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Transcript of Remarks and Replies to Media Questions by Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs Sergey Lavrov at Joint Press Conference with US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, Washington, March 7, 2006

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Foreign Minister Lavrov: I would like to share completely the evaluation by US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice of our talks that we had yesterday night at the dinner, and today in an extended composition, as very useful and important for the further development of our partnership. The list of themes of which Madame Rice said is truly very important. They directly concern acute problems that exist in the world. On how we are going to cooperate with our G8 partners, primarily the US, it largely depends whether we will be able to solve these problems by peaceful means for common benefit so as to avoid creating additional hotbeds.

Even though our views do not coincide in everything on what methods to act by, the ultimate goals of our cooperation in international affairs, I believe, are identical. We concur on preventing the spread of weapons of mass destruction, we're unanimous in our resolve to fight international terrorism, organized crime and drug trafficking and concur on the need to develop cooperation in the trade and economic field and reinforce the international trade system.

We answered the questions put by the American side. For our part, we voiced concern over the slow pace of Russian WTO accession talks. The US remains the only country not to have signed the protocol with us. The question of abolishing the Jackson-Vanik amendment has become the talk of the town.

We also spoke in support of Russia-US competition in world markets proceeding on a nondiscriminatory basis, on the basis of rules that exist between our companies. We expressed reciprocal interest in seeing the recent energy and nuclear security initiatives, with which the Russian and US Presidents came up in parallel, be developed via the cooperation of experts so that we arrive at common large-scale agreements, desirably towards the G8 summit in St. Petersburg. We will also be actively cooperating with the US on UN reform, including the idea of enhancing the role of the UN's Military Staff Committee. I am grateful to Madame Rice for the hospitality and very fruitful work.

Question: A question to Secretary Rice. Iran has reportedly told Russia that it is willing to suspend large-scale uranium enrichment while preserving some small-scale enrichment. Did

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov ask for US support for such a compromise during your meetings? Could the U.S. accept any level of enrichment on Iranian soil at any time? And does this potential compromise represent a threat to the united international front that you hope to present at the Security Council? A question to Foreign Minister Lavrov. If the Iran case moves to the Security Council, is Russia prepared to support any form of economic sanction for Tehran at any time, either now or later in the Security Council review process?

Foreign Minister Lavrov: I can reiterate what Madame Rice said. There is no new Russian compromise proposal. All our contacts with Iran, with the European trio, with the United States, China and others, including the IAEA Director General, were about finding a way to implement the February decision by the IAEA Board of Governors. It is only in that context that our well-known suggestion to have a joint venture to enrich uranium on Russian soil to provide for the fuel needs of Iran was made, and we have repeatedly stated that it's only in this context that this joint venture initiative is acceptable. This initiative is not a new one. It was welcomed by all participants of the process and there are no compromise proposals, nor could there be. We will be discussing the situation on the basis of the report of the IAEA. The Security Council will be able to acquaint itself with it, as we agreed in February.

As for the question you addressed to me, we are members of the Security Council, and quite in a position not to support any proposal at any time as you have formulated your question. We will have to consider each situation on its merits.

And on the issue of Iran, what's crucial is not who does what, and whether you elevate the level of discussion or keep it where it is. What's crucial is to make sure that the international community clarifies all questions about the past program of Iran, while at the same time preventing a violation of the nonproliferation regime. How to achieve this, I assume, will be decided in the next few days. In our view, any solution should take into account the very high desirability of continuing to investigate the old Iranian program so that all the questions the international community has can be answered by experts.

Question: Do you think that other Quartet members should have direct contact with Hamas and what do you think you achieved in your meetings with the leaders of the movement? And also do you believe that funds should be given directly to Hamas after having your discussions with them on Monday?

Foreign Minister Lavrov: I cannot speak for other Quartet members. One of them is here, so you can address the question, not through me, but directly.

We wanted to talk to Hamas in order to make sure that the Quartet position does not remain on paper - and it was because somebody must start persuading Hamas of the need to listen to the international community. And we did so together with some Arab capitals which Hamas had visited before coming to Moscow. We conveyed to them our commitment to the Quartet position and explained that it would be in the interest of the Palestinian people for Hamas to accept the Quartet position. We didn't insist the Hamas did this overnight. I assume there would be more efforts to send the message to them. I hope this would not take too long. But we did hear from them that they would respect the authority and competencies of PNA Head Abbas.

We also heard from them that they would be ready to express their position on the roadmap

and hopefully endorse the roadmap, as drafted by the Quartet, without any reservations whatsoever. They also stated their readiness to consider joining the well-known Arab initiative, approved on Saudi Arabia's proposal at the Arab League Summit in Beirut. And they assured us that the assistance to Palestinians would be spent in a transparent manner on social projects, as also on projects for the modernization of infrastructure and others. They even said that they would be prepared in principle to receive and install an international monitoring mechanism to guarantee that there is no diversion of funds.

As for Russia, we're going to be providing humanitarian assistance to the Palestinian people in line with our existing practice, using UN and IMF channels.

March 9, 2006