

MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION



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Unofficial translation from Russian

**Interview of Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs Sergey Lavrov, Granted to the Russia TV Channel on March 8, 2006**

10-03-2006

**Question:** Sergey Viktorovich, with regards to the events in Vienna. Western news agencies have begun to present this as a triumph of Western diplomacy and started talking about a referral of the Iranian nuclear dossier to the United Nations Security Council? Is that really the case?

**Foreign Minister Lavrov:** It distresses me very much that, the way you see it, the talk about the further fate of the Iranian nuclear dossier is turning into attempts to render a verdict who has won and triumphed and who, accordingly, vice versa. This is too serious a problem. A problem of the proliferation of nuclear weapons. We want that the efforts of all who are concerned with this be aimed at preventing a breach of the nonproliferation regime. This is indeed too serious to undertake a competition - who has diplomatically won or lost. We've already gone through such situations, including that after the end of the Cold War. I think that foreign policy after all does not consist of who tries to outplay whom or present matters so that in this concrete situation his line has triumphed. That's a zero-game philosophy, a detrimental approach with which no real problem can be solved. After all, we do not recall who was right and who was not right on Iraq, although the answer is obvious. We want to concentrate on working out collective positions on all burning issues on the international agenda. Now one of the most burning problems is the Iranian nuclear program. In order to sort it out, we need, first and foremost, to close the gaps in our knowledge that arose in the past. That's what the IAEA has been and remains concerned with. The inspectors from the agency have been working in Iran and cleared up a whole array of dark spots that existed regarding the past Iranian program. They have formulated utterly specific questions which Iran has to answer. They are continuing their work. If we are guided solely by a desire to show the public that somebody has got the upper hand over somebody at this stage, if we put at the top of the list the conjuncture of today in order to show to public opinion or one's voters - that's in respect of those who'll soon be facing elections - that we are the toughest blokes and get our way, then this will be a conjuncture of today's topical interest. But it will be whipping up emotions on both sides. I have already heard the representatives of Iran and the US exchanging "compliments" at the IAEA Board of Governors' meeting. When emotions begin to determine politics, this leads to nothing good. Therefore we advocate taking guidance exclusively from the task of working out a strategy for further steps of the world community aimed at preventing a breach of the nuclear nonproliferation regime.

What occurred in Vienna is crystal clear. There can be no false or differing interpretations. In Vienna a debate took place on a report which was presented to the IAEA Board of Governors by this agency's Director General, Mohamed ElBaradei. The report - scrupulously and on the basis of facts - sets forth the real state of affairs, which evokes no optimism, as Iran has indeed partially gone beyond the moratorium on uranium enrichment work. Iran is carrying out enrichment-related research work, which, generally, evokes concern. Because this is one more step along the path leading to a resumption of full-scale enrichment.

We together with the overwhelming majority of other IAEA member states urge Iran to come back to the moratorium. Yes, the moratorium is voluntary and formally is not a juridical obligation of Iran. But taking into account the questions that arose about the past, undeclared to IAEA, nuclear activities of Teheran, this moratorium is indispensable in order to restore trust.

No decisions were taken at the IAEA Board of Governors meeting. The decision had been taken a month ago, at the Board's February session. It provided that the UN Security Council would be informed of the outcome of the past February and upcoming March meetings.

**Question:** What is the difference between merely informing the Security Council and referring the nuclear dossier to the UNSC?

**Foreign Minister Lavrov:** You know, it's all a game involving attempts to show to public opinion that somebody has won and somebody has not.

**Question:** It's speculation? Is there any substantial difference?

**Foreign Minister Lavrov:** Yes, there is. Because when the Security Council is being informed, the IAEA Board of Governors asks the UNSC to take steps. If somebody considers that it is necessary in the Security Council to start taking action on the substance of the Iranian nuclear program, there are all the possibilities - legal, procedural - for any UNSC member to submit this question for consideration by the Security Council.

**Question:** There is a need for a reason to raise this problem in the Security Council?

**Foreign Minister Lavrov:** No such need. Procedurally every member of the Security Council can submit any question for consideration by the Council. That juggling with the terms - informing, referral - is needed only with one aim - to try to present matters in such a way that the IAEA Board of Governors threw up their hands and then asked resignedly the UNSC: you know, we acknowledge our own inability to influence Iran. Now you in the SC have authority under the Charter to do many things, so please take into your hands the reins of government on this matter. So now the decisions which were made in the UNSC provide for informing the Security Council only. Therefore if somebody tries to raise this question in the SC by appealing to the authority and supposedly the request of the IAEA, then it will be an untruth.

**Question:** Anyway, a discussion in the Security Council is in the offing. How do you think events will proceed further? What's happening, by your estimate, is a rise in the degree of tension in international relations? Or not?

**Foreign Minister Lavrov:** Of course, it's a rise in the degree of tension. There's no doubt about that. Our Iranian colleagues by no means help this problem be examined in a calm, professional vein. It has been and remains our view that the IAEA must be the chief arbiter in this matter. For that's where the professionals are assembled who get the money from member countries to see that the nuclear nonproliferation regime is not at risk. They know thoroughly all technical details of the Iranian nuclear program, without which to adopt the right decision is extremely difficult.

