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Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's remarks and answers to media questions at the news conference on the performance of Russian diplomacy in 2022, Moscow, January 18, 2023

Good afternoon, colleagues.

Our tradition has been to meet at the beginning of the new year to discuss the results and events of the past year. 2022 was difficult and even unique to some extent. It reflected deep-rooted trends in geopolitics and the international aspirations of the leading states, which had been brewing for more than a decade.

Our Western colleagues tried to turn Ukraine and the developments around it into the main media, political and economic event, accusing the Russian Federation of the troubles in the global economy because of its “aggression” against Ukraine. I do not want to dwell on refuting these assertions. The statistics of the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) and other international agencies convincingly show that the crisis had been developing long before the start of the special military operation. President of Russia Vladimir Putin repeatedly cited data showing the emergence of negative phenomena in the global economy, primarily due to the egoistic position of the United States and its allies.

What is happening in Ukraine now is the result of preparations by the US and its satellites for the start of a global hybrid war against the Russian Federation. Nobody is hiding this fact. This is clear from statements by unbiased Western politologists, scientists and politicians. In his recent article, Ian Bremmer, political science professor at Columbia University, wrote: “We are not in a cold war with Russia. We are in a hot war with Russia. Now it's a proxy war. And NATO is not fighting it directly. We are fighting it through Ukraine.” This admission is frank and this conclusion is on the surface. It is strange that some people try to refute it. Recently, President of Croatia Zoran Milanovic said that this is a NATO war. An open and honest statement. Several weeks ago, Henry Kissinger (before he urged

NATO to accept Ukraine in his recent article) wrote in clear terms that the events in Ukraine were a clash, a rivalry of two nuclear powers for control over that territory. It is clear enough what he meant.

Our Western partners are cunning while vehemently trying to prove that they are not fighting Russia but are only helping Ukraine respond to an “aggression” and restore its territorial integrity. The scale of their support makes it clear that the West has staked a great deal on its war against Russia; this is obvious.

The events surrounding Ukraine have brought to light the implicit push by the United States to drop attempts to reinforce its global position with legitimate means and to adopt illegitimate methods to ensure its dominance. Anything goes. Once revered mechanisms and institutions that were created by the US-led West have been discarded (and not because of what we are seeing in Ukraine). Free market, fair competition, free enterprise, the inviolability of property, and the presumption of innocence, in a word, everything the Western globalisation model relied on collapsed overnight. Sanctions have been imposed on Russia and other objectionable countries that do not comply with these tenets and mechanisms. Clearly, sanctions can be imposed any time on any country, which, in one way or another, refuses to mindlessly follow American orders.

The European Union has been completely subsumed by this US dictatorship (there's no point in discussing this at length). The signing of the Joint Declaration on EU-NATO Cooperation on January 10 was the high point of this process, something that has been in the making for several years. It states explicitly that the alliance and the EU's goal is to use all political, economic and military means in the interests of the golden billion. This is exactly what it says: in the interests of the one billion residents of NATO and the EU countries. The rest of the world, to quote High Representative of the EU for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Josep Borrell, is a “jungle” that stifles progress in the “garden” and must, therefore, be reformatted, adjusted to their needs and turned into new-style colonies in order to use new methods to ruthlessly pump out resources from them. These methods are all too familiar and include demonisation, blackmail, sanctions, threats of force, and much more. The West's course on destroying traditional ties between historical partners in different regions and fragmenting and destabilising them has become more salient. We can see this in the Balkans and in the post-Soviet space, especially if we take a closer look at what the United States, their “clients” and “fixers” are doing in Central Asia and the South Caucasus.

Everything that is happening around Ukraine has been in the making for a long time. The first Maidan protest took place in 2004 when European officials declared for the first time that Ukraine had to choose sides and decide who it was with, the West or Russia. Since then, this either/or approach has been consistently promoted by the West in its policies in this region. Those who chose the wrong side or believed that their historical and family ties, and their traditions and religious beliefs bonded them with the Russian Federation (even though they lived in Ukraine), were at first more or less delicately, and then ruthlessly, ground down, excluded from political life and criminally prosecuted. They killed intractable journalists and politicians and closed media outlets that did not promote the official point of view. The creation of a police-run Nazi state was in full swing. In fact, it has now been created with the blessing of the West. They used the “either with the West or Russia” choice to identify those who were against the West and proceeded to severely punish them.

Coming back to the NATO-EU Declaration – this is an interesting document. These two organisations are being presented as an alliance of democracies against autocracies amid global rivalry. A patently confrontational agenda has been announced for the world to hear. Europe has waived its independence. The Joint Declaration directly subordinates Europe to NATO. It includes commitments to serve US interests in matters of geopolitical containment of Russia and China. Their declared goal – well known to everyone before but now laid out in black and white – is to enable the US-led alliance to achieve global preeminence.

NATO is not limited to organising life on the European continent. In June 2022, NATO's Madrid Summit declared that the military bloc had a global commitment, specifically in relation of the Asia-Pacific region, which they call the Indo-Pacific region. It is clear that they are attempting to make overtures to India to create additional problems in its relations with China. Their battle-cry is indivisibility of security in the Euro-Atlantic and Indo-Pacific regions. Mere word play. Since the 1990s, the same commitment to the principle of indivisibility of security was declared by the OSCE and Russia-NATO Council. This term was used to mean equal security for every state and an obligation not to strengthen one's own security at the expense of another's. Now it has been taken out of context and given a new meaning – the indivisibility of interests of NATO and the Indo-Pacific region. The difference is obvious.

In the so-called “Indo-Pacific region,” the West is out to create bloc

architecture against Russia and China. With this aim in view, they have consistently been destroying (although they prefer to keep quiet about this) the decades-old mechanisms and formats of cooperation created around ASEAN based on equality, consensus, and a balance of interests. Instead, they are putting together military blocs. A shining case in point is AUKUS, an Anglo-Saxon bloc in Asia, which includes the US, the UK, and Australia). Japan is under pressure to join it as well. Prime Minister Fumio Kishida's recent visit to Washington ended up confirming this course. Japan is militarising again. As I understand it, Japan is bracing to alter the articles in its constitution that prevent it from doing this. The process is underway.

I will not speak now about the West's actions in other geopolitical areas. Today we regard the policies of the US and the West as a whole as the main problem creating difficulties in all areas. In short, this is what it means. Washington's policy of dictate in international affairs means precisely that the Americans can do anything anywhere they want, even at the other end of the Earth. They do what they think is necessary. All other countries cannot do anything without the US's approval, even in response to direct security threats the US creates on their borders.

Like Napoleon, who mobilised nearly all of Europe against the Russian Empire, and Hitler, who occupied the majority of European countries and hurled them at the Soviet Union, the United States has created a coalition of nearly all European member states of NATO and the EU and is using Ukraine to wage a proxy war against Russia with the old aim of finally solving the "Russian question," like Hitler, who sought a final solution to the "Jewish question."

Western politicians – not only from the Baltics and Poland but also from more reasonable countries – say that Russia must be dealt a strategic defeat. Some political analysts write about decolonising Russia, that our country is too big and "gets in the way." The other day I read an item in *The Telegraph* that called for liberating Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Transnistria, while leaving Karelia, Koenigsberg and the Kuril Islands for negotiations. Of course, it is a tabloid, but we have to read yellow sheets because they sometimes make headline news.

Quite a few such statements have been made, including in our non-system opposition. No Western politician has refuted them. President of France Emmanuel Macron, who proposed creating a European Political Community as a format which all European countries apart from Russia and Belarus will be invited to join, has

also suggested convening a conference of European states. He suggested that it should be open for the EU member states, Eastern Partnership countries (Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan), as well as Moldova and Ukraine. I doubt that Belarus will be invited. The potential participants as the EU states and Eastern Partnership countries, plus – note this - politically active emigres from Russia. It has been said (not in Macron's presentation but in subsequent comments) that some Russian regions, which are trying to maintain ties with Europe, could be invited as well. I believe that everything is clear. It is not a black-and-white situation, contrary to what our Western colleagues claim; it reflects their strategy of global domination and unconditional suppression of all countries on pain of punishment.

The Western politicians are talking only about sanctions. Ursula von der Leyen has recently said in Davos that new sanctions will be imposed on Russia and Belarus, that they know which sanctions to adopt to strangle the Russian economy and cause it decades of regression. This is what they want. They have shown their true colours. For many years, UN Security Council members discussed sanctions against countries that violated international law or their obligations. And every time the Western countries that initiated such measures promised that the sanctions would not harm the people but would be targeted at the "regime." What became of their promises?

They openly say that sanctions against Russia are designed to incite the people to rise in a revolution to overthrow the current leaders. Nobody is observing or intends to observe proprieties any longer. But their reaction and frenzied attempts to ensure, by hook or by crook, by any foul means possible, the domination of the US and the West, which Washington has already brought to heel, is proof that, historically, they are acting contrary to the objective course of events by trying to stop the rise of a multipolar world. Such change does not happen on orders from the high offices on the Potomac or in any other capital, but for natural reasons.

Countries are developing economically. Look at China and India (our strategic partners), Türkiye, Brazil, Argentina, Egypt and many African countries. Considering their immense natural resources, their development potential is enormous. New centres of economic growth are emerging. The West is trying to prevent this, in part, by exploiting the mechanisms created to service its interests within the globalisation framework it created. The role of the dollar as a reserve currency is very important in this respect. This is why in our contacts through the

SCO, BRICS, the CIS, and the EAEU, and in our cooperation with associations of Asia, Africa and Latin America, we are doing all we can to create new forms of interaction to avoid dependence on the West and its neocolonialist methods (that are now clear). President of Russia Vladimir Putin spoke about this frankly and clearly. These methods are used with the express purpose of robbing the rest of the world in these new conditions. In dealing with our reliable partners and friendly countries, we are developing forms of cooperation that will benefit all of us. Those who want to subdue the entire world have no say in it.

