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**Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's remarks at the Moscow
Nonproliferation Conference on, "Foreign Policy Priorities of the
Russian Federation in Arms Control and Nonproliferation in the
Context of Changes in the Global Security Architecture" Moscow,
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Ladies and gentlemen,

Thank you for the invitation to the conference, which we believe is a very important event. It is taking place at a time when such discussions can only be welcomed in the hope that the truth will be born in disputes that can be conducted candidly and professionally, with full awareness of our responsibility for controlling the risks that exist in the world today in the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, strategic stability and arms control rather than with an eye towards achieving any momentary geopolitical effect in the context of one or another electoral cycle.

A Review Conference to consider the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) will be held next May. We are convinced that the proliferation risks and threats that we face today can be eliminated precisely based on the strict observance of this treaty, while respecting and ensuring the balance between its three components: nonproliferation, disarmament and peaceful use of nuclear energy. It is crucial that the upcoming Review Conference in May be held as non-confrontationally as possible and not repeat the sad experience of the 2015 conference, when in fact, the participants refused to talk to each other and even to listen to each other, and each stated their position independently of what the others were saying.

This was the reason for a rather dangerous and at the same time illusory trend to prevail, namely to “force” the nuclear powers to abandon their existing nuclear arsenals without taking into account their security interests and strategic realities. This approach led to an accelerated drafting of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) which was open for signing.

To reiterate, Russia does not plan to accede to this treaty. We share the goal of building a nuclear-free world. However, this goal should not be achieved by the unilateral, rather arrogant methods on which this document is based. We presume that the complete elimination of nuclear weapons is possible only in the context of general and complete disarmament where equal and indivisible security is ensured for all, including nations with nuclear weapons, in accordance with the NPT.

We consider progress in making the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) enter into force critical to maintaining the nuclear nonproliferation regime. The fact that it remains non-operational 23 years after it was opened for signing is a serious problem. Responsibility lies with those eight states from the “list of 44” that must ratify the Treaty for it to enter into force. The position of the United States appears particularly destructive. It stated explicitly in its nuclear doctrine documents that it would not seek its ratification. This jeopardises the fate of this crucial document, which is the only effective verifiable international agreement to end nuclear testing. There is no alternative to it.

One more serious problem is the absence of clarity as regards the prospects for creating a zone free from weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and their delivery vehicles in the Middle East. This problem is directly related to the success of the NPT Review Conference next May.

In this context, we attach special importance to the successful holding of the conference on a WMD-free zone in the Middle East in New York on November 18-22. We have been preparing it for many years, sometimes meeting lack of understanding

and even resistance from our co-sponsors in the United States and the United Kingdom. However, I believe we eventually arrived at an agreed upon format for this conference, which should suit all of the participants. It should remove tensions regarding the Middle East issues in the context of the NPT Review Conference. Let us remember that the resolution on the need to start negotiations on creating a WMD-free zone was adopted in 1995. Nothing has been done since then. Russia will take a most active part in the conference. I would like to emphasise that the conference is not a onetime event but the beginning of a process that will rely on consensus. Everyone is ensured. It would be absolutely counterproductive to block this forum.

Now that many understandings for nonproliferation have been discarded, I would like to note the productive cooperation on implementing UN Security Council Resolution 1540 on preventing the acquisition of WMDs by terrorists and other non-state actors.

A comprehensive review conference on the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1540 will take place next year. We hope it will extend the mandate of the relevant Security Council committee that is designed to promote cooperation in this very important area.

We welcome the appointment of the Ambassador of Argentina at International Organisations in Vienna, Rafael Mariano Grossi, as Director General of the IAEA by the IAEA Board of Governors. He faces a very serious task – to promote the agenda that will unite the member states and preserve their desire to achieve friendly and consensus-based work together.

The IAEA must remain a professional, technical mechanism for verifying compliance with safeguards commitments and play the key role in international cooperation in peaceful uses of nuclear energy. We are certain that the system of IAEA safeguards must remain unbiased and depoliticised. It must rely on international law and the related agreements. In this context, I would like to mention the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) on the Iranian nuclear programme.

