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Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's address and answers to questions at the 53rd Munich Security Conference, Munich, February 18, 2017



Ladies and gentlemen,

Ten years ago, President of Russia Vladimir Putin addressed this conference with a speech that many in the West saw as a challenge and even a threat, although what his message emphasised above all was the need to renounce unilateral action in favour of honest cooperation based on mutual respect, international law, joint assessment of global problems and collective decision-making. Unfortunately, the warnings he sounded then about the negative consequences of attempting to obstruct the emergence of a multipolar world have become reality.

Humanity stands at a crossroads today. The historic era that could be called the post-Cold War order has come to an end. Its main result, as we see it, was the complete failure of the Cold War institutions to adapt to new realities. The world has become neither 'Western-

centric', nor a safer and more stable place. This is evident in the results of 'democratisation' in the Middle East and North Africa, and in other places too.

NATO expansion has created a level of tension in Europe unseen in the last thirty years. Yet this year marks the 20th anniversary of the signing of the Russia-NATO Founding Act in Paris, and 15 years since the Rome Declaration on a new quality of Russia-NATO relations was adopted. These documents' basic premise was that Russia and the West took on a joint commitment to guarantee security on the basis of respect for each other's interests, to strengthen mutual trust, prevent a Euro-Atlantic split and erase dividing lines. This did not happen, above all because NATO remained a Cold War institution. It is said that wars start in people's heads, but according to this logic, it is also in people's heads that they should end. This is not the case yet with the Cold War. Some statements by politicians in Europe and the United States seem to confirm this particularly clearly, including statements made here yesterday and today during this conference.

I mentioned NATO expansion just now. We categorically reject the allegations of those who accuse Russia and the new centres of global influence of attempting to undermine the so-called 'liberal world order'. This global model was pre-programmed for crisis right from the time when this vision of economic and political globalisation was conceived primarily as an instrument for ensuring the growth of an elite club of countries and its domination over everyone else. It is clear that such a system could not last forever. Leaders with a sense of responsibility must now make their choice. I hope that this choice will be made in favour of building a democratic and fair world order, a post-West world order, if you will, in which each country develops its own sovereignty within the framework of international law, and will strive to balance their own national interests with those of their partners, with respect for each country's cultural, historical and civilisational identity.

Russia has never hidden its views, and has always been sincere in advocating work based on equal footing in order to create a common space of security, good-neighbourliness and development from Vancouver to Vladivostok. The tensions of recent years between North America, Europe and Russia are unnatural; I would even say they go against nature.

Russia is a Eurasian state with a variety of cultures and ethnicities. Predictability and goodwill in relations with all countries, primarily, its neighbours, have always been inherent to our policies. This line of thinking underlies our close work within the CIS, the Eurasian Economic Union, the CSTO, the SCO, and BRICS.

Good-neighbourliness and mutual benefits underlie our relations with Europe as well. We are part of the same continent, we wrote our history together, and we were successful when we worked hand-in-hand to achieve prosperity for our peoples.

Many millions of Soviet people gave up their lives for the freedom of Europe. We want to see Europe strong, independent in international affairs and taking good care of our common past and future, while staying open to the world around it. We are appalled by the fact that the EU is unable to muster enough strength and give up its Russian policy based on the least denominator principle where fundamental and pragmatic interests of its member states are being sacrificed to Russophobic speculations out of sheer "solidarity." We look forward to seeing common sense take the upper hand.

What kind of relationship do we want to establish with the United States? We want relations based on pragmatism, mutual respect, and understanding of our special responsibility for global stability. Our two countries have never been in direct confrontation with each other. Our history is steeped in friendliness more than confrontation. Russia did a lot to support the independence of the United States as it proceeded to become a united powerful state. Constructive Russia-US relations are in our common interest. Moreover, America is our close neighbour, just like the European Union. We are divided by just 4 km of the Bering Strait. The potential of our cooperation in politics, the economy, and the humanitarian sphere is enormous. But, of course, it has to be tapped. We are willing to go ahead and do so inasmuch as the United States is prepared to do so on its part.

Today there is no shortage in evaluations of the genesis of global challenges such as terrorism, drug trafficking, or the crises that engulfed territories from Libya to Afghanistan, leaving countries such as Syria, Iraq, Libya and Yemen bleeding. Certainly, the Munich debate will provide an opportunity to review in detail all these issues, as well as the continuing conflicts in Europe. Most importantly, a settlement cannot be achieved by military means.

