempts with unsuitable means. This is an inherently criminal process. We consider it as such. Any impartial lawyer understands that this is the case. There are multiple inconsistencies, failure to follow the rules of an impartial trial, clerical work, and interrogation of witnesses. Almost all the witnesses are on a secret list, including the one you mentioned who could have shed light on the facts that have been ignored by the investigation so far. And the fact that the request by the defendants' lawyer was rejected without any explanation also speaks volumes. They ignored the simulation experiment conducted by Almaz-Antey which proves that the statement about the specific type of missile used in the attack is not corroborated by facts. Our Defence Ministry provided documents confirming that the missile in question was manufactured in 1986, deployed at a military unit in Ukraine and remained there until it was fired. All of that information was ignored.

I would like you to look at the facts that are more political by nature, but are highly convincing. Representatives of Malaysia were the first to arrive at the crash site. It was their aircraft, their airline. They and the militias (who are referred to as “separatists,” “terrorists” and the like), found the black boxes. The militias made these boxes available for study without even trying to hide them. The boxes were sent to London for expert analysis, but the results have not yet been released. In other words, the militias helped sort things out in the very first hours following the crash. The Dutch showed up much later. Interestingly, Holland, Belgium, Australia and Ukraine created a joint investigation team, but left Malaysia out. The Malaysians were invited to join it five months later, although under ICAO rules, the country that owns the aircraft in question should be part of the investigation from day one.

The third fact, which those who accuse the Russian state are stubbornly turning a blind eye to, is that several days after the tragedy, we initiated the adoption of a UN Security Council resolution which instructed the ICAO to start an impartial investigation and established its underlying principles. Since then, this organisation has remained rather uninvolved in the investigation which was usurped by this joint investigation team, which Malaysia was invited to join only later in the year. In addition to Almaz-Antey's simulation, the results of which were ignored by the investigation, Russia provided primary data from its radars which were also turned down as proper evidence, even though they provide



absolutely irrefutable data. At the same time, no one is asking Ukraine to disclose its radar data. The court was satisfied with Kiev saying that the radars were not operating at that time. Nobody is asking Ukraine to provide a transcript of conversations between the air traffic controller and MH17; the lady who was on the phone in the control room has vanished.

Questions abound. No one is asking the Americans to show satellite data, which, they claim, irrefutably prove that the investigation is on the right track. The investigative authorities simply added a record that the United States possesses these satellite images. The investigation found this statement quite satisfactory.

The list of absurdities, blatant violations of the principles of impartiality and sweeping hard facts under the rug goes on and on. Of course, relatives in the Netherlands tried to open another trial on Ukraine not closing its airspace. Their appeal was turned down and deemed irrelevant.

Back to where we are now. In the spring, Russia saw the first wave of accusations in connection with the fact that we were conducting military exercises on our territory near our western borders. No one spotted any hostilities there, because there were none. However, only because of the exercises, the United States formally directed its airlines not to fly over the area. In other words, the US authorities considered the exercises a good enough reason not to fly over the area, whereas at a time where everyone knew perfectly well that a real war was going on in Donbass in July 2014, the airspace was not closed. Now everyone is keeping bashfully silent and believes that this is irrelevant and Ukraine shouldn't have closed the airspace. This incident, just like many other developments involving Western approaches to a particular event in international life, is rife with double standards.



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