The JCPOA has not become less important despite Washington's unacceptable actions. It made it possible to put the IAEA's questions to Tehran, create maximum transparency in its nuclear programme, and reaffirm its lawful right to master and develop civilian nuclear technology under IAEA control. The JCPOA and the Security Council resolution that approved it have made Iran the most verified country in the world. Let's not forget this. We are convinced that it is in the interests of all countries to preserve the JCPOA and create favourable conditions for its further, consistent, full-

scale and honest implementation within the established time period. We support the efforts of Europeans to this end but, regrettably, for now they have failed to produce results.

The Korean Peninsula nuclear problem can only be resolved by diplomatic methods on the basis of a dialogue between all parties concerned. A full-fledged launch of the denuclearisation process on the Korean Peninsula will become realistic only if political talks make progress based on reciprocal moves by the directly involved parties. Specific proposals on how it would be possible to move towards that goal have been formulated by Russia and China, first in a roadmap and now in an action plan that we are finalising together with the members of the six-party talks.

Strategic stability has deteriorated in recent years. The profound crisis in this area is unprecedented in modern history. Above all, it is caused by the actions of the United States aimed at gradually destroying the architecture of international legal arms control agreements, with the blind support from its allies. It took decades to create this architecture, which worked successfully for the common good in the most complicated periods of world history in the late 20th century, but now it has become a burden and an unwanted restriction for Washington, which hinders the US' ability to build up its military potential all over the world to put pressure to bear on its opponents and, if necessary, to use military force directly, of which there are numerous examples.

The dismantling of the INF Treaty by Washington has very negative implications. True, while the treaty was in effect, both parties saw their mutual complaints mount, but, instead of addressing them professionally in a constructive and businesslike manner, our American colleagues were only engaged in searching for pretexts to get rid of the INF Treaty. Concrete practicable measures proposed by Russia to handle mutual concerns so that the treaty could be saved were arrogantly rejected. Sadly, most of the NATO member countries obediently submitted to Washington's demands and did not accept our proposals to come and see with their own eyes that the Americans' allegations had nothing to do with reality.

Since the United States has already begun to build land-based intermediate-range missiles, we, as Russian President Vladimir Putin warned, will act in a similar way. At the same time, to make the search for maintaining predictability in the field of nuclear missiles possible in the future, Russia has resolved to not deploy land-based intermediate-range missiles in any region unless US-made missiles of the same class are deployed there. In his messages to the leaders of the NATO member countries and Asia Pacific countries, President Putin called on them to join the moratorium on the deployment of land-based intermediate-range missiles. So far, NATO has not clearly

responded. Moreover, we are given to understand that NATO will not agree to this. Of course, we are aware of the discussion that has already become public and was sparked by the statement made by the United States that it planned to deploy these missiles in the Asia-Pacific region, including Japan and South Korea. Seoul said it knew nothing about this, however, there is no smoke without a fire.

There is much concern today over the extension of the Russian-American New START Treaty which still remains, albeit with some problems, as the last effective bilateral instrument of nuclear missile weapons control. Its extension would prevent the collapse of control and restriction mechanisms and would gain time to study approaches to possible ways to regulate new military technologies and to agree on the number of participants in potential talks. Meanwhile Washington is evading any serious discussion, making public discouraging signals regarding the future of this treaty. It's an open provocation to insist on China's participation in the process, as a precondition, despite Beijing's clearly stated and many times repeated position on this.

We will do everything possible to restore the dynamics of the arms control process. We are open to constructive interaction with anyone who is ready for real cooperation on enhancing international security with due regard for the interests, the balance of interests of all the parties based on comprehensive consideration of all the factors affecting global strategic stability without exception.

We consider the deployment of the US' global missile defence system to be such a factor. The configuration of the system probably dissuades any remaining doubt – in those who might have had them – that it targets not an Iranian missile threat, but that it has much greater ambitions. Among these factors are also plans to deploy assault weapons in outer space, development of non-nuclear high-precision weapons for preventive “disarming” strikes. Of special concern is the development of low-yield nuclear weapons launched by the US in the context of its doctrine documents stating the possibility of lowering the threshold for nuclear weapons use. The policy of a decreasing defence potential for other countries through illegitimate methods of unilateral economic coercion that bypass the UN Security Council cannot be ignored either. This policy is not being hidden; it demands that various countries around the world stop military-technical cooperation with [US] competitors and purchase only US-made weapons.

We are increasingly concerned about the attempts of our Western colleagues to use multilateral intergovernmental agencies in charge of nonproliferation for their own geopolitical interests, to erode the independent status of their secretariats and to try to

“privatize” them.