These are my thoughts on the past year. The main point is that the processes that took place did not start yesterday, but many years ago. They will continue still. It takes time to create a multi-polar world and finalise the relations needed for the triumph of democracy and justice and for the observance of the UN Charter principle of respect for the sovereign equality of all states. The UN Charter is a good foundation. At the time it was adopted, it was a revolutionary document. Unfortunately, the West distorted all its correct principles. It did not respect the principles of sovereign equality of states, non-interference in internal affairs and peaceful settlement of disputes. The United States used its armed forces abroad hundreds of times since the establishment of the UN. In the majority of cases, it crudely violated the UN Charter.

It will take a long time to create a multipolar world order. This will take an entire historical era. We are now in the midst of this process. Sometimes, direct participants of such major events do not see everything immediately. This is why we value so greatly that we are in constant contact and share our opinions and impressions with each other. I am referring not only to our foreign partners but also to media colleagues. Your observations and the questions that you want to ask are useful for us.

Question: What's your take on the likelihood of holding talks about Ukraine between Russia and major US-led Western countries this year? What security issues in the context of a Ukraine settlement would Russia like to put on the table? Do you think it's possible the active phase of the hostilities will be stopped this year?

Sergey Lavrov: With regard to the active phase of hostilities, our military have commented on these issues more than once. President Putin once again personally confirmed that the goals of the special military operation are real and not pulled out of the blue, but rather determined by the fundamental and legitimate

interests of the security of the Russian Federation, its international positions, primarily in our immediate vicinity.

As with any other territory bordering the Russian Federation, there should be no military infrastructure that poses a direct threat to our country, discrimination, or persecution of our compatriots in Ukraine. By the will of fate, they ended up citizens of the Ukrainian state, but they want to preserve their language, culture and traditions, to bring their children up in these traditions in full accordance with the Constitution of Ukraine, which states that it guarantees the free use and protection of Russian and other languages of ethnic minorities. The Russian language is highlighted there. This Constitution remains in force.

We sent materials to media outlets listing the articles of the Constitution and Ukraine's specific obligations under international conventions, as well as an extended list of laws that were adopted in violation of the Constitution and international obligations of the Ukrainian state. I was surprised by President Zelensky's interview with ZDF in October 2022. He argued that if Russia were allowed to win, other large countries would decide that they "can" too. And there are enough such countries on different continents. Therefore, they will allegedly "strangle" the little ones and divide everything else among themselves. Vladimir Zelensky stressed that he is for a different scenario in which everyone on the planet will know that no matter where they live, they have the same rights and are protected like any other person in the world. This was stated by a man who in November 2021 (a year before) said that "species," not people, live in eastern Ukraine. Even earlier, in August 2021, Zelensky noted that if any of the citizens of Ukraine feels Russian and thinks in Russian, and wants to stay Russian, then for the sake of the future of his children and grandchildren, they should clear out for Russia. It was the same man who now declares that he dreams of the day when all are equal and can live as they wish. It is clear that these "beautiful" words are uttered for the benefit of the West, but all this vividly describes the current regime. It is clear why we cannot abandon the core goals of the special military operation.

As for the prospects of talks, they have been discussed and considered dozens of times. I don't want to repeat obvious facts. Starting in March 2021, we supported Ukraine's request for talks. Moreover, we finalised the draft settlement agreement proposed by that country. But Ukraine got a slap on its wrists and told it was too early. Since then, after the spring of 2022, all summer and until the beginning of autumn, Western officials have repeatedly said in different words that

it is too early to start negotiations. The country needs to be given more weapons so that it can start negotiations from a stronger stance. NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg said bluntly the other day that arming Ukraine is the path to peace. Zelensky himself put forward completely absurd 10-point plans which cram everything together: food, energy and biological security, the withdrawal of Russian troops from everywhere, repentance of the Russian Federation, a tribunal and condemnation.

Negotiations with Zelensky are out of the question, because he adopted a law that banned talks with the Russian Government. The Western claptrap to the effect that they are ready to talk, but we are not, is nothing but prevarications.

You asked about the prospects for talks between Russia and the West on Ukraine. We are ready to consider serious proposals and to decide on what we do next. So far, there have not been such proposals. We hear mantras coming from Western capitals about “not a word about Ukraine without Ukraine.” It's nonsense. In fact, the West is making the decisions for Ukraine. They also told Zelensky not to agree on anything with Russia in late March 2022, when an agreement was fully formalised. So, the West is making the calls. It decided without Ukraine and for Ukraine that it was not the right time. Now, they are saying the same thing: they need to get more weapons and to humiliate the Russian Federation.

I'm not sure who among them is doing military planning. CIA Director William Burns met with Head of the Foreign Intelligence Service Sergey Naryshkin. The idea of holding this meeting was put forward by President Biden, and President Putin agreed. The meeting took place without any breakthroughs.

In sporadic and rare contacts that are taking place at one level or another, the West is not saying anything more than it says in its public statements. Our position on this score is well known. Talking with the West only about Ukraine is pointless. It is using Ukraine to destroy the security system that had existed in the Euro-Atlantic region for many years now and relied on the principles of indivisible security and addressing issues through dialogue and cooperation. The OSCE embodied the ideals that the West is now busily burying, just like it practically buried the Council of Europe. Organisations that were created for dialogue and the search for consensus and compromise are now being used to promote the same policy of total domination of the United States (and the rest of the West, which is at its heel) in everything and everywhere. Telling us that we will “think of something” with Ukraine, and everything else will be theirs? No. We will need to sit down and

have a candid discussion.

I don't think we need at this stage to take the initiative in the areas that the West itself closed down, including what it did in the Council of Europe, which everyone was so proud of. Moreover, there are several dozen conventions in the Council of Europe, which do not require a country to be a member of the Council of Europe to be able to participate in them. The West has decided to cancel Russia here as well and to build discriminatory obstacles to the participation of our representatives in the work of the relevant bodies of these conventions, which are open to non-members of the Council of Europe. In this situation, they are putting forward unacceptable terms for the participation of our representatives in review events. Given these circumstances, we will not put up with it. Recently, we withdrew from the Convention against Corruption for this particular reason. This does not mean that we will no longer fight corruption. This means that we are not willing to sit on a side chair during the meetings of a relevant body and listen to Western lectures at a time where even our procedural rights are limited. The list of examples of that kind goes on and on.

Question: Many Europeans believe that Russia did not show its best side when it launched the hostilities, and that it is doing just what the other imperialist countries, like the United States, do. They bombed nearly half of the planet, violating international law to seize territories. These critical remarks have been made in Greece, Cyprus and the Balkans, which also fell victim to this policy. You probably know this issue better than many. It is rumoured that Türkiye is threatening Greece in the Aegean Sea. What are your arguments against this view?

Sergey Lavrov: I will not argue; I will simply put forth my view. You said that Russia did not show its best side when it started the special military operation. This is interesting phrasing.

We showed our "best side" after the Soviet Union dissolved, as President Vladimir Putin pointed out many times. In 2001, one of the first foreign trips he made after he was elected president was to Germany, where he addressed the Bundestag in the German language. By doing that, President Putin became personally involved in a historical reconciliation between Germany and Russia. That reconciliation took place in the late 1980s and early 1990s and began with the fall of the Berlin Wall and the reunification of Germany. It took place at the state and official levels. Vladimir Putin personally contributed to that historical

reconciliation between Russians and Germans. Remember that the reunification of Germany became possible first of all thanks to the Soviet Union, because the other victorious nations were not enthusiastic about it, to put it mildly.

We were willing to show our best side and we did it repeatedly in terms of respect for international law and looking for solutions that could benefit Europe and humankind as a whole. I have cited the example of the first Maidan protests in Ukraine (2004), when the European authorities said that Ukraine must choose between Europe and Russia. It happened three years before Vladimir Putin's Munich speech. We hoped then that reason would prevail, and Europe would see that they should not lie all the time and keep moving NATO further east contrary to their promises. This is unacceptable not only because of their oral promises but also because of their written OSCE obligations that nobody should enhance their security at the expense of other states and that no organisation in the OSCE space should claim domination. That promise was put on paper and signed, in part, by the leaders of Greece, the United States and Russia. The provision that no one should claim domination in Europe has also been included in the documents of the Russia-NATO Council signed at the highest level.

If you think that the alliance's reckless advance, contrary to our official protests, can be interpreted as compliance with that obligation, there will be no understanding between us. I am sure that you don't think so and that you clearly understand the issue at hand. You said that we acted just like the other imperial countries. Yes, we have again been described as an empire. I would rather leave this to experts and professionals.

Russia is a country with a huge number of ethnic groups, nearly 300 languages and nearly all the global religions, where the national traditions of all these ethnic groups are respected. Russia has been developing as a multiethnic and multifaith country for hundreds of years. Unlike the colonial practices of the West, we never suppressed nations that joined the Russian Empire, never destroyed them and never threw them into a melting pot where they would have lost their identity and integrity, becoming all the same, like the Americans. They have failed, like you can see now. All the nations that joined the Russian Empire preserved their values, traditions, identities, customs and languages.

As for seizing territories and that we have the same "instincts" as the Western empires, the United States has invaded other countries' territories about 300 times. In most instances, they did this because somebody had offended the Americans, as

it is happening all the time in Central America and the Caribbean, or to eliminate threats to peace and security. For example, Saddam Hussein allegedly had weapons of mass destruction, which later turned out to be a lie. In Libya, they wanted to eliminate Muammar Qaddafi because they thought he was not a democrat but a dictator. They have ruined both Iraq and Libya, prosperous countries where people lived quite well in social and economic terms. In Yugoslavia, they wanted to ruin the Balkans, in part for the benefit of Germany, which did not wait for the EU to coordinate a common line and recognised [the independence of] Croatia and Slovenia. This made the process irreversible and prevented any chance for the restoration of a confederative or any other form of unification of the Balkan countries. Serbia stood up against the Balkans' subordination to the West. What have they done to it? Senator Joe Biden said in 1998, a year before NATO's aggression against Serbia, that he was for bombing Belgrade and proposed sending US pilots to bomb all the bridges across the Drina River and confiscating Serbia's oil reserves. As you remember, Senator Biden's demands were implemented a year later, in 1999. The Time magazine said on its cover then: "Bringing the Serbs to heel. A massive bombing attack opens the door to peace." Nobody reacted to that. No tribunals were proposed. Nobody even considered it.

