



**EMBASSY OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION
IN THE REPUBLIC OF SINGAPORE**

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PRESS-RELEASE

**Interview of Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation
Sergey Lavrov with Kommersant newspaper
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Question: Everyone is looking forward to reading two US administration reports: the so-called Kremlin report on high-ranking Russian officials and business leaders who are allegedly close to the government, and a report on the expediency of new harsh economic sanctions against Russia. What will Moscow do if these reports lead to the adoption of harsher sanctions?

Sergey Lavrov: This is a hypothetical question. We have said repeatedly that we do not want confrontation. We believe that the sanctions are unreasonable in that there are no grounds for them. As for their goals, they are futile because, as their authors can see, several years of these sanctions have been unable to change Russia's honest, open and constructive policy. Our independent and non-partisan position on the international stage is based on our national interests and cannot be changed by external pressure. Our position is determined by the President of Russia based on the interests of the Russian people. I believe that broad public support for our foreign policy is the best proof of the futility of any attempts to put pressure on our elite and individual companies in order to force the authorities to change our foreign policy.

However, although we are not interested in fanning confrontation, we cannot remain indifferent to the attempts to punish Russia by infringing on our diplomatic property, adopting sanctions or using sports. There are numerous facts showing that although some of our athletes used doping, just as athletes in many other countries did (these cases are public knowledge, but they have not been used to raise an uproar; instead they have been dealt with in keeping with the established procedure), there is also a pre-programmed campaign that is based on a principle that is also being used in other areas of international affairs and concerns Russia's relations with its partners. If my memory doesn't fail me, Richard McLaren wrote in his report that they have no evidence and do not know how it was done, but they

know how it could have been done. No normal court in any country would accept such charges. However, these exotic statements have led to decisions to ban Russia from the Olympic Games.

This reminds me of the tragedy with the Malaysian Boeing, when the United States, which insisted on investigating this tragedy three days later, stated that they know who was responsible and are sure that the investigation would confirm what they know.

Question: According to the US media, in March 2017, Russia presented the United States with proposals on mending relations in the “non-paper” format, and that these proposals contained several points. Are these proposals still in force, given the increased US sanction pressure and everything that has happened in Russian-US relations over the past 12 months?

Sergey Lavrov: The proposals always remain in force. We never posturise; instead we try to understand the context of actions being taken by the Americans or some other of our colleagues. In this case, we realise that there is a combination of an entire range of factors motivating this unprecedented aggressiveness, as it is now customary to say, of the US establishment.

The Democrats are unable to get over their defeat, after exerting such efforts and taking so many actions, including those to remove Bernie Sanders from the election race, but they don’t like to recall this today. This is the main factor, and this amounted to directly tampering with the election process in gross violation of the US Constitution.

Second, the majority of the Republican Party’s members have found themselves in a situation when they have received an unorthodox President who did not work his way up to the top through all stages of the Republican establishment and who received votes on the Republican ticket during primaries. No matter what one may think of the US President Donald Trump, and no matter how one may interpret his actions, we are now discussing the causes of that unprecedented indignation on the part of US politicians. The Republicans also don’t like the fact that a system when two parties had established the rules of the game (that is, when one party gains power for two consecutive four-year terms, and another party engages in business, and then the two parties switch their roles) that had existed for many decades (over 100 years, to be more exact) has now crumbled to dust because Donald Trump has taken over. But he did not come to power because he is a messiah, but because society has become tired of the traditional uneventful change of leadership.

I would like to single out the third element from among many others: there is a frustration felt among the US establishment as it comes to realise that it is no longer possible to influence all global processes in the interests of the US.

A feeling that it is impossible to run everything from a single centre is also manifested in the anti-Russia campaign. There are also China and other big countries, many of which probably prefer not to notice the US excesses.

There were some alleged contacts between some people and certain representatives of the US political elite. Russian Ambassador to the United States Sergey Kislyak contacted Donald Trump's National Security Adviser Michael Flynn. This is absolutely normal and should not have elicited such a response, all the more so as these accusations with regard to the Russian Ambassador and Embassy in the United States are child's play compared to what US diplomats are doing in Russia.

We did not respond to a series of unfriendly measures with regard to the Russian Ambassador who refused to modify his actions, to renounce his independence and to apologise for what had never happened. And this made them even more agitated. Understandably, they started blaming us for all US sins and setbacks. They are using us as a certain lightning rod in the context of the developments in Mexico and France.

Absolutely everywhere – it is Russia, Russia, Russia. This is a simple and uncomplicated method for straightforward propaganda. Voters respond to very simple CNN headlines, such as Russia has once again meddled in something. These statements will catch on, if repeated a thousand times.

Question: It looks as if you are trying to find excuses for President Trump. However, nobody forced him to sign the bill on arms deliveries to Ukraine or the August bill approving new sanctions against Russia.

Sergey Lavrov: I am not trying to idealise anyone. You should bear in mind, though that when a bill is adopted by a sweeping majority – 95 per cent in this case – the president no longer thinks about the essence, legitimacy or correctness of the bill or the ability to implement it, because a veto, if he decided to use it, would be overridden anyway.