The most indicative example is the situation in the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW). I would like to emphasise that the Technical Secretariat of this international organisation is exclusively endowed with the powers specified by the Chemical Weapons Convention. However, last year Western countries adopted a course towards replacing international law with their own rules in flagrant violation of this convention. Using the minority votes of its participants they are trying to compel the Technical Secretariat deal with issues that are the exclusive prerogative of the UN Security Council. The deep differences that have emerged in the organisation as a result, are bound to affect the prospects for the convention.

Our Western colleagues are also trying to prevent the consolidation of the international community as it attempts to draft uniform standards for countering terrorism related to WMDs and their components. I am referring to the situation at the Geneva Conference on Disarmament several years ago. Russia and China suggested creating a new instrument – the Convention on the Suppression of Acts of Chemical and Biological Terrorism at this universally recognised international negotiating venue. The NATO members bluntly opposed it. Meanwhile, it is necessary to take some steps in this highly risky situation when access to biological and chemical toxic substances may be open to those who should not have it. Instead of doing this work at the collective negotiating venue of the Geneva Conference on Disarmament, the NATO members announced the creation of an “International Partnership against Impunity for the Use of Chemical Weapons,” which is not based on any universally accepted international legal standards. Only those who share Western approaches to the issue were invited to join it. This applies, in part, to the groundless accusations against the Syrian government of committing chemical attacks that were investigated by the OPCW exactly as the West told them to, through highly doubtful methods that were at variance with the convention. This partnership will make decisions as a narrow closed club and they will be presented as the will of the international community. In fact, this is already taking place.

The tendency to replace intergovernmental universal organisations that rely on generally accepted international legal instruments with closed-door clubs like these is very dangerous. Only those who won’t argue are invited to take part. Regrettably, this trend is growing more pronounced in the policies of our Western colleagues.

I would like to emphasise that weapons proliferation threats are too serious to use them as objects in geopolitical games or to try to use them as bargaining chips for getting shady advantages in international affairs. Indicatively, this is always, or for the

most part, being done with geopolitical and ideological goals in mind.

We are convinced of the need for a system-wide approach to nonproliferation and arms control. This can only be achieved through an open-to-all dialogue. Russia is ready for this and interested in cooperating with all those who share the aims of strengthening international peace, security and stability.

I would like to say with certain optimism that I am encouraged by the approval of the Russia-submitted draft resolution on consolidating the system of treaties and agreements on arms control, disarmament and nonproliferation by the UN General Assembly First Committee. The draft was supported by 175 countries, including all NATO members. Not a single country voted against it. If we manage to unite on this platform, we will be able to overcome objective and, for the most part, subjective difficulties that block the way to a safe and stable world. I hope that your conference and forthcoming discussions will make it possible to approach this goal.

Question: Recently French President Macron said that NATO was “brain dead” in defending against the Russian threat. I was wondering what might be your response to this particular statement.

Sergey Lavrov: As for the medical part of the question, I do not feel like engaging in a debate on likely diagnoses. If French President Emmanuel Macron feels like this is the diagnosis he has every right to talk about it. He knows NATO much better than I do because he represents a country that is one of the leaders of North Atlantic Organisation. We would like to maintain a regular dialogue with NATO. It was not our doing that almost all forms of cooperation have been suspended and the dialogue between the militaries broken off. It was not us who proposed the measures taken by NATO regarding the Russian delegation at the NATO [Headquarters] in Brussels. Russian delegates are simply kept in the dark for several days and are not given elementary answers to their request for a meeting. We will not impose ourselves on them but it is in our interests, as it is provided for in our foreign policy doctrine, to develop mutually beneficial cooperation with NATO on an equal footing. So, as soon as NATO recovers we will not keep them waiting.

Question: Speaking at the 11th Conference on Facilitating Entry into Force of the CTBT in New York on September 25 this year, you said that not all Russian diplomats had been issued US visas. Do you think this important Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) that you mentioned could be moved to Vienna, where long ago one of the pillars of the NPT – I mean the treaty’s guarantees – was reviewed. And, there will be no problem with visas.

Sergey Lavrov: As for holding international events at various UN centres, a serious problem has emerged. The American side fails to deliver on its obligations to ensure the smooth functioning of UN bodies located at the UN Headquarters in New York. Not only does this refer to the unacceptable behaviour with respect to the Russian delegations but the same goes for delegates from several other countries who faced the same obstacles.