Likewise, nobody proposed any tribunals when the United States invaded Syria without any legitimate reason and started razing Syrian cities to the ground. For example, Raqqa was turned into rubble. Dozens and hundreds of corpses lay there for months unattended. Yes, the international community, Doctors Without Borders and Reporters Without Borders raised their voices, but nobody mentioned tribunals. When the International Criminal Court decided to investigate war crimes committed by the Americans in Afghanistan, the United States threatened to slap the ICC with sanctions and to seize the court's funds kept in US banks. And that high international body of justice stopped talking. Of course, comparisons can be made.

But we defended our security. Ukraine was being turned into a bridgehead for attacking Russia and undermining our interests. Naval bases, first of all Anglo-Saxon ones, were to be built in the Sea of Azov. This is a serious matter.

Second, the humiliation of Russians, whose rights were guaranteed in the Ukrainian Constitution, is unacceptable because they are our compatriots. They look to us to protect their legitimate interests, which are guaranteed in the Ukrainian Constitution. The 2014 coup, which was inspired by the West, was not

followed by any attempt to launch a national dialogue in Ukraine. The West unequivocally took the side of the regime, which immediately declared its anti-Russia goals and its commitment to the Nazi theory and practices by bombing Donetsk and Lugansk. Nobody is investigating these crimes. No tribunals were established, and nobody is even considering this. When the war launched against those who refused to recognise the coup was stopped, the Minsk agreements were signed. As you know, Germany, France and Poroshenko, who signed these agreements (with the exception of President Putin), have recently said that they did it to gain time for more weapons to be sent to Ukraine and for it to be better prepared for the next stage in the war. How is it?

Do you think we have not shown our best side in this case too? Russia was the only side to press for the implementation of the Minsk agreements. All the other sides were crooks who acted on the Americans' advice.

As for the suffering of Greece and Cyprus, I don't know what they are suffering from more. We have always been good friends with the Greeks and the Cypriots. We have taken note of the change that took place in the two countries' leadership.

Everybody knows how forces were built up for launching a hybrid war against us. I cannot imagine that the prime ministers and presidents of European countries, let alone the countries that have centuries-long historical ties with Russia, are unaware of the facts or are unable to analyse them. The conclusion I make from the positions taken by European countries, including Greece and Cyprus, is that they have either been forced or have voluntarily agreed to submit to the US dictate. The United States has brought Europe to heel. Europe will no longer be allowed to think about "strategic autonomy." When sending more US troops to Europe was discussed a year ago, US Secretary of Defence Lloyd Austin was asked if these troops would be deployed there on a rotational basis or permanently. He replied that this matter would be decided in Washington. Nobody will ask Europe's opinion.

We have drawn conclusions from this, and we will draw them with regard to those who have quickly and subserviently supported the aggression against Russia.

This war will eventually end. We will uphold our truth, one way or another. But I don't know how we will live after that. Everything will depend on the conclusions reached in Europe.

Question: After the start of the special military operation in Ukraine, all of

us have observed that, in fact, this is the collective West's confrontation with both Russia and some countries other than Russia. The region's smaller nations, including Georgia, have found themselves in a difficult situation. There are constant radical attacks by US-controlled political and media groups, whose owners, the Americans, are seeking to impose immoral and perverse values as well as norms of Western behaviour. This is out of character with our culture and identity. Therefore, the West is attempting to subvert smaller countries' cultural sovereignty and gain control over them. The ultimate goal of this cynical policy pursued by the globalists is to sacrifice these smaller countries to their political interests. Ukraine, regrettably, is a sad case in point. Georgia and other smaller countries in the region are facing the same threat. Under these circumstances, we are keen to know whether Russia has a clear-cut strategy against the West's destructive cultural expansion and whether this implies its cooperation with countries that could be its natural allies in the matter of defending the conservative values.

Sergey Lavrov: This is a vast matter. We have just talked about Ukraine. Yesterday, the UN Security Council held a special meeting convened at Russia's initiative and dedicated to threats to international peace and security as posed by the Kiev regime's policies on human rights, including religious rights, and ethnic minorities.

Cultural presence and opposition to negative trends through preserving the traditional values are directly related to religion and the activities by the Russian and Georgian Orthodox churches. In Ukraine, [the Russian Orthodox Church] is not a tool of Russian influence. Rather, it is an institution that serves to preserve traditions and history and to pass on these traditions from generation to generation. But it is being destroyed and banned, while priests are subject to arrest or stripped of their citizenship. These are the methods used by the West to wage a war for asserting its values.

We have to retaliate in kind in cases where popular Russian journalists, politicians and political scientists who can bring the truth to foreign audiences are faced with sanctions. We have to reciprocate. But this is not our choice. Soviet and US researchers regularly met and discussed current issues of modern times even during the Cold War. Today, there are practically no opportunities for this. Occasionally, certain representatives of Western political thought would sound out timidly via absolutely unofficial channels, whether or not we could jointly organise

a workshop on neutral ground, to which “your” and “our” people might come? Earlier, no one asked that. An institute would come to agreement with another institute. Today, our Western partners, who participated in these exchanges, are scared stiff. They have been exposed to rather strong harassment.

I have much respect for the stand taken by the Georgian Orthodox Church, which is defending these values. Generally, we have never had any problems with the Georgian people.

There was the story in 2008, when NATO played a role at its April summit in Bucharest, where a declaration was approved saying that Georgia and Ukraine would join NATO. US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, too, came to Georgia a month before Mikheil Saakashvili ordered to shell Tskhinval and the positions of the peacekeepers. In all evidence, Saakashvili was excessively excited and came to the conclusion that all of that was an indulgence for him.

It took the Bucharest impulse somewhat longer to reach the minds of people in Ukraine. But eventually they started chasing all things Russian from their land. We are in favour of Abkhazia and South Ossetia establishing relations with Georgia. There are dialogue mechanisms there, in which we participate. It is rather long since Georgia suggested implementing a joint economic project to build trust. These are all useful things. But now the Western participants in the Geneva Discussions between Georgia, Abkhazia and South Ossetia (the EU, the UN, the OSCE, and the US) are attempting to make even this format hostage to what is going on around Ukraine. This is indecent and unprofessional, and it means that they make their aims in this specific region dependent on their own political grievances and whims.

I am glad that our people-to-people contacts with Georgia are making strides. In 2022, Georgia's GDP grew by 10 percent. This happened largely due to tourism and trade relations with the Russian Federation. I hope that we will soon be able to resume direct air service.

We see Georgia and all other countries face pressure from the West, which is publicly urging them to join the sanctions against the Russian Federation. The fact that a small country and its government have the courage to say that they will be guided by their national interests and the interests of their economy, this fact commands respect.

Question: You just said that the West has thrown off their masks. How would you comment on the rather frank statements President of Finland Sauli

Niinistö made in his New Year's speech about the Russian Federation being as brutal as the Nazi regime?

In Soviet times, the words “imperialism” and “colonisers” were part of the political rhetoric, and we are hearing them increasingly often today again. There are some new terms as well – neoliberalism and globalism. Gennady Zyuganov and the Communist Party of Russia have been using them for the past 30 years, and now you and the President of Russia are using them too. How would you describe those opposing Russia today? Are these concepts relevant today or are they history?

Sergey Lavrov: As to President Niinistö's New Year's statement and another recent interview, similarly to Greece and Cyprus, we have been viewing Finland as a model of friendly relations between states for years, ever since the time we used the term “coexistence of countries with different sociopolitical systems.” I was amazed by how fast Finland (and Sweden too) reversed their rhetoric. Apparently, there was a change of approach behind this, or it had been this anti-Russia all along, just well camouflaged with beautiful phrases about the need for a common European home and respect for the Helsinki Final Act principles. They even mentioned the possibility of holding an OSCE 75th anniversary summit in Helsinki in 2025. I don't know. I was definitely taken aback by those statements.

Sauli Niinistö directly compared Joseph Stalin's attack of Finland with Vladimir Putin's actions in Ukraine, and stated that Putin would lose just like Stalin in Finland. To be honest, that was a rather primitive monologue. But his allusions to Nazi Germany make one wonder if they reflect what really is on his mind. I would expect the Finns to be better aware of their history, including the fact that they (actually) weren't the innocent victims of the processes that took place before and during the WWII. It is regrettable that Europe is now dismantling (largely through Finland's efforts) what it had earlier created – again, in many respects, with Finland's leading role). But we are still neighbours. This can't be changed. Finland is so happy – and desperate – to join NATO, trusting that membership would guarantee its security. But, as we said, we will have to draw our own conclusions from Finland and Sweden's accession to the alliance (if it happens) and we will take appropriate military-technical measures on our side of the border.

I didn't mention “neo-imperialism.” The person next to you said we were behaving just like other imperial powers. It's a matter of taste. As for colonial habits, President Vladimir Putin mentioned this. It was a truthful assessment of

what the West is trying to do. Colonialism refers to seizing a nation and living at their expense. But that can be done in a variety of ways. In the 17th century, slaves were carted off on ships; another way is to subjugate a country or an organisation, with all its plans and programmes to the coloniser's will, which is what the Americans are now doing with the European Union. Iceland is not an EU member. You are lucky. The EU has completely lost its independence now and has essentially become a NATO appendage. Occasional public statements emerge in the European Union about being discriminated. French Minister for the Economy Bruno Le Maire mentioned the need to persuade their American allies to be more considerate of Europe's interests rather than to sell gas to European industries at four times the price at which it sells to domestic enterprises.

In general, the long-term transition to liquefied natural gas, despite the price fluctuations that we are now seeing, means a serious rise in the cost of production in Europe. It's funny that many years ago the Europeans insisted that Russia shift to spot pricing from long-term contracts. Now, against the backdrop of the Ukraine events, the Europeans began to negotiate with Qatar, trying to find new sources of energy. The emirate said, it's our pleasure, and offered a 15-year contract as a minimum. The Europeans went back to negotiating with the United States. Yesterday I read a report that the Americans agreed to give them a better price, but only under long-term contracts. Reliability and sustainable prospects are more important than following zigzags on one or another stock exchange every day. But European industry is already beginning to move to the United States. Certain political scientists, including Western ones, say that one of the goals of the processes happening around Ukraine is making Europe less competitive. This is a step towards making China and other rivals less competitive in world markets as well.