When President Trump received me at the White House, talked with President Putin in Hamburg and later on the phone, I did not see that President Trump was resolved to take any actions that would be contrary to his election promises of good relations with Russia. It has just happened this way. The current developments are the result of a combination of at least three factors – Hillary Clinton's defeat, President Trump's non-systemic character, plus the need to explain why the United States does not always succeed on the international stage (there are other factors as well). While the United States becomes more deeply involved in this deplorable process and sees that Russia is acting calmly and without hysterics (we have responded to some US actions, but I would describe this as the least reaction possible), we continue to act according to our plans,

promoting a policy of conflict resolution and working on the markets out of which Americans would like to push us.

There is a glimmer of hope, though, because some Congressmen and members of the US political community, as well as some diplomats have admitted confidentially that the situation is completely unreasonable and needs to be improved. On the other hand, they also blame it on those who tried to drive Russia into a corner, because it is clear that they have failed to push us into isolation. They admit that they have gone too far, but they suggest that we should do something that could be interpreted as a concession.

Question: Does a concession imply strengthening control over the self-defence forces in Donbass so as to force them to stop shooting, to withdraw their weapons completely and to start complying with the basic provisions of the Minsk Agreements?

Sergey Lavrov: We would like all parties to withdraw their weapons and stop shooting, including the Donetsk and Lugansk forces and the Ukrainian army as well. A lot of evidence by our colleagues, including from BBC and other media outlets who have visited the contact line this year, show that battalions like Azov are not controlled by anyone except their own commanders. They don't listen to anyone. The Ukrainian army and the Ukrainian armed forces have no influence over them, as you can see from their blockade, which President Poroshenko publicly denounced. He made a public pledge to lift that blockade, which fully contradicts the Minsk Agreements, and even sent forces to lift the blockade, but his attempt was a complete failure. After that he decided that it would be better to make a U-turn and issue an executive order to legalise the blockade. So, the shooting must stop and the weapons, including heavy weaponry, must be pulled back, but this must be done by both sides.

The Minsk Agreements have been approved by the UNSC. They clearly state that everything that needs to be done should be agreed between Kiev and the so-called designated parts of the Donetsk and Lugansk regions. We trust the UN, the OSCE, which incidentally is doing some good work in very adverse conditions. But you cannot just throw away the political part of the Minsk Agreements. The promise that they would be fulfilled later, after the UN military administration takes over all this territory, is dubious. If those who have put forward this idea persuade Donetsk and Lugansk, by all means that would be welcome. This is exactly what the Minsk Agreements envisage and what the UNSC has approved. But I believe that those who are promoting this concept simply want to strangle these two territories.

Question: On Thursday, Ukraine's Verkhovna Rada adopted the so-called "Law on the Reintegration of Donbass." The European capitals had a neutral

reaction to this, whereas Moscow was very critical. Why? What do you think about the practical consequences of the law?

Sergey Lavrov: Speaking legally, the “Law on Reintegration” nullifies the Minsk agreements that were unanimously approved by the Security Council in the resolution adopted several days after the meeting of the four leaders in the Normandy format in Minsk. This is obvious for us.

As for the reaction, we have no doubts and, moreover, we have documented information that both Europe and Washington are fully aware of the game being played by the current Kiev authorities that are dragging out their commitments under the Minsk Agreements. I hope that officials from Berlin, Paris, Washington and other capitals are expressing this to their colleagues from Kiev during private, closed contacts. Having taken these absolutely non-negotiable authorities under its wing, the West can no longer criticise what its mentees are doing. Understandably, it is linked with the misinterpreted feeling of one’s own prestige and reputation; but this is how things are. We will work for the implementation of everything that is written in the Minsk Agreements. The attempts “to bring down the sight” and lead these discussions astray, a desire to find new agendas, new forms and methods of work are unacceptable.

Question: My last question is about Iran that you mentioned. Can Russia stand to gain anything if the Americans pull out of the Iranian deal? In this case they will look isolated and odious, while Iran will be more pliable on some issues.

Sergey Lavrov: Russian leaders do not follow this school of thought. Many political scientists ask us why we are worrying about these things. They say the worse the better: let the United States prove its non-negotiability and destructive role in world affairs, be it in Iran or Syria where it is also taking unilateral actions that have already provoked Turkey to anger.

That’s not the point. If the fabric of legal agreements approved by the leading countries in a conflict is destroyed, there will be a free for all where everyone defends its own interests. This would be very bad. I consider this unacceptable, whether it’s Iran, Syria, Libya, Yemen or the Korean Peninsula. There is also the 2005 agreement on the Korean Peninsula, which states in clear terms what is required from the DPRK and others. Two weeks after this was written, the Americans suddenly dug out an old story with some account in a Macao bank and started seizing North Korean accounts. We can argue about the extent to which this was fair, if North Korea was right and the United States wrong but a fact remains a fact. There was an agreement to abstain from confrontation and any provocations from a particular moment. This did not happen. Speaking on the system level, the biggest problem now is negotiability.