There was an important discussion at the First Committee, which addresses disarmament issues, and at the Committee on Relations with the Host Country. The report approved by the participants in this discussion says explicitly that the American side acted unlawfully. Under the agreement between the UN and the Government of the United States as the host country for the UN Headquarters, situations like these require that arbitration procedures be invoked. They must be initiated by the UN Secretary-General. We are still waiting patiently, but it is impossible to wait indefinitely. This issue is not just about holding a conference – a Review Conference on the NPT – or any other conference. This is a system-wide problem, which has to be handled systematically. So, we will insist that all the methods and procedures provided for under the agreement on the headquarters, or the agreement with a host country, are invoked in full by the Secretary-General.

Question: Russia has very good relations with the countries of South Asia. Again, South Asia is becoming a nuclear flashpoint. And I believe you could strengthen your voice calling for dialogue between the two countries, which you have been doing, more forcibly because that is the only way out to have a better situation there.

Arms control is a very major point, it is not just the countries multilaterally for arms control. In South Asia if you have the major powers pouring in arms and technology, BMD and nuclear submarines, one of the countries is a net security provider, you get such an imbalance that strategic stability itself is endangered. Therefore a certain amount of self-restraint in the part of the major suppliers would also be a good idea.

Sergey Lavrov: I agree with the direction you are thinking. The proliferation of WMDs as well as other modern high-precision weapons definitely requires a special discussion, and we are ready for this. However, when we do not get a response to our proposals from our major partner in this area – the US, it is hard for us to try to do something alone. We keep reminding them of the many proposals on strategic stability and arms control that we have sent and that other leading nations are aware of. They remain on the negotiating table.

Concerning India and Pakistan, Russia made many efforts in the Soviet times for their relations to unfold in a constructive rather than a confrontational way. If both parties want it, we are willing to review any form of participation that they deem useful, possible and necessary. I would note, as an achievement, India and Pakistan's joining the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) with our support. This creates an additional platform with a friendly and cooperative atmosphere, which, I hope, will help promote dialogue between Delhi and Islamabad for the benefit of their people and for the benefit of the entire region.

Question: As you already mentioned, the Russian initiative on the non-deployment of intermediate-range missiles is the only way to prevent a new and perilous round of the arms race, which can lead to a new Cuban missile crisis like in the year 1962 or something even worse.

You also noted that the United States and its allies have not responded to this Russian proposal. They have advanced two counterarguments. First of all they interpret the term "moratorium," which we sometimes use, as Russia's alleged attempt to preserve the deployed missiles that are in violation of the treaty. They refer to the events of 1982, when the Soviet Union did not suggest a non-deployment solution but a moratorium, which would have allowed it to preserve its SS-20 missiles. Maybe we should not use the word "moratorium," as it is rather confusing the issue?

Second, how should one verify compliance with the Russian non-deployment initiative? Could we use the verification mechanisms of the Open Skies Treaty? For example, some inspection flights can be used to verify non-deployment. Or maybe we can use the verification mechanism of the New START Treaty, which stipulates the inspections of ground facilities, including rail-mobile ICBMs, which Russia has. In principle, such inspections can be held to verify the non-deployment commitments of both Russia and the United States.

Sergey Lavrov: Regarding the term "moratorium," hard words break no bones, as the saying goes. I do not see it as a problem of terminology, because the essence is clear to everyone. It is true that when we proposed mutual non-deployment, they said that we were trying to deceive everyone because we had allegedly already deployed such missiles. We responded that several years ago we asked the Americans for hard facts concerning our alleged violations. They refused to do this categorically. Nobody has ever provided any satellite images, which alone can reliably prove their complaints, as I see it. We have no doubt that they do have such images, just as they have the satellite images of the disaster with the Malaysia Airlines Flight 17, which was downed over Ukraine. But they do not show these images to anyone. They simply

say that we are to blame. Their current argument is that this missile is in violation of the treaty, which is why we must destroy it. We proposed carrying out special procedures for settling this problem. But they insisted that we must destroy it, refusing even to take a look at it. This is why we demonstrated this missile in January 2019 and invited military attachés from the majority of countries, including all the NATO states, to the event. But the NATO countries, including from “old Europe,” were prohibited from inspecting the missile and attending the briefing, which lasted over two hours, during which we planned to answer any questions. Of course, since the United States was not present, the questions asked there did not cover the entire range of our Western partners’ interest in this weapons system. Anyway, we did give them an opportunity, but they ignored it, which was also not very polite in the case of the foreign military attachés working in Moscow. Only Turkish, Bulgarian, Cypriot and Greek representatives attended the briefing despite Washington’s ban. This is self-explanatory. Behaviour is an indication of what people are planning to do and what they are really up to.