Colonialism is markedly manifested in [Western] relations with developing countries. Look where American investment is going. And each investment deal always includes either some political demands or the deployment of US troops. I don't see a big difference. I know that many scholars are already studying this phenomenon, colonialism in the new conditions, which is not even neo-colonialism. It is colonialism in its purest form, considering its goals and objectives – subdue and use their resources to your advantage.

Question: Diplomacy has many tools, primarily words. What do you consider the most tragic word in the diplomatic world in 2022? What word gave

hope in the past year and what word does the whole world need to hear today?

Sergey Lavrov: Quite a lyrical question. We think about concrete matters for the most part and would ask you to characterise what we do.

I am not afraid to say that in the first case this word is “war.” What is happening is our response that, as the President said, should have come a bit earlier. This is the response (it is not late) to the hybrid war that was unleashed against us. The West is pushing its agenda today in most diverse guises. The word that gives hope is “victory.” And I think the third word is “victory.” Unfortunately, those who want to hear the word “negotiations” do not want them themselves. They are manipulating this term in many ways to drag out the war against Russia as long as possible.

Question: What place do the Arab states occupy in Russia's foreign policy? Were the priorities in this area revised in 2022?

Sergey Lavrov: The Arabs are our long-time loyal friends. We maintain regular contacts with them through bilateral channels, via the Arab League and the Gulf Cooperation Council. Yesterday, I held a regular meeting with all ambassadors of the Arab League member countries. In May 2022, I visited the Arab League headquarters in Cairo. I made remarks before all of its members.

I see understanding of our position. This is not at all about Ukraine but about the fight to create a new world order between those who think it should be completely subordinated to their “rules” that mean the domination of the US and its satellites, and those who want the world order to be democratic.

I have said this more than once. The Western countries are always demanding democracy from everyone but they are referring only to the internal system of this or that state. And yet nobody even has the right to ask questions about democracy in the United States. There are studies on the latest elections: some dead people were elected; one congresswoman received double the number of votes as there were registered voters in her district; there was voting by mail and many other things. This is not allowed. As soon as you start talking to them about democracy in international relations, they walk away. They don't want this. They need “rules” in the world – not international law that guarantees democracy and sovereign equality to every country but the “rules” allowing them to dictate everything. The NATO-EU Declaration reads – “in the interests of our one billion citizens.” The jungle must be protected and used in the colonial way.

None of the Arab states joined the sanctions despite unprecedented,

extremely tough, unceremonious and self-debasing pressure from the West. When I visited the Arab League, its Secretary-General told me before I took the floor that three days prior to my arrival a delegation of Western ambassadors visited them and demanded that my speech be canceled.

When they received a polite reply that this would be impossible considering that the Arab League is friends with Russia, they demanded that every Arab League member takes the floor after my remarks to condemn the Russian aggression. Here too, they met a polite reply saying that every country had its own position and was free to define it as it saw fit. There was also the third request, the most humiliating for the West, I believe: they asked not to pose for photos with me. This is not a joke.

After that, the Secretariat staff put all this on paper and sent it to all the embassies to inform them about this demarche. I do not mean to say that I was flattered by the fact that after my presentation, which lasted over an hour, I was asked to pose with each of these ambassadors for photos, but it is important to note that for the record. It may seem like a small detail, but for many other countries, in particular in Europe, this would have required a lot of political courage.

There is positive momentum in our relations with the Arab world. Of course, the illegal sanctions and the agony we are currently witnessing of those managing the international monetary and financial system must be factored into our trade and economic ties. We are building new supply chains which are shielded from the colonisers. We are also increasingly switching to settlements in national currencies. We have many global projects. In Egypt, Russia is building a nuclear power station and participates in creating an industrial zone. There are many projects in Algeria. There are also promising plans for Morocco. In fact, we have them for almost all African countries. The intergovernmental commissions for trade and economic cooperation with Arab countries are hard at work. There is also the Russian-Arab Cooperation Forum, which operates at the level of foreign ministries. The pandemic prevented us from meeting in person for a couple of years. We are now discussing with the Arab League headquarters the idea of holding a regular ministerial meeting in one of the countries of the region, to be chosen at our partners' discretion. Alternatively, the Russian Federation is always ready to host the meeting.

Speaking of the Arab world, I cannot fail to mention the obvious dissatisfaction among our colleagues with the fact that the West demands

something on Ukraine every day without doing anything on the Palestinian issue. We are deeply dismayed by the fact that there has been little, if any, headway made on Palestine or on the Libyan settlement after the West destroyed the country. There are still problems regarding Iraq. All these and other regional challenges are second-rate and sometimes even third-rate issues for the West compared to exhausting Russia and strategically defeating it.

Our colleagues do see that we have a different position, and we appreciate this. We have been unrelenting in our efforts on the Palestinian issue, Syria and the Libyan settlement. As for Iraq, we intend to engage in high-level contacts with our Iraqi colleagues. It is essential that we do not forget about these conflicts. In particular, the Palestinian issue is the oldest unsettled conflict in the world. The UN Secretary-General could have been more proactive in his efforts to promote this agenda as one of the members in the quartet of international mediators.

Question: You mentioned Raqqa and the predatory, aggressive policy by the United States, which turned this city into ruins. The illegal, unfair and unilateral sanctions against the Syrian people, as well as the fact that part of the Syrian land is under occupation, all this only makes the crisis in Syria last longer and worsens the living conditions for the Syrian people. What would be your comment on the violation by the United States and its satellites of international and humanitarian law against the Syrian Arab Republic and efforts to ban refugees from returning to their historical land?

Sergey Lavrov: Much can be said on this matter. Sanctions are unacceptable. This is yet another example demonstrating that the perorations by the West that their sanctions do not affect ordinary people are a lie. The very purpose of sanctions is to make life worse for the people, so that they rise up against their governments. This is obvious and rather straightforward.

There are exceptions in the humanitarian sphere. Look at the volumes of humanitarian aid arriving in Syria. What Syria is receiving is about half of the volumes the United Nations believes are necessary. This is one of the worst indicators for all humanitarian programmes.

The West really does not want refugees to return to Syria. Even the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees distributed a special questionnaire in Syrian refugee camps in Lebanon demonstrating in a quite straightforward manner that Syria is not good for refugees and they had better stayed in Lebanon. We raised a row over this issue. They apologised to us, and withdrew this questionnaire. All

this demonstrates the way the so-called international communities treat refugees.

This is all driven by political reasons. In fact, UN Security Council Resolution 2254 provides for holding elections with the participation of the entire Syrian population, etc. When the time finally comes for this election, even though the Syrian Arab Republic has already held an election on its own without any Western interference, the West really wants to impose some kind of a grand election so that refugees can also vote in it. They know how to make people in refugee camps cast their votes for the opposition nurtured by the West. This is obvious, and rather shameful.

The Americans realised that grooming Juan Guaido for Venezuela was pointless, and that it was necessary to work with the people who had been empowered by the people. Similar trends are currently manifesting themselves with regard to Bashar al-Assad. The Americans and the Syrians maintain behind-the-scenes contacts on prisoners of war. Other countries, including Türkiye, suggest normalising relations with Damascus. President of Türkiye Recep Tayyip Erdogan said he was ready to meet with President of Syria Bashar al-Assad. They have asked us for assistance. Turkish and Syrian defence ministers have met with Russia's help, and a meeting between foreign ministers is in the making. Some Arab countries did not leave Syria and have retained their embassies there. Other Arab countries have reopened them. For example, the United Arab Emirates, a country with rich experience of mediation, is using it for positive purposes more often. We appreciate this. Life will force the sides to review all these issues in line with realities, rather than some perfect picture of geopolitical concepts that someone has painted.

However, Idlib ranks among the main problems. It is necessary to fulfil the agreements which state that deploying terrorists there is unacceptable. It is also necessary to establish contacts between the government and the Kurds in north-eastern Syria. We realise that our Turkish colleagues are concerned about this problem, as well as their irritation that the United States wants to use the Kurds to create a quasi-state in eastern Syria and to compel the Kurds to act on Washington's instructions and create certain regional irritants all the time.

My colleague, Foreign Minister of Türkiye Mevlut Cavusoglu, recalled that, in 2019, Russia and Türkiye signed a memorandum. In that document, we pledged to make sure that the Kurds cooperate, that they withdraw a certain distance from the Turkish border. This option would be similar to the 1998 Adana Agreement on

security between Türkiye and Syria. My good friend, Mevlut Cavusoglu, said Russia had so far failed to completely fulfil its obligations. He is right, and this is a complicated issue. However, Russia and Türkiye had reached other agreements, in addition to the north-east. President of Russia Vladimir Putin and President of Türkiye Recep Tayyip Erdogan signed a protocol on Idlib. Under this document, Türkiye pledged to disengage the opposition cooperating with the Republic of Türkiye from Jabhat al-Nusra and its other incarnations, so that the terrorists would not feel free. In 2020, we agreed that Russian and Turkish units would jointly patrol the M4 road to Aleppo. So far, we have been unable to accomplish this task. Consequently, it is necessary to work persistently to accomplish these tasks. They remain highly relevant.

Issues regarding the economic rehabilitation of Syria play an important role. The West is trying, by hook or by crook, to retain channels for supplying humanitarian aid to Idlib via the Turkish border and outside Damascus' control. We have now retained only one such point and only on condition that specific legal methods for delivering humanitarian aid, under international law, (that is, via the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic) expand and that opportunities open up for financing early recovery projects. Apart from food and medications, it is necessary to renovate hospitals and schools, to supply water and electricity. They did not merely promise this to us; members of the UN Security Council passed the relevant resolution. The US also actively supported this document. We have seen very little progress for over a year now. The UN should also address this task more actively.