**Question:** And if it's deciding in the UN Security Council?

**Foreign Minister Lavrov:** The UNSC does not have the expertise for a professional grasp of this matter and the elaboration of a well adjusted line. I repeat, we do not rule out that this question might turn up in the Security Council. But under all the circumstances the Council should not assume the chief role in determining the presence or absence of real, not farfetched, nonproliferation breach risks. Facts play the key role here. You remember the way the facts were treated before the start of the Iraq war. That's still fresh in everybody's memory too. And the Security Council is simply duty-bound to rely upon the professional assessments and conclusions of the IAEA.

As far as I know, the agency's Director General believes that its capabilities are far from exhausted. In our contacts of the last few days with the European trio we heard an offer to talk it over, before taking any further steps, with the participation of the US, Russia, China and with the invitation of the IAEA Director General. To discuss just what kind of strategy is going to be most effective, bearing in mind that the principal aim is nonproliferation, not attempts to exploit the situation for achieving some political aims of this or that country in regard to Iran.

There is an inconsistency in the way certain of the major participants in the process act. Some of them think it possible to start calling for the consideration of the Iran question in the UNSC and in parallel continue work in the IAEA. I repeat, we are open for discussion, but discussion focusing not on a proposal torn separately from the whole situation: say, let us now in the Council call somebody to something. We ask the question right there: And what next? If the call is formulated unprofessionally, without regard to the IAEA's opinion and will only aggravate the situation, then - what will we do next?

**Question:** They will very quickly answer this question by proposing sanctions.

**Foreign Minister Lavrov:** Yes, but these are people who are guided by a logic differing from the task of aiming solely to find solutions that can prevent undermining of the nonproliferation regime. That is the logic of political standoff, of bringing political pressure to bear upon Iran and much more broadly than simply its nuclear program. I think that this is an incorrect logic. We are convinced that before taking a path, there ought to be a clear vision of how we will travel the complete length of it. Because an entirely different process will commence in the Security Council. Even if the first step is but a mild call to cooperate with the IAEA, then arguments will follow, to be thrown in by supporters of pressure buildup. They will, above all, consist in that the Council can't lose face and so it needs to adopt one more resolution, threaten and think of sanctions. Doing such things unthinkingly is very risky, for the stakes are too high. It is by no chance that responsible politicians are pondering over it.

I can tell you that when I was on March 7 in Washington and President Bush was receiving me, he said literally the following. In regard to further actions on Iran extreme caution is necessary, and before starting to do something in the Security Council, all the moves need to be thought out up to the last. We share this position completely. I hope that's what the US negotiators will be guided by, as well.

**Question:** At the same time Vice President Cheney, speaking to the American Israel Public Affairs Committee on Tuesday, said that Washington is keeping all options on the table, including evidently the military too, in order to solve this crisis and not allow Iran to have a nuclear weapon. Don't you think that the heat of the debate is rising, and many political scientists, let alone the politicians in Washington, are trying to link what's happening and Moscow's political line to bilateral relations between the US and Russia? In this connection the recently released report of the Council on Foreign Relations has received a lot of publicity. How are we to behave? How are we to react? From us they there await support of a tough line towards Teheran.

**Foreign Minister Lavrov:** Firstly, I did not have the honor of communicating with Vice President Cheney. I communicated with President Bush. I have already said how he assesses the situation. I presume that the US President is the one who determines foreign policy.

As to attempts to link our actions on Iran to a further attitude towards Russia, there are many examples where certain people try to link practically any issue to how to act in dealings with our country.

The notorious Jackson-Vanik amendment. You know why it was adopted in the US Congress. It's emigration restrictions on persons of Jewish nationality that existed in the USSR. All who wanted to, have long since left. There are no such restrictions any more. But this amendment is adrift and I think will yet long stay adrift in discussions, while remaining in effect. Now they tag chicken legs onto it, now Russia's entry into the WTO, which is simultaneously being delayed without any reasons comprehensible to us. So there are enough people wishing to use any pretext to start talking of a need to be tougher with Russia. We visualize who those people are and what they represent. The report you mentioned belongs to that category. Actually, it is not a report of the Council on Foreign Relations, but a report which was prepared by a Council-sponsored working group. Fortunately, it has not gained any wide publicity. While in Washington, I heard neither from any one of my interlocutors - neither from the President, nor from the Secretary of State, nor from the leading political scientists with whom I communicated, nor from the senators with whom I met in Congress, nor from journalists at the press conference - a single question with respect to this report. It is hard to comment upon, because it rests on the infallibility of the authors' assessments. They are based, in most cases, on false premises; the report simply distorts the facts. If one wished, one could go through it with a fine comb, but the genre of our conversation does not give such an opportunity.