This fully applies to the internal Ukrainian conflict. There's no alternative to complying with the Minsk Package of Measures through a direct dialogue between Kiev, Donetsk and Lugansk. This is a firm position adopted by Russia, the West and the UN Security Council. Importantly, the Kiev authorities should embark on that path and honour their obligations.

Today, more than ever, we need a dialogue on all complex issues in order to find mutually acceptable compromises. Actions based on confrontation and the zero-sum-game approach will not cut any ice. Russia is not looking for conflicts with anyone, but it will always be in a position to uphold its interests.

Our absolute priority is to use dialogue to achieve our goals and mutually beneficial consensus. It is appropriate to quote a directive which Chancellor Gorchakov, back in the times of imperial Russia, sent to Russian Envoy in the United States Eduard von Stoeckle in

July 1861: "there are no such divergent interests that cannot be reconciled through zealous and hard work ... in the spirit of fairness and moderation."

If everyone could subscribe to such an approach, we'd be able to quickly overcome the post-truth period, to reject hysterical information wars imposed on the international community and to proceed to keep up the honest work without being distracted by lies and falsehoods. Let this be a post-fake era.

Thank you.

Question: I have a concrete question about military exercises. Why are Russian military exercises held without prior announcement, and why are they so non-transparent? This year you will hold the largest Zapad (West) exercises in 20 years, which have alarmed your neighbours. What should be done to build up confidence regarding this issue?

Sergey Lavrov: As you know, Russia-NATO relations and the Russia-NATO Council have been suspended at the bloc's initiative, although after the 2008 Caucasus crisis our American colleagues, including then US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, admitted that the suspension of the Russia-NATO Council was a mistake and that it should be more active especially in times of trouble. However, they continue to step on the same rake. NATO has decided to suspend all practical contacts with Russia, as NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg told me yesterday. He said they would maintain contact at the level of ambassadors at the Russia-NATO Council and between himself and me, but that they had curtailed all practical contacts.

At some stage, Sauli Niinisto, the President of Finland which is not a NATO member, expressed concern that not just Russian aircraft but also the planes of NATO states fly over the Baltic with their transponders switched off. He mentioned his concern at a meeting with President Putin during his visit to Russia. Following that, President Putin instructed the Russian military to prepare proposals to settle the issues of transponders and aviation security over the Baltic. Our military experts brought detailed proposals to Brussels in July 2016, when the Russia-NATO Council held a meeting there. We believed that these concrete proposals would prompt a response, and that experts would get together to coordinate security enhancement methods. This did not happen. We still cannot start working on this issue. NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg told me yesterday that an expert meeting might hopefully convene in March. It is taking too long, of course, but we are not to blame for the delay.

He also mentioned the issue of military exercises yesterday and expressed satisfaction that the Russian military held a briefing on the exercises held last autumn. He also expressed hope that special briefings would be held on the exercises we plan for this year.

As for the surprise factor, I am not a military man, but I know that military attachés working in Moscow, including from NATO countries, are invited to such military exercises. But the best answer to this question, as I told Mr Stoltenberg yesterday, is that we should resume military cooperation to remove all these concerns and suspicions. The NATO Secretary General, who was accompanied by his deputies, could not say that NATO is ready to do this, which is a pity, because without military cooperation our diplomats' meetings will be of little importance for security issues.

As for our relations with NATO, we proposed resuming them long ago. Instead of accusing each other and discussing and implementing plans to deploy NATO combat capabilities on the border with Russia for the first time in a decade, we should sit down to discuss the situation. We proposed looking at the maps to see how many weapons and military personnel NATO and Russia have, and where. After we collect this data, we will be able to gauge the real measures of military security in Europe. And then we will be able to use this information to consider arms control agreements and additional security measures.

Once again, it was not Russia who suspended practical cooperation in the framework of the Russia-NATO Council.

Question: Russia has submitted the first three provisions of Minsk-2 for discussion by the UN Security Council: the cease-fire, the withdrawal of heavy weapons and admission of the OSCE observers to all the Ukrainian regions. Why doesn't Russia find it possible to meet these obligations and thereby send a message about an increased level of confidence and improved overall situation?