Question: The Russia-US relationship is currently not in the best state. What steps does Russia believe Washington needs to take in order to achieve recovery? How detrimental is this tense relationship between Russia and the United States when it comes to dealing with other crises such as in Yemen, Syria, Libya and Iran?

Sergey Lavrov: When two powerful countries do not cooperate and for the most part will not even speak to each other, this state of affairs always affects their ability to help with solving international problems that require joint efforts. It is an objective factor. What is required for normalising this relationship? Norm is a notion. It will never be what it was before. NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg recently said that Russia will never have the same relationship with NATO and the West that it had in the past.

We said it long ago that we will no longer allow a situation when the other

party lies, signs documents but refuses to comply with them – as it was the case with the Russia-NATO Council's declaration, the OSCE's Istanbul declaration, the OSCE's declaration adopted at the Astana summit in 2010, the Ukrainian crisis settlement agreement of February 2014 (secured by Germany, France and Poland), the Minsk Agreements that were not only signed by Germany and France but also unanimously approved by the UN Security Council. The West did not even intend to fulfil those agreements. We were simply lied to when those obligations were signed solemnly at the level of presidents and prime ministers. So, we stopped taking words at face value even earlier.

Why do we take words for granted? It was customary in Russia that, when merchants made an agreement, they never signed any papers but simply shook hands. That was it. If you did not deliver, nobody would respect you. We were weaned away from this habit after they promised not to expand NATO. Then we started signing political and even legally binding documents. The Security Council's resolution on the Minsk Agreements is a legally binding document. Now we are being told to leave Ukraine and fully comply with the UN Charter, which, by the way, states that all UN members must comply with Security Council resolutions. The UN Security Council's resolution on Ukraine was sabotaged and efforts to resolve a conflict failed, which would have prevented more suffering in current conditions. It is obvious to me.

Some time ago, our Western "friends" lobbied for a decision of the UN General Assembly according to which every time a veto is imposed in the UN Security Council, the General Assembly must convene within ten days to hear out the motives for this veto. We agreed. We have nothing to hide. We already explain all votes and decisions.

But I would raise a different question: why does the UN General Assembly refuse to consider the resolutions that were adopted without vetoes but see no further compliance? The resolution on the Palestinian settlement is one example. They were indeed adopted by the UN Security Council, some even unanimously. They were forgotten. When Palestine is discussed, the General Assembly deplores the fact that the resolution has not been fulfilled. But it has not occurred to anybody to convene specifically to discuss why the resolution adopting the Minsk Agreements on Ukraine was not fulfilled. I mean it occurs to some people but nobody is interested. Instead, they discuss some phantasmagoric ideas about a tribunal and the Russian Federation paying reparations. Well, whatever works for

them. The Ukrainians and their curators need these tribunals as much as they need the tribunes from which they pump their fists. It is as simple as that.

We did not destroy the relationship with the United States. After the meeting between US President Joe Biden and President of Russia Vladimir Putin in Geneva in June 2021, where they reaffirmed the Gorbachev-Reagan formula stating that “a nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought,” we promoted it actively. The Americans agreed. It would be fair to say that, unlike the Trump administration, the Biden administration immediately supported that idea, which allowed the leaders of all five nuclear powers to make a similar statement, initiated by Russia, in January 2022: a nuclear war is unacceptable. The second agreement reached with them was beginning a strategic dialogue on what can replace the New START Treaty on strategic offensive arms, expiring in early 2026. We launched the dialogue through diplomats, military officials and security services. Two rounds of talks took place in July and September 2021. We had a more or less clear idea of how to move forward and discussed formats of further talks, which is also important. All of a sudden, after September 2021, the Americans broke off the strategic dialogue. Now they say it should be resumed. We did not break it off. We did not initiate a termination in a single area of our contacts or cooperation. The United States did. We are not going to chase after it and offer to be friends again. They know that we are serious people and we will always respond to serious treatment in kind. US President Joe Biden asked President of Russia Vladimir Putin to make sure that Director of the Foreign Intelligence Service Sergey Naryshkin meet with CIA Director William J. Burns. The meeting took place. It was a serious and useful meeting, even if with no breakthroughs. It is always helpful to have a serious and mutually respectful dialogue instead of accusations of all sorts of offences. So, the ball is not in our court.

Question: As a follow-up to the question about relations with the US, I would like to ask if we know when the new US Ambassador is coming to Russia. Are there prospects for resuming the work of the diplomatic mission as regards issuing visas to Russians? Is the Foreign Ministry ready to promote dialogue with the US on this matter?

Sergey Lavrov: I do not know when the new ambassador is coming; she has already undergone hearings and completed the formalities. It is for the American party to decide. She has received agrément. Nothing is hindering her arrival from our side.

As for the conditions the embassies work in, just like with the previous question, we have never taken any actions to obstruct the work of the diplomats. What we are seeing now was started by Nobel Peace Prize winner Barack Obama in December 2016, three weeks before Donald Trump's inauguration. When leaving the White House, Barack Obama wanted to do a disservice to his successor and took our property and expelled our diplomats. It was a petty thing, unseemly for someone who was called the President of the United States.

Donald Trump's representatives called us later and said that he was not the president yet, but they believed that it was wrong. The Americans were sure that we would retaliate, asked us to wait for Donald Trump to come into the White House, and said that they would try to fix it. We took a pause. Six months had passed, and he was not allowed to fix anything, even if he wanted to. We were forced to respond by dismissing diplomats and imposing a special regime on the Americans' couple of properties in Moscow. They were offended that we dismissed them for no reason at all. There was a reason, starting with Barack Obama. It was simply a chain reaction.

There is no parity at the moment. The share of US diplomats is bigger. The total number of diplomats, which is the same for both our countries, includes the employees of the Russian Permanent Mission to the UN, who have nothing to do with the bilateral relations of Russia and the US. They would otherwise not count in this parity number. But they do. These are 140 people. So the Americans are far ahead of us. When they complain that there is not enough personnel to issue visas, do not believe them. We are short by 140 people, but we never stopped issuing visas and never sent US citizens to apply for a Russian visa in Venezuela, Cuba or Nicaragua. But we could have. But we are not that small minded. We are trying to be serious people.

Question: China has been talking a lot about peace lately, and that our world needs peace, as well as non-confrontation and non-alignment policies. Still, the West keeps talking about the Russia-China alliance and sometimes even tries to scare the world with it. How typical of the West – breaking anything it does not find to its liking. Does Russia see any attempts by the West to cause trouble between Russia and China today, for example through cyberattacks, releasing compromising information and other things the Americans are known for?

Sergey Lavrov: Our relations with the People's Republic of China are at their all-time high. This is what our respective leaders, President Vladimir Putin

and President of the People's Republic of China Xi Jinping, said. This is also set forth in the joint documents, the latest of which was adopted on [February 4, 2022](#), when the President of Russia visited China. It was titled Joint Statement of the Russian Federation and the People's Republic of China on the International Relations Entering a New Era and the Global Sustainable Development. What a powerful document. It covers all the key matters in today's world from the perspective of solidarity between our two countries. There was a time when our Chinese friends said that our relations were more than an alliance but something stronger. We share pragmatic, trust-based, mutually respectful relations rooted in the balance of interests. This is an ideal setting for promoting relations with any country, rooted as they are in the principles set forth in the UN Charter.

Russia and China have seen record trade statistics. In 2022, we almost reached \$200 billion. Oh, I keep counting in US dollars, but it is high time that I switch to roubles and yuan. We will probably make this transition soon.

Moscow works closely with Beijing on the international stage, including within the United Nations, and our countries work together on fighting emerging challenges and threats within the SCO and BRICS. The EAEU cooperates with China to harmonise Eurasian integration with China's Belt and Road Initiative. There is military, military-technical cooperation, and joint exercises. All this strengthens our strategic partnership, and the West sees this.

You asked me whether we have any information on Western attempts to sow discord in our relations. This information is in plain view and is right there in the public domain. The United States drafts its strategy, including the national security doctrine, and the Declaration on NATO-EU Cooperation, listing Russia and China in them. There is a small nuance though: they view Russia as an immediate threat that they need to deal with right now, while designating China as the main, long-term, serious and system-wide challenge. The West believes that dealing with the Chinese threat will take more time.

Many independent observers wrote that the Americans and Europeans are making a mistake by trying to contain both Russia and China at the same time. They probably think that they are capable of doing this. The United States would have never done this on its own. There must be no doubt about it.

It was not a coincidence that they enslaved Europe and devoted it to serving its strategy of domination, and nothing else. They are doing the same thing to Japan right now. They will probably try and draw New Zealand and Canada into

AUKUS-like alliances in order to have all five Anglo-Saxon countries locked in. There is also an effort to reach out to South Korea.

The Americans cannot carry out their policy of dominance, which primarily consists of constraining Russia and China, on their own. It is for this reason that they need the Western camp to be fully mobilised. A partial mobilisation would no longer suffice. And this is what they are doing right now. This demonstrates yet again that they have almost run out of steam in their effort to counter the objective historical trend marked by the emergence of multipolar world order.

Both Russia and China can see that the West, while sticking to its dual containment strategy against Moscow and Beijing, is trying to sow discord in our relations. They want to defeat us and then to persuade Russia to be a partner to the West so that it can show mercy and lift sanctions. This way, Russia would become a partner to the West and at least would not stand in the way of the Western efforts to contain China, or ideally would even contribute to these efforts. I don't know what kind of analysts devise theories of this kind over there, since they are clearly out of touch with reality.

China and Russia are clear-eyed about these games. We do understand that China is integrated in the ongoing globalisation processes to a much greater extent. Its economy and foreign exchange reserves denominated in Western currencies are much bigger. Ending its dependence on the West would be much more complicated for China, compared to the Russian Federation. To an extent, the avalanche of sanctions imposed on Russia helped us in this regard, to a certain extent, enabling us to conclude that we cannot trust the people who are trying to lure us into their economic system, let alone rely on them.