I will repeat that as the multipolarity of world politics takes root, those will surely be found who will lament the disappearance of the time when in world politics the unity of the world community was understood in only one way - everybody must follow a course set by somebody and once and for all. In contemporary, recent history we have already watched such situations in Iraq and a number of other crisis points. Gradually life all the same compels those who would like to determine international politics alone and then pull

everybody towards their policy turn to collective wisdom for advice. That forming a government of national consensus is becoming the principal task in Iraq now - it's a better late than never realization of what we have been saying from the very beginning: right after the declaration of the end of the active phase of military operations it was necessary to form transitional structures in Iraq on the basis of national reconciliation, with the invitation of all Iraqi political forces to dialogue. So all the structures that gradually crystallized themselves there would not rely upon decisions made outside of Iraq, but on agreements reached among the Iraqis themselves.

Now the realization of a need for such national consensus, for the formation of a government of national unity has come. Therefore I think that it is necessary to treat calmly the attempts to distort our position on Iran and present it as being contrary to or opposing the position of the world community. We slightly more than a month ago in London at the meeting of the European trio, the US, China and Russia worked out consensus on how to act on Iran. It was that the question had to be most intensively examined within the IAEA during the next two sessions of the Board of Governors, which have already taken place, informing the UN Security Council thereupon. There were no other agreements, including that on what would further occur in the UNSC, nor could there be. Because until we have exhausted all the capabilities of the IAEA to speak of something different would be counterproductive. Thus, it is mere wishful thinking. There were no other agreements, I repeat, and now the next phase has set in.

Yes, we have informed the Security Council. Yes, the IAEA has held two Board of Governors sessions. Yes, the situation is critical, because of, among other things, the stance that Iran's leadership holds and which we disapprove. This does not mean that now we must all go to the Security Council and from there start making exhortations, issuing threats and realizing the threats. It only means that now again we have all to gather together and collectively work out a new consensus on what our strategy will be at this stage. We are ready for this, so are the European trio and China. IAEA Director General ElBaradei is ready to help us with this. I am convinced that the United States too should and will take part in this kind of coordination of positions.

**Question:** And the last question. We would like to hear your comment on what is happening in Transnistria. Probably a new day will come, and cargo vans will still stand on the border, and the talk will still continue of a mounting crisis and of there being resentment on both sides. What can the Foreign Ministry say on that score now? What are your actions and expectations?

**Foreign Minister Lavrov:** The Foreign Ministry has already spoken out on this issue. And more than that. The Foreign Ministry has sent its representative as a member of the group of Russian officials who are visiting the region and familiarizing themselves with the situation on the ground. We consider that the restrictions that have been imposed - even though they are formally called the sheer necessity of clearing the transportation of goods from and to Transnistria through Moldovan Customs - are actually an obvious violation of the 1997 memorandum, which bears the signatures of Chisinau and Tiraspol and envisages the right of Transnistria to free economic activity, including foreign economic ties. The customs procedures now imposed by Ukraine and Moldova essentially do not allow for this foreign economic activity to be practicably conducted.

That they were going to do just this kind of thing, Ukrainians and Moldovans had been speaking for quite a long time. They postponed introduction of these measures because at some phase they had realized what this was going to lead to. What is now happening proves the correctness of their fears. But evidently some political considerations have prevailed. I can only assume that they stem from an attempt to exacerbate the situation, create tension in Transnistria, and get the situation changed through unrest in the region, thus undermining the existing settlement mechanisms and trying in these troubled waters to change the situation unilaterally. This is the incorrect approach. We're watching similar attempts today - and that's no mere coincidence - in South Ossetia. We have heard that the leadership of Transnistria has called for this situation to be urgently discussed within the Joint Commission, which exists and which is empowered to consider any problems in relations between Chisinau and Tiraspol. We are worried by the fact that both in Transnistria and in South Ossetia there can be observed a systemic nature, if you wish, as regards the conscious attempts to render the existing negotiation formats lifeless, sabotage their work and present everything as the incapacity of these formats to achieve results. Although in actual fact important decisions were elaborated in them, which, incidentally, have failed to be implemented through the fault of accordingly Chisinau in one case and Tbilisi in the other. This is worrying us. These are nonlegal methods which run counter to the agreements reached with the participation of the sides.

**Question:** In the case with Transnistria and South Ossetia a continuous violation of the existing agreements takes place. With a great degree of probability it can be assumed that such will be the case in the future as well. How will Moscow respond if the situation becomes aggravated and the systemic nature of things is abundantly clear?

**Foreign Minister Lavrov:** Our choice is very explicit: it is necessary to return to the negotiation format. Those our Western partners who participate in these formats, primarily the OSCE, which cooperates both on South Ossetia and on Transnistrian settlement, as well as in the case with Transnistria - the US and the European Union - are concerned that the situation might be shattered.

Sometimes from Brussels somewhat inconsistent assessments of the situation, in particular the Transnistrian, can be heard, but my contacts in Washington have shown that they there are seriously concerned by a possibility of destabilization of the situation and its evolving along a path of force. In particular, this concerns South Ossetia. We will hope that our partners will follow the principles on the basis of which we are working. It's reciprocal trust, transparency and predictability. And of course that they will follow in the mainstream of the agreements already reached, which have enabled creating the peacekeeping mechanisms, and preventing a renewal of bloodshed in the conflict regions of the former USSR for the last 12-plus years.