Closer to the end of your remarks, you mentioned the post-fake era. Russia's interference in the US election campaign was mentioned while it was underway. An election campaign is underway in France, and one of the candidates complained of Russia's interference as well. French President Hollande even convened an extraordinary meeting of the Security Council to discuss this.

Sergey Lavrov: Regarding your first question, I'm pleased that you are familiar with the Minsk agreements, though it's a pity you didn't read them to the end, apparently. Indeed, the first item is the withdrawal of heavy weapons, but then it says that on the 30th day after the start of such withdrawal, which began in April 2014, the Kiev authorities will prepare a draft law on elections and begin consultations thereon with Donetsk and Lugansk. You can ask all kinds of questions about the timeframe of a particular item in the Minsk arrangements - they don't always offer fixed dates. However, this date is specified and it's 30 days. The withdrawal has begun. The beginning of consultations with Donetsk and Lugansk did not hinge on the completion of this process. As you may be aware, a lot has changed since then: the weapons were first withdrawn and then disappeared from the warehouses. The OSCE

Special Monitoring Mission, which worked in very difficult conditions - and whose work we highly appreciate and hope that the mission will represent more OSCE members, not just NATO and EU member countries - repeatedly noted violations on both sides with regard to the ceasefire, and the presence of heavy weapons in the security zone. However, the Ukrainian armed forces have always been the champion when it came to heavy weapons missing from warehouses. Again, other kinds of violations happen on both sides.

There have been repeated accusations (interviews with several Ukrainian political pundits have been published recently) that President Putin uses women and children in Donbass as human shields and tries to convince the Ukrainians living to the left of the contact line that people in Donbass hate them, while people in Donbass are being told that the Ukrainian government wants to destroy them. These arguments are false and hold no water. They also wrote that Donbass self-defence forces and unnamed Russian troops shell Donetsk in order to blame everything on Ukraine.

Getting back to your question, I have many times mentioned how to make a ceasefire stick. No matter what you think about the Russian media, we can see our reporters doing their jobs along the contact line in Donetsk and Lugansk on a daily basis. They run their stories live showing us destroyed residential areas and social infrastructure buildings, including children's homes, schools, outpatient clinics, and civilian casualties. I became interested in what's happening to the west of the contact line and started watching CNN, Fox News, Euronews, and BBC. I haven't seen anything like that done by Western reporters on the western side of the contact line. They don't run live reports, which our reporters do, risking their lives and getting wounded and even killed in the process. I asked my Western colleagues whether Western reporters are instructed to stay away from the other side of the contact line for security reasons. There's no answer. Then we asked the OSCE SMM to focus, in their reports, on the destruction of civilian infrastructure to the left and to the right of the contact line. So far, we haven't received exhaustive information. This may give an idea of why Western reporters, who are so bent on bringing the truth about the events in Ukraine to the world, do not show what's happening in the areas to the west of the contact line, which are controlled by the armed forces of Ukraine. Are they discouraged from going there for safety reasons or are they doing some self-censorship? I would like to figure that out.

Our stats show that there are many times more destroyed social infrastructure buildings on the side controlled by Donbass as compared with the situation on the left side of the contact line. In most cases, fire is aimed at the positions controlled by the Ukrainian armed forces. Nonetheless, some members of the media make it into the war zone.

Not long ago, I saw a report by the Washington office of the International Institute for Strategic Studies and Washington Post articles by journalists who have been on the line of contact. They wrote that volunteer battalions are the ones provoking violence in Donbass. These forces do not obey anyone, they do not take orders from Ukraine's Armed Forces and act solely at their own discretion. The journalists wrote that thousands of ultra-nationalists from the Right Sector are fighting there and are not controlled by Kiev in any way whatsoever. The reporters concluded that Kiev may be interested in armed and angry radicals staying on the line of contact in Donbass instead of staging another Maidan uprising in the capital. These articles also mentioned neo-Nazi foreigners who are fighting in Donbass, while others tend to turn a blind eye to their presence there.

We discuss these issues in the Normandy format. Today, a meeting of French, German, Ukrainian and Russian foreign ministers will take place. The question remains: why is there so little information about what is going on to the west of the line of contact? It is key to answering your question about why so little progress has been achieved in terms of security. However, making progress on security issues is not a goal in itself. Our common aim is to ensure full implementation of the Minsk agreements that provide for security on the line of contact (and I mentioned why it has not been achieved so far), constitutional reform to introduce a constitutional provision on the special status, amnesty for all who took part in hostilities in Donbass (just as all those who took part in what happened during Maidan uprisings benefited from amnesty), and the holding of elections. Under the Minsk agreements, the Ukrainian government can restore full control of the border with the Russian Federation only when these provisions are implemented. As I have already said, we are not there yet.