During his meeting with Government members yesterday, President Vladimir Putin once again reaffirmed our policy priorities. I have no doubt that our Chinese colleagues also see this threat. The West has already started imposing sanctions on China. Everything related to China's ability to make microprocessors and semiconductors has been sanctioned. It was also said for everyone to hear that there must be no dependence on China in anything. They need to produce everything on their own, and the United States is about to bring its manufacturing capabilities back home. There will be more sanctions of this kind against Beijing in the future.

While refraining from any steps that could undermine our practical relations or hurt economic operators, we are gradually moving, together with China, towards reducing our dependence on Western tools and unreliable partners. Yuan and

roubles account for almost one half of our trade. This share has been growing and will increase even more.

China understands all too well that the Western doctrine of starting with Russia and leaving China for later is no joke, and that the West will stick to delivering on this vision “as long as it can walk,” as the song goes. The West has already stated its position on Taiwan, which is totally unacceptable for China, as well as in terms of international law. They are looking for new opportunities to irritate China on Tibet, Xinjiang, and Hong Kong.

Beijing understands very well the danger of remaining in the Western system and fully dependent on the West. This carries serious risks in terms of China's vital national development interests.

Question: In December last year, you said that an important foreign policy result of the year was that it finally became clear who can be negotiated with and who cannot be trusted. While it is clear what the “collective West” is all about, what can we expect from Asia as a whole? What are the Foreign Ministry's priorities on the Asian track?

Sergey Lavrov: I have addressed this topic. The West is attempting to impose a bloc approach on the rest of the world, and Asia is a priority. Its “Indo-Pacific strategies,” which are specially designed to drive as many wedges as possible in relations between India and China and involve India in the West's schemes, are an obvious approach.

They have created AUKUS in a move that simultaneously humiliated France insofar as its planned supplies of submarines to Australia were concerned. It was announced that they would do that on their own. Their current policy is to expand this “bloc” format. A US-Japanese summit was held a few days ago. It has become clear that Japan will become more militarised and will boost its military spending. New Zealand and South Korea are America's spare components in this process.

No one knows what this will come to. It is up to these countries' governments to decide. The plan is to disrupt organisations that spent decades building a security architecture in Asia. This refers primarily to ASEAN, which was generally recognised as the nucleus of coordination in the economy, security, political dialogue, and humanitarian cooperation. It has created a number of ramified mechanisms: dialogue formats between ASEAN and some of its partners, the East Asia Summits (involving ten ASEAN member states, along with the nine dialogue partners – Russia, China, Australia, India, Canada, New Zealand, South

Korea, the United States, and Japan), the ASEAN Regional Forum to discuss security (with ASEAN's partners and many other invitees), the ASEAN defence ministers' meetings, including the defence ministers of the dialogue partners, as well as a number of other mechanisms enabling the consideration of economic issues, disaster management, and humanitarian cooperation. Academics also held meetings. Formally, everything is still on paper. But a policy has been initiated to authorise a narrow bloc organisation like AUKUS, and not universal consensus-based formats, to determine the region's main development directions. Later, this organisation will be beefed up in every way, including with new members.

The Americans are not ashamed of hinting that five of the ten ASEAN member countries are quite fit to follow in "their" wake, while the rest are not yet "mature" enough. This is nothing more than a direct effort to split ASEAN up. And this is what is happening with a measure of success. Internal friction and annoyances are growing within the association. Myanmar: for the first time in ASEAN's history a member state has been suspended and banned from attending summits.

We are working with our friends. Indonesia is the current Chairman of ASEAN. I attended the East Asia Summit in Cambodia (November 13, 2022) and the G20 Summit in Bali (November 15-16, 2022). Our colleagues from the region are concerned about the current developments. Their relations with China were not without problems, but they have been long involved in a dialogue to find mutually acceptable solutions. What the West is doing now is aimed at subverting this dialogue, among other things. Once, the OSCE was also based on consensus, and it sought agreement and a balance of interests. Our Western colleagues have crushed this principle almost to the ground. The Polish Chairmanship was particularly proactive in this respect in 2022.

In the Asia Pacific Region, attempts are under way to undermine a fundamental architectural "ensemble" that is based on consensus, accord and a search for compromises, and push to the forefront organisations created on clearly bloc-based principles.

Question: A question about Central Asia. I went on a month-long business trip to Uzbekistan. I walked around Tashkent, and I saw that Russian businesses' interest in Uzbekistan was growing. Many tourists travel there independently rather than on package tours. How are Russia's relations with the former Soviet republics in Central Asia, from which European industry has fled, for better or for worse,

developing in the context of sanctions? What is Europe's attitude to Russia's cooperation with the EAEU countries?

Sergey Lavrov: Our relations with Central Asian states are developing actively. There are several collective formats in addition to bilateral relations, which are based on a legal framework and many instruments, such as intergovernmental commissions on economic, military technology, humanitarian and other forms of cooperation. We use these formats to closely work with our Central Asian neighbours. The most important of them are the CIS, the SCO and, speaking about Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, the EAEU and the CSTO, where three Central Asian states – Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan – are full members.

Over the past few years, we have been developing an additional 5 plus 1 cooperation format (the five Central Asian states plus Russia). Several meetings have been held between our foreign ministers over the past two years. All our friends have supported this format. In autumn 2022, the first Russia-Central Asia summit was held at the presidential level on the sidelines of the Astana events. They adopted a document to promote cooperation in that format in the main development areas of the region. We will continue to develop this cooperation.

As for other partners in Central Asia, their number is growing. Long before the current developments, interest in the region was displayed by all the main players, including the EU, the United States, Japan, India, China, Turkiye, Iran and the Republic of Korea. Central Asia maintains cooperation with nearly all of them in the 5 plus 1 format. According to available information, which we receive from media reports and contacts with our Central Asian partners, it can be said that not all of our colleagues' work in Central Asia is free from discrimination. For example, we never say at the CIS, the EAEU, the CSTO or the SCO, or at meetings with our Central Asian colleagues, that they should not cooperate with certain countries because we "must act together against them." We never do that, while the United States, the EU and Japan do. They openly say during meetings with their Central Asian partners that they should not rely on Russia, which will lose the war with the West (they make no secret of the fact that we are not fighting Ukraine but the West), and that they should put their stakes on the winning side. This is exactly how they put it. It is a fresh demonstration of the manners and mentality of our Western partners, in the broad sense of the word.

They not only use verbal arguments but apply serious pressure, threatening our partners with the loss of their markets and potential investments in their

economies. They insist that they do not help Russia to evade the sanctions. Some of our Central Asian and other partners have to bear in mind that some companies with business projects around the world might refuse to fully comply with the sanctions. Some companies are ready for that.

We do not insist that all economic operators in every friendly country begin the morning by speaking out against anti-Russia sanctions. It is enough for us that none of them have joined the sanctions and that we are working closely with them, just as with our partners in other regions, and looking for new mechanisms and cooperation instruments, which will not depend on the whims and fancies of our Western colleagues.

Question: President Zelensky said that Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni is going to visit Kiev soon and he appreciates Italy's position, its support for Ukraine. At the same time, Italian Foreign Minister Antonio Tajani said that Italy is strongly in favour of a diplomatic solution and the mediation of the UN and China. How do you evaluate Italy's position in general and, of course, as a consequence, the relations between Russia and Italy?

Sergey Lavrov: To us, it is similar to the position of Greece and Cyprus, which I already talked about.

In the past years, these countries were among the friendliest countries to us. We held a huge number of joint cultural and educational events. The economy also served our common interests. We were somewhat surprised at the speed with which Italy became one of those who signed on to sanctions and even a leader of anti-Russian actions and rhetoric (at least, under the previous government).

I like Italian people a lot. Their traditions and outlook on life are very similar to that of many peoples in the Russian Federation, in the Caucasus, for instance. In Moscow and St Petersburg, you can find people who sincerely love the way Italians look at life.

I dare say that the way Italy is reacting to the current developments reflects the course of aggressive confrontation dictated to Europe rather than the interests of the Italian people. I do not see how the Italian people would be interested in creating new barriers, cutting off connections and transport links and in general fencing themselves off and building a new wall.

You have a coalition there. I heard that recently Silvio Berlusconi spoke several times and gave an assessment of his contribution to building Russia-NATO relations. It was he who initiated the 2002 summit in Pratica di Mare that convened

on the basis on the Russia-NATO Founding Act of 1997. There were hopes related to Russia's and NATO's commitment (I want to emphasise again that the documents said so) not to strengthen their own security at the expense of others' security and not to let any organisation dominate in the area of security in Europe. I do not think that I need to explain who violated this commitment.

As for calls to hold talks. Pretty much everyone is doing that these days. And then US National Security Advisor to the President, Jake Sullivan, would say at a news conference (as he does from time to time) that this is not the time for talks, they need to help Ukraine improve its position on the battlefield. The West and Europe do not have a common approach to finding a peace settlement. They say it all just for television and the newspapers, to show that they are for a peace settlement, while President Vladimir Putin allegedly does not want it. We understand why they are doing this.

Question: What's your take on current relations between Russia and the Latin American countries?

Sergey Lavrov: As with almost all developing regions around the world, I believe our relations with Latin America are on the rise. We have created a ministerial mechanism to harmonise approaches between the Russian Federation and the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC). It was convened a couple of times in the format that included Russia and four CELAC countries. It had to be put on hold due to COVID-19-related restrictions, but we will resume cooperation soon.

Of course, there are countries, primarily, Cuba, Venezuela, and Nicaragua, with which we have longer-standing, deeper and more intensive cooperation than with other countries in the region. We appreciate the history of our relations and solidarity on most international political issues. We always support each other during voting at the UN General Assembly.

As you may be aware, Cuba has been under illegal and unilateral US sanctions since the Cuban Revolution. The United States is the only country that votes for keeping these sanctions in place. Sometimes, other island nations side with them. However, the overwhelming majority of all UN members vote for lifting this illegal blockade immediately.

As we move forward in our relations with our long-standing partners, whom I just mentioned, we want other Latin American countries to be part of our priorities as well. We are not pursuing any Monroe Doctrine. When we come to a

region, we are not carrying along any risks or threats to subsume a particular country into our orbit or to advance certain political forces to the helm of power.