Our complaints to the Americans concern their (*intermediate and shorter-range*) target missiles, which fully comply with this classification, and their unmanned aerial vehicles, which are not covered by the INF Treaty. We proposed holding additional talks on UAVs, but they turned down that proposal outright. There is also the problem of the MK-41 launcher, which we have been saying for years can be used to launch offensive cruise missiles. They replied that this is not so, although its producer, Lockheed Martin, says on its website that MK-41 has a multi-missile capability and can be used for any mission, including ballistic missile defence and land attack. The Americans have used it for recent tests, without even bothering to explain why they had refused to admit that the MK-41 can be used to launch cruise missiles.

As for verification mechanisms, President Vladimir Putin has sent a long letter to the leaders of over 50 countries, in which he wrote about our readiness to discuss verification measures as part of the negotiations on what we call a moratorium. Therefore, the ball is in their court now.

Question: The global non-proliferation regime in general is in disarray, primarily because of some of the unilateral revisionist actions by the United States and also because of the lack of leadership from the states, who really matter in this regard. Do you think Russia has the ability, will and responsibility to take leadership back to bring the non-proliferation regime to a proper level, particularly when it comes to the Iranian nuclear programme? How can the Review Conference be saved?

Sergey Lavrov: I have already mentioned what there is to be done for the 2020 Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons to avoid the sad fate of the 2015 Review Conference, its predecessor. Any single country's leadership is not enough to use all the opportunities in a maximally effective way. As far as the review procedure is concerned, the five permanent members of the UN Security Council, the legitimate owners of nuclear weapons under the Treaty, have always played a special role in this regard. Taking into consideration the sentiments in favour of a speedy advance towards a nuclear-free world and the desire of many anti-nuclear activists to put aside other factors influencing strategic stability... well, this can't be done because it is not a question of destroying nuclear weapons for the sake of destroying nuclear weapons. It is just that the world should not have destabilising weapons that would generate permanent risks and a threat. It is for this reason that I am enumerating the risks that will impede our advance towards nuclear arms reductions unless we take them into consideration. The Five are in the limelight, and many activists among those who would like to get rid of nuclear weapons as soon as possible, are accusing them of being too slow and insufficiently aware of their responsibility. In this connection, the constructive steps suggested by the five permanent members of the UN Security Council – the five nuclear powers – are very much needed and enable the review conferences to take place in a constructive manner. Thereby the Five could show that they are not ignoring the sentiments felt by many states parties to the Non-Proliferation Treaty. But the Five must be united for this. It is neither an ornament nor a credit to the Five that we are still unable to call a Conference on the Establishment of a Middle East Zone Free of Nuclear Weapons and Other Weapons of Mass Destruction, although this issue was settled back in 1995. One member of the Five is to blame for wrecking or nearly wrecking (I hope it can still be saved) the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), which was welcomed by everyone as a major breakthrough not only with regard to the Iranian nuclear programme but also in what concerns the strengthening of the non-proliferation regime. Of course, this does not add reputation points to the Five in the context of the preparations for this conference. We in Russia, because ours are sufficiently defensible positions, are in favour of the Middle East Conference and of preserving the JCPOA. In this situation, we could present our Western colleagues as parties that are impossible to negotiate with, but we do not want to do this. We understand what collective responsibility is borne by the Five. And we are concerned with this responsibility prevailing over the time-serving games in the context of an upcoming electoral cycle in this or that country, prevailing over things superficial, artificial and momentary. We

think that senior experts of the Five understand this. And if there is an understanding, we will try to produce recommendations that would enable the leaders of the five powers to behave responsibly and to promote a generally acceptable non-proliferation agenda.