As for what our European partners are saying regarding sanctions, I have already commented on the illogical and artificial nature of the formula whereby the EU lifts sanctions once Russia implements the Minsk agreements. Russia also wants the Minsk agreements to be implemented, and will not lift its sanctions against the European Union until the Minsk agreements are implemented. There has to be clarity on this issue. Paris, Berlin and hopefully Washington and other capitals, including NATO headquarters, know all too well what is really happening in Ukraine and why the Minsk agreements are not working properly. But they are unable to recognise it in public due to a distorted sense of solidarity with those who decided to bring freedom and European values to Ukraine. When our good friend, the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Federica Mogherini says that sanctions are a tool for ensuring implementation of the second Minsk agreements, I see this as a way to use sanctions for regulating the crisis in Ukraine, since sanctions unambiguously shift the blame on Russia. As Federica Mogherini said, maybe it was a Freudian slip, 'We will wait until Russia concedes and departs from Minsk-2 by undertaking something unilaterally and forcing

Donbass fighters to take unilateral action.’ The hidden message behind this position is that there is no need to work with Kiev, Kiev is doing everything right. That said, I strongly believe that the key capitals know the truth. I do hope that they send signals to this effect to the Ukrainian government during their contacts, if not publicly. Not only do I hope but I know that this is the case. It is hard to tell whether these signals come across.

Regarding the second question, on Russia’s alleged interference in election campaigns and other events in countries abroad, if you recall, when Donald Trump said that the election was not very honest and that the Democrats got votes from ‘dead souls’, the Democratic Party demanded to see the facts, but for some reason, when it comes to us, no one demands to see the facts. I have not seen any evidence regarding our alleged hacking of Democratic Party sites, or of whatever we are alleged to have done in France, Germany or Italy. We know that there were facts several years ago in Germany, when the eavesdropping on the entire German senior leadership was revealed. Leaks emerged a few days ago, suggesting that the CIA engaged in cyber-espionage throughout the entirety of France’s 2012 presidential race. A CIA representative told a journalist today that he had no comment on this subject. No comment. But my good friend, French Foreign Minister Jean-Marc Ayrault, speaking in parliament after the information came out about suspicions that the CIA had meddled in the 2012 election (though, as I understand it, there are not just suspicions but also concrete facts), said that they oppose all cyber-espionage, no matter whether it comes from Russia or any other country. Modesty is always a fine thing, of course, but in this case, once again, I ask to see the evidence.

Let me remind you that Russia was the first country to initiate work in the UN many years ago on coordinating our positions on international information and cyber-security. Our Western partners evaded tackling these issues for a very long time. Finally, a couple of years ago, we adopted a resolution by consensus and a group of government experts was established, which produced a good report, which formed the foundation for a new resolution. Another expert group has been set up and will continue working on this matter now. We proposed long ago that our colleagues work more actively on the professional, technical and technology aspects of cyber-security issues. When the USA, during Barack Obama’s presidency, started hunting down our citizens in violation of the agreement our countries have, and did not inform us that they were catching these people on suspicion that they were involved in cybercrime, we proposed that both sides sit down together and settle all these issues. We have absolutely no desire to see our citizens involved in these illegal cyber activities. In November 2015, we proposed to the Obama administration that we meet and begin bilateral work on cyber-espionage, cyber-security and other cyber-related areas. A year

went by without a response, even though I mentioned the matter to John Kerry every time we met. In the end, they proposed meeting in December 2016, but then said that everything would have to be postponed because of the new administration coming in.

Federal Chancellor Angela Merkel, when she spoke about cyber-security today, put forward the interesting idea that the Russia-NATO Council should address this issue. Let me return to my answer to the first question. We always wanted to see the Russia-NATO Council work on real substantive issues. We were not the ones who broke off practical cooperation. If the Federal Chancellor of Germany, one of the main NATO member countries, wants the Russia-NATO Council to work on cyber-security, we see this as a signal that Berlin, at least, wants the Russia-NATO Council to resume real work and not just limit itself to discussions.



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