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Unofficial translation from Russian

**Transcript of Remarks and Replies to Russian Media Questions by Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs Sergey Lavrov After Meeting of the Quartet and the Five on Iran, London, January 30 - February 1, 2006**

**Foreign Minister Lavrov:** Yesterday we held a meeting of the Foreign Ministers of Russia, the US, the EU trio and China. We met specifically to agree the principles on whose basis our nations can continue to cooperate on the Iranian nuclear problem. It is gratifying that we were able to agree on them.

Our western partners initially proposed referring the Iranian nuclear file to the UN and attesting that from now on this question would lie within the purview of the UN Security Council, which must take it up substantively. We could not back this kind of approach, as, you know, the IAEA continues working professionally in Iran, and settling a number of questions that arose in the past regarding Iran's nuclear activities. The Agency intends to achieve additional results.

The consensus we reached is that the question shall remain on the agenda of the IAEA, and that after the IAEA Board of Governors' meeting at the beginning of February the UN Security Council would only be informed of its results and would not take any decisions. This measure, I hope, will help draw everybody's attention to the fact that this is indeed a serious question, that we are keen to see the Iranian nuclear program being developed solely within a peaceful framework and that the concerns still outstanding be settled as soon as possible. Of course, this can be done given full cooperation from Iran. We are conducting such work with the Iranian colleagues. In the next few days the representatives of the leadership of the Russian Foreign Ministry together with the Chinese colleagues will visit Teheran in order to explain the substance of the accords reached and urge Iran to again respond concretely to the questions which the IAEA has placed before Iran.

So the main outcome of our accords, and they, naturally, have yet to be translated into practical actions at the IAEA Board of Governors, in which there are more than 30 members, consists in that the Board will speak for intensifying inspectors' work and for more concrete actions on the part of Iran on the questions raised by the inspectors.

**Question:** Teheran suggested that China participate in a joint venture with Russia for uranium enrichment. Did you manage to discuss this matter with the colleagues from China?

**Foreign Minister Lavrov:** This theme isn't urgent right now. The joint venture as an idea

remains valid, but negotiations as such are not yet being conducted. This proposal was made by Russia in the context of the efforts which the European trio was undertaking to reach agreements with the Iranians. It is precisely in this context that it remains valid. As to the countries which could be cofounders of the joint venture, different versions are possible here. I think that if we agree on the question of principle, namely that work on uranium enrichment for the Iranian power industry will be done by this joint venture outside Iran, then the most diverse schemes are possible.

**Question:** Today Russian President Vladimir Putin, speaking at his press conference, said that Russia, unlike the US, never considered Hamas a terrorist organization. To what extent will this remark tell on the dialogue with it?

**Foreign Minister Lavrov:** This was a mere statement of the fact. The US and then the European Union put Hamas on a list of terrorist organizations. We didn't do that, as we hold that in order to achieve a settlement in the Middle East, it is necessary to see a full picture. Hamas, like Hezbollah in Lebanon, reflects the real situation in settlement with all its minuses, long histories and so on. As for us, we do not rule out the possibility of contacts with Hamas. We expect that in the coming weeks, and perhaps in two or three months' time, I do not know exactly when this will happen, a parliament will be formed, which will start working, and a PNA government too. We, of course, proceed from the positions that were declared by the Quartet in the UN - those who will be working in the parliament and in the government cannot be armed people, cannot represent any armed groups. It's a separate theme what to do with the armed detachments of Hamas. It is gratifying that ideas are already being voiced for their incorporation into PNA power structures. We support this position of the PNA leadership. The representatives of Hamas, even if they do not now straightforwardly accept this idea, are nevertheless thinking along the lines of the legalization of their armed units so they really acquire a legitimate status.

**Question:** A question regarding Afghanistan. On the one hand the government of Afghanistan is asking for additional funds for the development of the country, and on the other we see the strengthening of the Taliban in bodies of authority. Your comment?

**Foreign Minister Lavrov:** We are concerned by the tendency for a return of the Taliban, even though they are called moderate Taliban. But the specific personalities, about whom the talk currently is, were not such. We shall say about this at the London Conference. About this we shall speak today with Afghan President Karzai and the Afghan Foreign Minister as well. We are convinced that the approach of the world community to the Taliban as the accomplices of Al-Qaida cannot be reviewed. This would mean a serious rollback in the activities of the global Antiterrorist Coalition. We feel that a balance ought to be reached in Afghanistan in political terms among the forces which made a decisive contribution to the Taliban's defeat. These forces got their niche in the legitimate structures of Afghanistan after the recent parliamentary elections. We know that in respect of the Taliban most of them entertain a firm belief in the inadmissibility of their return to power in any form.

**Question:** Many western media today in their interpretations of the accords on Iran actually put the sign of equality between "informing the UNSC" and "referring the Iranian nuclear file to the Security Council." Assertions can even be heard that Russia has "betrayed" Iran. Could you specify this point once more?

**Foreign Minister Lavrov:** I have already said that in the agreed-upon conclusions at the end of yesterday's meeting it is not only written that the UNSC will be only informed. It is bluntly set forth there that it will not take any decisions. So this even isn't subject to interpretation. That's written on paper. Well, as for your colleagues from the western media and their ability to present matters the way they like, we know that they are experts on that score.

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