Question: It is evident to everyone that Russia is the player in the Middle East. We have a Middle East weapons conference coming up. So I am wondering if Russia would put on the table the possibility of, for example, a nuclear test-free zone as a first step in the Middle East to get started with the discussion? And the second question to you is: since 2016, I know, you have worked with Dr Zerbo on the possibility of a moratorium on nuclear testing and a declaration among all the Five. I am wondering if there are conditions, in your view, today to get back to the idea and really release a final declaration by all the Five on that moratorium?

Sergey Lavrov: As for the second question, I have already said in my opening remarks that the United States had officially declared that it had no intention to ratify the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty. How will it accept the moratorium idea against this background? Formally, the moratorium does exist, but it has not been enshrined in law. The idea is fine, but do discuss it with the Americans and our other colleagues. Occasionally, when Russia suggests something, we are always suspected of having an ulterior motive. Perhaps it will be easier for you to promote the neutral positions of this initiative?

As for the Middle East and the suggestion to start with a test ban treaty for that region, I think this will only complicate the debate on creating a zone free from weapons of mass destruction. If we start by talking about a ban on nuclear testing, this will imply that there is something to test, while we want that there should be nothing to test over there.

Question: After the breakdown in Hanoi, there is a big difference between the US and North Korea, and one of the main points is the US pressure on North Korea to show, lay out the roadmap and the end state of denuclearisation. On the other hand, North Korea is asking the United States to show the end state of the guarantee of security. As you have been working in the mediating role, and have laid out the action plan, how do you evaluate your action plan? To me, in my perspective, it is not really well taken by both sides. So how do you evaluate your action plan as a mediator, or do you have any secrets to persuade both sides because it is really a critical situation?

Sergey Lavrov: When efforts began between Washington and Pyongyang to establish dialogue, we, together with China, expressed our position supporting such contacts and honestly stated our assessments – that we can only achieve success on a

reciprocal basis. Action for action. Step by step, gradually, sequentially. We also warned against this logic where North Korea was required to first completely get rid of everything related to the production of nuclear weapons (and missiles as well), and only then could they would think about how to promote economic development, lifting sanctions, etc. That logic did not work, and the meeting in Hanoi probably confirmed this. Our roadmap, which we proposed with China, said confidence was to be built in the first place through meetings; that were to be followed up by certain tangible steps, including the suspension of military exercises, the suspension of tests and missile launches; and talks at the next stage. That plan was being followed quite closely. At least, that was happening before the recent exercises that your country held with the United States. That caused a predictably negative response from the North Korean leadership. Now that this roadmap logic seems to be accepted by everyone, as we estimate with our Chinese friends, we have developed an action plan based on reciprocal steps. It lays out the steps that the US could take without compromising its reputation, and the steps that the leaders of North Korea could take on the same basis. The other countries that are parties to the six-party talks have been reviewing this plan for a couple of months, I think. I understand that, as you said, the attitude towards it is positive.

We have formulated ideas that are accepted by everyone, but we cannot implement them instead of the Americans or the North Koreans. So some impetus needs to be given to these sluggish contacts. But we have a regular dialogue with the United States and with the US Special Representative for North Korea Stephen Biegun who is still dealing with this “portfolio.” We have dialogue with Pyongyang on a regular basis. To the best of my knowledge, experts from both the US and North Korea are present at today’s conference. We have ongoing consultations with our South Korean colleagues. But I would repeat that it would be wrong to expect Russia or China that we will decide everything for the US and North Korea. And there is no need to wait until this dialogue one way or another resumes. I believe that an independent, parallel track that was established a couple of years ago, the track of contacts between the North and the South of the Korean Peninsula is being wrongly pushed onto the back burner. For a long time now, I have not heard how this process is going. After all, good agreements have been reached on the pilot resumption of railway services and many other things. We were ready to help, especially given that we have trilateral infrastructure projects involving both Koreas and Russia. Therefore, I would like to highlight the importance of inter-Korean relations as an additional component to stabilising and denuclearising the entire Korean Peninsula.

Question: I'd like to engage you on your comments on the OPCW. I think the problem is that we've seen recent use of chemical agents. And despite a lot of evidence on attribution, this evidence is contested, and the analysis is contested. So surely, given the importance of the Chemical Weapons Convention and the importance of compliance and upholding the convention, it's a good idea to empower the OPCW to carry out independent technical attribution, so that in any events in the future we might be able to have a more agreed analysis in the international system. And the compliance issue still rests, of course, with each country, not necessarily at the UN Security Council but within each country.