Over the past 20 years, we have had good relations with all countries of the region, regardless of whether the country has moved towards the left or swayed to the right following the most recent elections. We will continue to expand our relations.

The new President of Brazil, Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva, was sworn in just the other day. President Vladimir Putin had a telephone conversation with him and also spoke with former President Jair Bolsonaro and thanked him for his cooperation. I contacted my colleagues from Brazil. Yesterday, I went to the Embassy of Brazil in Moscow and made an entry in the Book of Condolences for the great football player and Brazilian citizen Pele. I spoke with the Brazilian Ambassador to Russia, Rodrigo Baena Soares, about current plans.

Argentina, Mexico, Bolivia. Peru. I want to make sure I don't miss anyone. We are interested in mutually beneficial cooperation with all these countries. We also want Latin America to strengthen its Latin American-Caribbean unity.

As I understand, Brazil said that it is about to rejoin CELAC, which will allow this pan-regional association to resume its activities soon. We hope that CELAC will make its voice heard in the process of addressing key issues that are arising as this very multipolar world that we are all talking about is in the process of taking shape.

Brazil is a BRICS member. Argentina has also announced its interest in joining this association. As far as I understand, several other Latin American countries are also planning to join.

At this point, we are ready to cooperate through the BRICS+ format. The five association members see eye to eye with us on this score. We have teamed up with our Chinese friends to approve the criteria for other countries wanting to join BRICS. Probably, speaking about the Latin American region's interests, it would make sense for CELAC to consider items on the BRICS agenda. Also, other CELAC countries would benefit from the Latin American countries that participate in the BRICS activities representing their interests in BRICS. Russia has observer status with the Central American Integration System (CAIS). We maintain contacts with the Central American Parliament as well. We enjoy observer status with the Association of Caribbean States. We maintain regular contacts with the South American Common Market (MERCOSUR), the Andean Community, and the

ALBA Association, which, as I understand, is on its way to finding a second wind, which is a very welcome development.

We appreciate the fact that not a single Latin American or Caribbean country, with the exception of the Bahamas, joined the anti-Russian sanctions.

As a result, Russian exports to Latin America increased by almost 10 percent last year. Our cultural and humanitarian ties are getting stronger. Not long ago, Moscow, St Petersburg and several other Russian cities marked the 100th anniversary of the birth of outstanding scientist Yury Knorozov who is known to have deciphered the Mayan script, for which he is held in high esteem in Mexico and other countries of the region. Thousands of Latin American students (mostly Cubans) study at our universities. Tours to Cuba, Venezuela and other countries of the region with great resort destinations have become increasingly popular. We have visa-free travel arrangements with 27 out of 33 Latin American and Caribbean countries, which fact spurs people exchanges and contacts at various levels.

Question: You talked about respect for the UN Charter. What respect for international law were you showing when you sent troops into Ukraine on February 24?

Sergey Lavrov: The question of respecting the UN Charter is much broader than your simple question suggests. It may be an easy sell for an average person in the United States, but in front of a serious audience, the approach must be somewhat different.

At the beginning of this news conference, I referred to the sovereign equality of states as a key principle in the UN Charter. It lies at the core of the United Nations Organisation. If you take a closer look, you will not need much time to find proof, either in books or online, of how the United States tramples on the very principle of sovereign equality every day, every hour.

Russia explained the reasons behind its actions in Ukraine when this whole situation started. The United States and its allies condemned Russia. If you respect the sovereign equality of states, and respecting this equality is your obligation, you follow the principles of democracy by letting others determine on their own whether they understand Russia or not, whether they support Russia or the United States. But no one lets them proceed this way. The United States with its army of ambassadors and special envoys humiliate themselves every day around the world by running around and demanding that everyone condemn Russia. Is this the sovereign equality of states? They use blackmail. The Americans say that if these

countries do not condemn Russia, they should keep in mind that they have money in their accounts with Chase Manhattan Bank, while their children are enrolled in Stanford. This is what they say. How unworthy and humiliating for a great power.

The UN Charter is not that big a document. You can read it, if you are interested. It sets forth sovereign equality of states and self-determination of nations, which comes first in the text, as the main principles, along with the territorial integrity of states. The Charter mentions these two principles – self-determination and the territorial integrity of states – as being at the same level. There have been questions as to which of the two comes first and has priority over the other ever since the early days of the United Nations, as soon as the Charter was approved, ratified and came into force. A special procedure was instituted, and all UN members spent several years discussing this issue, along with other matters related to interpreting the Charter.

Finally, this paved the way for the adoption, in 1970, of the Declaration on Principles of International Law concerning Friendly Relations and Cooperation among States in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations, which remains in full force and effect to this day. In it, there is an entire section on self-determination saying that this is a universal principle, which means that respecting territorial integrity is a principle that everyone must respect when dealing with countries whose governments comply with the principle of self-determination and represent the interests of all peoples living on the territory in question. Under the Charter, we must respect the territorial integrity of states representing the entire population of their countries.

A coup against the government happened in Ukraine in 2014 after Under Secretary of State Victoria Nuland handed out cookies to terrorists, and the Americans instantly recognised the coup organisers. But what about Europe? The US could not care less about it, ignoring that it was Europe which acted as a guarantor in the agreement with the Ukrainian president. Do you remember what Victoria Nuland suggested to US Ambassador to Ukraine Geoffrey Pyatt regarding the way he had to treat the EU? She used a four-letter word in English to describe what they think of the EU.

The putschists who came to power said they would expel Russians from Crimea. When Crimea and eastern Ukraine refused to obey the people who came to power illegally after staging a bloody coup, the coup organisers declared war on them. They went to war against their own people. They burned 48 people alive in

Odessa's Trade Union House. There is video evidence out there for everyone to see. You don't even have to institute a tribunal. Just look at the footage and hand down a guilty verdict. There are the last names of people firing their guns at civilians trying to save themselves from the fire by jumping through windows. It is all there. Instead, the Ukrainian authorities opened criminal cases against those who perished in the fire. And all the progressives in the international community follow America's rules by turning a blind eye to this entire situation. Many of the events there constitute war crimes.

How can those who came to power be considered a government representing the interests of the entire Ukrainian population within its borders? How can the Poroshenko administration be considered such a government if he became president thanks to his promise to make peace in Donbass within a week but soon started claiming that they would finish the Donbass people off, that their own children would go to schools and kindergartens while children in Donbass would shelter in basements. This was said by the president of the country Donbass belonged to. Did he represent the interests of the people he insulted?

Some hoped that with Vladimir Zelensky, everything would change. He also came to power as a "president of peace," implying in every way he could that his TV series, *Servant of the People*, where he ousts oligarchs to act on behalf of ordinary people, reflects his own ideals that he would practice when handed the president's bludgeon. But in a November 2021 interview (I have already cited it), when asked about people living in Donbass, he said that there are people and there are creatures. Earlier, in August 2021, he suggested that all people who live in Ukraine and identify as Russians should get out and go to Russia for the sake of their children and grandchildren.

If you tell me now that, with these views and with his actions in general, Vladimir Zelensky represents the interests of the entire population of Ukraine he wants to see within the borders set in 1991, then perhaps there is not much point in continuing this conversation. But it is the only interpretation recognised by international court for the relationship between the right to self-determination and respect for territorial integrity.

I would like to hear what American journalists think about the aggression against Yugoslavia. Back then, *Time* magazine came out with a cover saying "Bringing the Serbs to heel. A massive bombing attack opens the door to peace." You can probably find archives of the US media coverage of the war against Iraq,

the war against Libya, the US invasion of Syria and Afghanistan. There, if anybody so much as moved, they were fired on with cluster bombs. How many weddings did they wipe out? It would be interesting to compare.

I gave you a justification of our actions from the perspective of international law. The Donetsk and Lugansk people's republics could not exist under a government that openly declared them terrorists, savages, subhumans and daily bombed their kindergartens and schools.

There was an incident in Dnepropetrovsk just recently. One Ukrainian "expert" described how it happened. Everybody realised that Ukraine's anti-aircraft defence, despite all rules of war and international humanitarian law, was based in residential neighbourhoods. The operation of one such system resulted in a missile falling on a residential building. Over the eight years of Kiev's aggression against its own people in Donbass, there were a great number of similar incidents. Our journalists and military correspondents who are working there in real-time reporting the truth, did the same even before the Minsk agreements. And especially after the Minsk agreements, they worked at the contact line every day on the side of the Donetsk and Lugansk republics, showing how the Ukrainian neo-Nazis' bombs destroy residential areas, kill people, destroy kindergartens, cafeterias and schools. However, there was no regular coverage from the other side. BBC would come now and then to film fairly truthful reports. But they soon realised what their reports confirmed: there is much less damage to civilian infrastructure on the Ukrainian side. The DPR and LPR only responded to shelling. The OSCE recorded this as a fact – although it took some time. For more than a year, we requested that OSCE reports not simply state the number of destroyed civilian infrastructure facilities and killed civilians but specify which side of the contact line accounts for which amount of damage and number of victims.

As soon as we succeeded in having the report released, it became obvious that the damage on the side of Donetsk and Lugansk was five times greater than on the side of the Kiev regime that only received fire in response to attacks.

They become outraged seeing any picture of any sort of damage caused to the Ukrainian regime. But the same citizens simply stay silent about the heartbreaking pictures of what the Ukrainian neo-Nazis did to civilians, to children, seniors and women.

Of course, history will see that justice is served, but international law must not be ignored.

Maria Zakharova: As for big words, I believe journalists from Crimea and Donbass would be equally emotional if for eight years, they could have asked the same questions that are now being asked by Anglo-Saxon media outlets. But they were not allowed: they were denied visas and accreditation to similar news conferences in the West. By the way, our accredited journalists were also denied the possibility of not only asking questions but even attending such events.

Question: As far as we know, you are planning to visit Minsk tomorrow. What do you expect from this visit? How would you evaluate the level of Russia-Belarus cooperation on international platforms? Why do your CIS, EAEU and CSTO partners far from always support Belarus and Russia during voting at international organisations?

Sergey Lavrov: Regarding my expectations, I always look forward to visiting Minsk. Such visits are always useful professionally and always pleasant. I love Minsk and the traditional hospitality you enjoy everywhere there.