And just one last question: Would you ever imagine that we will get to a nuclear-weapon-free world?

Sergey Lavrov: This may be some sort of fiction. But if you ask me, I am all for it. But human beings are strange, so you never know what is on their mind. Many people are guilty of vanity and a striving to dominate. So far, we need to think about ways to free the world from risks and threats. If security guarantees in the foreseeable historical perspective are going to include the preservation of nuclear weapons, complete with control and verification procedures and anything else necessary for preventing the sides from suspecting each other, so be it. Once again, we are returning to the subject of whether the world will be a safer place without nuclear weapons but with missile defence weapons, weapons in outer space, with the so-called Prompt Global Strike weapons and many other things, as well as with imbalances in conventional arms, which are seldom discussed, for some reason. Read the SIPRI report on the balance of heavy weapons in Europe, the weapons which only NATO and Russia have in Europe. NATO has two to three times more such weapons of each class. This is something we should take into account during our discussions.

As for the OPCW, I agree that all cases of the use of prohibited chemical agents must be investigated independently. The independence of these efforts has not been ensured so far. The Technical Secretariat was established in keeping with the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) with the sole purpose – to respond to information about the possible use of prohibited agents and to determine whether such agents were used, nothing more and nothing less. The important detail is that, to determine whether prohibited agents were used, it must act in strict compliance with the CWC approved procedures. This means that independent experts, as you implied, should visit the site of the alleged attack in order to collect soil and air samples, as well as biological material if there were victims, and deliver these samples to a designated laboratory, which must be conducted through the continuous physical presence of inspectors.

Only after this can the designated lab submit its conclusions to the OPCW authorities. These provisions have not been complied with in a single case before the internal OPCW crisis broke out.

It all began at Khan Sheikhoun, when the OPCW experts refused to visit the site because of the high security risk of a site visit. When we continued to insist that experts should be sent there, we were told at The Hague that this was no longer necessary because, by a stroke of luck, the samples were already in London and Paris. And the French and Brits have shared them with the OPCW. Is this independent investigation? Of course, we talked with London and Paris. We told them that the OPCW could not send its experts to the site because of the security risk, but if France and Britain did receive the samples through their channels, this means they know with whom to discuss the security issue. We asked them to help guarantee the safety of the OPCW experts. London and Paris refused to do this. When we asked them how they received the samples, they said it was a secret. Is this independence from or a degree of OPCW dependence on London and Paris?

It was after that shameful case that a report was published about that incident. It was clear that the attack was a staged affair and that the report consisted of numerous “likely,” “most likely” and “the possibility could not be completely ruled out.” It is a completely unprofessional document, which is a shame for international officials. The Joint Investigative Mechanism (JIM) was established with the approval of the UN Security Council, just as this should be done when an investigation should be carried out and culprits called to account, because only the UN Security Council can approve the establishment of such a mechanism. This is also why the JIM’s mandate was not extended – because this mechanism discredited itself with the report I mentioned. Of course, it was not to the advantage of our Western colleagues, because 99 percent of the JIM staff were from Western countries.

The Fact-Finding Mission in Syria, which had been established before that, was chaired by two people: one led the group that investigated the complaints made by the opposition about the government, and the other chaired the group that investigated the complaints made by the government about the opposition. As luck would have it, both are the subjects of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II. So the fate of that biased mechanism, which only worked one way, was sealed. By prohibiting the extension of that mechanism’s mandate, we and the other countries that hold the same views proposed that the UN Security Council establish a new agency that would be told bluntly that only the procedures that are stipulated in the CWC shall be used to investigate supposed chemical attacks. This did not please our Western colleagues,

who wanted to be able to use these illegal and unapproved procedures. This is a matter of international law and the rules-based world order advocated by the West. International law in this case is the CWC, which says that notification must be followed by on-site inspections, the collection of samples in the physical presence of inspectors and the personal delivery of these samples to a designated lab, which must provide its conclusions. This is part of international law. When we are told that the samples were collected remotely, that nobody went there and that the people from London and Paris helped out, it is not international law but a rules-based order with which they want to replace international law. In the case of the OPCW, this is a striking example of the concept of a rules-based world order, which our Western colleagues proudly add to all their documents. However, we hope that international relations will not be based on the rules formulated by a narrow circle of countries but on the universally coordinated instruments of international law, including conventions and UN Security Council decisions.



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