We hold two joint meetings of the foreign ministry collegiums of Russia and Belarus every year, in addition to the exchange of visits between the ministers.

The next meeting of the collegiums, which was scheduled for December 2022, will be held tomorrow. It has been postponed over the untimely demise of Foreign Minister of Belarus Vladimir Makei.

The agenda includes the issues we are discussing right now: the new world order and relations with NATO, the EU, the Council of Europe and the OSCE. These organisations are rapidly merging into a single body that is acting on orders from its master, the United States. We can also see signs of this at the OSCE.

We will hold a trust-based discussion of specific areas of our diplomatic efforts, including resolutions moved for voting at various UN bodies, and our foreign policy coordination. There are plans for joint foreign policy activity at the CIS and the CSTO, such as joint statements that are drafted at the CSTO and, to a lesser degree, at the CIS. It is sometimes difficult to come to an agreement. Our CSTO partners have problems that appear in relations with the West or because of its pressure. They also have economic problems. We are working jointly with our Belarusian friends to promote a very simple line; all of us want diversity. Nobody wants its ties with its partners to be artificially restricted. They do not want to have master-servant ties but relations between two equal states based on a balance of their interests. The discussion of projects should create benefits for both or several partners, if more than two sides are involved. As for the volume of trade,

investment and cultural and educational ties among CSTO members, it is much larger than what the West is doing in the post-Soviet space.

In some cases, Russia, Belarus and several other countries vote in unison, while other states abstain. Unlike at NATO, we do not use the discipline of the rod. At NATO, any deviation from the approved line is regarded as taboo. Some countries have expressed disagreement with NATO's aggressive line in the Ukrainian crisis, with how inflexible and uncreative it is being. There is not much criticism, but it exists. However, they vote as they are told to. I believe that this kind of heavy-handed discipline is harmful.

We would like to see absolute solidarity within the framework of our union structures. We are working on it. This calls for explanations and a customised approach to each particular case.

It is no secret that we have problems connected with the situation in Armenia. Our Armenian friends are promoting the idea of sending a CSTO mission to ensure stability on the border with Azerbaijan. We have coordinated a document on the parameters of such a mission during a summit meeting in Yerevan. But we failed to adopt it, because our Armenian colleagues insisted on adding a clause condemning Azerbaijan. We explained that anyone can condemn, make rhetorical statements and put forth their positions. But if we want to send a CSTO mission, this decision will not be based on "external indicators" or sharply worded statements.

We are still ready to send a CSTO mission to the Armenia-Azerbaijan border. However, although we are allies and the mission has been created, the Armenian side chose to negotiate with the EU on deploying a civilian observer mission there on a long-term basis.

Armenia has a right to do this. However, it should be remembered that the issue concerns the border with Azerbaijan. If a mission is deployed there without its approval, it will be counterproductive. Instead of strengthening confidence on the border, it might create additional irritants. This is the objective situation.

We must take a creative approach to every CSTO region, that is, Central Asia and the South Caucasus, and we must thoroughly understand the complexity of the problems that arise within the development framework of each member state. They are being pressured. We pointed out that many external partners would like to develop special relations with Central Asia. Some of them are interested in adding security issues to their cooperation plans. All our partners know very well that there

should be no contradictions with their obligations within the CSTO. Our Armenian friends have assured us that they are aware of this.

We need an open and honest conversation between the presidents, like at the CSTO summit in Yerevan. It was preceded by a conversation between our foreign ministers and their experts. We must openly talk about the concerns and problems of all sides. When we speak openly, we can always find a joint solution.

Question: You mentioned Japan on multiple occasions in light of its ongoing militarisation. How does the build-up of military capacity affect Russia-Japan interaction? Can we still talk about interaction and cooperation channels between the two countries?

Mikhail Galuzin stepped down as Russian ambassador to Japan in November 2022. Will there be a replacement?

As an Armenian, I cannot skip the Lachin Corridor issue. Where do we stand in the settlement?

Sergey Lavrov: With regard to Japan, the third question matters most.

Our relations are ongoing. We have an embassy there. Japan has an embassy in Russia as well. Mikhail Galuzin's replacement will head to Tokyo soon. We are not going to hold this process up. We believe it is important to always have an opportunity to listen to what our partners have to say and to convey our concerns. I'm unable to think of any contacts other than contacts between our respective embassies in Tokyo and Moscow. Just like other countries that have proactively joined the sanctions, our Japanese colleagues froze all contacts and reverted to fairly arrogant and bellicose rhetoric. We listen to what they are telling us. Similarly to our response to NATO strengthening in northern Europe, we will strive to ensure our security interests near the Japanese islands accordingly.

Question: I also asked you about Japan's military buildup. What can you say about it?

Sergey Lavrov: I said earlier that Japan building up its military capacity can hardly be construed as a positive development. The Japanese are saying they are doing it because of North Korea. However, everyone knows that they also have Russia and the People's Republic of China in mind. The Americans openly encourage Japan to build up its military infrastructure and capacity. The idea to revise the constitution has been put on the table where the Japanese armed forces will lose what's left of their pacifist veneer and be able to engage in military operations abroad.

This hardly chimes with Japan's interest in normalising relations with the Russian Federation.

Several years ago, when work on a peace treaty between Russia and Japan was underway, our President and the Prime Minister of Japan reviewed language and draft documents during their regular meetings, while ministers, deputy ministers, and experts worked in between these meetings. At some point, the Japanese said they didn't need the "big" peace treaty that we were offering to them. Russia's position was to sign a peace treaty as is customarily done after a war. Probably, this implies capitulation. Here are the borders. We will live in peace from now on. However, several decades have gone by since then. Signing such a piece of paper would be a show of disrespect for the current level of Russian-Japanese relations. So, we proposed signing an expanded peace treaty that would outline the principles of cooperation based on mutual respect, mutual interests, and neighbourliness. The peace treaty was supposed to outline areas of economic, investment, and humanitarian cooperation as well. That way, the above was supposed to be used to delineate the border. The Japanese turned our proposal down saying they needed a concrete document, not a treaty drafted in turgid and high-flown language.

Inside Japan, the discussions were very simple and straightforward. First, they wanted to get two islands and then sign a peace treaty, even though our President and the Japanese Prime Minister had agreed to proceed in reverse order and sign the peace treaty first as provided for by the 1956 Moscow Agreement.

However, my point is different. All of what I just said is history. The Japanese firmly insisted on first having back two islands and taking it from there. To digress, I have been dealing with Japan as a minister for quite a long time, but I'm not a trained Japanologist. I asked a seasoned expert on that country to share his thoughts about the situation at hand. He told me that the prime minister was interested in promoting relations with Russia, there were regular contacts, and cultural events were ongoing, but if some day the Japanese suddenly decide that they would not get these four islands back, they will join the ranks of the most rabid detractors of the Russian Federation. I'm just citing him. I won't even comment on that.

In 2022, as usual, the UN General Assembly was voting on the Russian resolution "Combating glorification of Nazism, neo-Nazism and other practices that contribute to fuelling contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination,

xenophobia and related intolerance.” Japan, Germany and Italy voted against for the first time ever. Before that, they abstained. Now that we see Ukraine glorifying Nazism which is making its way into all spheres of life not in theory, but in real life, this vote by the three former Axis powers had a symbolic ring to it.

Speaking of the Lachin Corridor, I spoke with the Foreign Minister of Azerbaijan yesterday. Under the agreement reached by the leaders of the three countries on November 9, 2020, the Lachin Corridor should be freely available for the passage of goods, citizens and vehicles in both directions. Of course, a separate mention was made to the effect that this route may not be used for transporting military cargo. The Azerbaijanis provided data (our military experts are studying them) showing that the Armenian side delivered mines via this corridor which it used to mine areas near the Azerbaijani positions, in violation of the tripartite agreements. Mutual accusations abound.

We have come up with a straightforward proposal. Under the tripartite agreement, the Russian peacekeeping contingent is endowed with the authority to control the traffic and check vehicles for prohibited, non-humanitarian and non-civilian cargo.

Meetings between representatives of Azerbaijan and representatives of Nagorno-Karabakh with the participation of the commander of the Russian contingent were held the other day.

I think this issue will be resolved soon.

Question: We have not said a single word about Africa. In an interview with RIA Novosti earlier today, the South African Foreign Minister called on the US Congress to drop an anti-Russia bill they were planning to consider. The bill provides for the US punishing African states that continue to cooperate with Russia. Madam minister spoke at length about the unacceptability of the West's colonial policy and the impossibility of unilateral sanctions against our country. What is Moscow's view of this US bill to oppose Russia's activities in Africa? How would it influence Russia's cooperation with the countries in that region?

Sergey Lavrov: My perspective on this bill is the same as South African Foreign Minister Naledi Pandor's. As to how it would influence our relations with Africa, I think her comments already hold the answer.

Not every African country will be able to express its position through its official representative as clearly as South Africa did. In some cases, subjective factors of a personal nature will have an effect. Some of our African colleagues

may come up with a less principled position.

But I have no doubt whatsoever that in their hearts even those who do not comment on US provocations like this do believe that this bill is harmful, primarily to the Africans.

First, they are not regarded as equal. This is clearly a colonial mentality in a new dimension. Second, when Mike Pompeo was Secretary of State in the Trump administration, he travelled to Africa, where he addressed public events and news conferences, urging everyone to discontinue trade with Russia and China because allegedly Russia and China were out for gain to the detriment of African interests, while America had commerce with African countries solely in order for them to develop and build democracy. It's as simple as that! These claims are accepted everywhere in the world, including in Africa, for what they deservedly are.

Russia and Africa are planning to hold a second Russia-Africa Summit on July 23-26, 2023, in St Petersburg. We are preparing a series of events for the summit, including a business forum. We are drafting documents to reset cooperation mechanisms in this environment of sanctions and threats you mentioned in the context of this US bill. There will be new trade and investment cooperation tools, logistics chains and payment arrangements. The change to transactions in national currencies is under way. This process is not a rapid one, but it is in progress and gaining momentum.



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