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Unofficial translation from Russian

Transcript of Remarks and Replies to Media Questions by Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs Sergey Lavrov Following Talks with Saudi Minister of Foreign Affairs Saud Al-Faisal, El Riyadh, May 21, 2006

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Foreign Minister Lavrov: First of all, I would like to express my gratitude to the Saudi friends for the hospitality and attention accorded to our delegation. This is my first visit to the Persian Gulf region. It's no coincidence that the first country has become Saudi Arabia - an influential regional power and a long-standing friend of Russia. I was received by Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques His Majesty King Abdallah of Saudi Arabia and conveyed a personal message from Russian President Vladimir Putin to him. It gives an appraisal of the efforts that have been undertaken in development of the accords reached between the two leaders at the end of the visit in September 2003 of King Abdallah to Russia.

During the reception with the King and talks with First Deputy Prime Minister of Saudi Arabia, Minister of Defense and Aviation Crown Prince Sultan, my counterpart, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Saudi Arabia Saud Al-Faisal, and Secretary General of the National Security Council of Saudi Arabia Prince Bandar we stated that, in the slightly less than three years since the previous summit, substantial progress had been achieved in the development of bilateral relations in all fields. Such results are due to the fact that the two states' leaders regularly check how their decisions are being carried out. In their permanent dialogue they through telephone conversations and the exchange of messages compare notes on the bilateral agenda and our actions in international affairs.

We noted the marked growth of trade and the development of cooperation in the oil and gas industry in line with the existing agreements. Russian companies are working in Saudi Arabia: Lukoil, Stroitransgaz. Our other operators have interesting offers which are being considered by the Saudi partners, not only in the oil and gas field, but also in the spheres of electric power generation and railway transport. We count on a productive talk between the representatives of the business circles of Russia and the KSA.

As to their state and government support, it is first and foremost our task to develop the juridical base, improve the investment regime for the economic operators of each other, and deal with tax issues. We want to establish a direct air link and I hope that this will occur soon, especially given that El Riyadh and Moscow are keen on encouraging tourist

exchanges, in addition to the growing number of Russian pilgrims annually performing Haj.

Besides, we have intergovernmentally agreed to vigorously assist the mechanism of the bilateral commission, which is working on the basis of the agreements of the President of Russia and His Majesty King. It has set up sectoral mechanisms. We will use them maximally. The business circles themselves are actively cooperating within the framework of the Russian-Arab Business Council. There is the Russian-Saudi group in it. They meet twice a year, that is more often than the Intergovernmental Commission does. In February a meeting took place in El Riyadh. We are grateful to His Majesty King Abdallah for his receiving the participants of this meeting. The next session of the Russian-Arab Council involving the Saudi friends will now be held in September this year in St. Petersburg.

There are the cooperation mechanisms in the humanitarian field, between the Academies of Sciences and in the sporting field. I have learned with enthusiasm that a Program of Exchanges in the Field of Sports is to be signed in the near future.

My colleague has already told you about our joint steps to enhance the effectiveness of international efforts in the fight against international terrorism. There is an agreement to set up a bilateral working group in which the representatives of the Foreign Ministries and the appropriate law enforcement structures will participate. This group will soon hold its first meeting. We have much in common to advance the dialogue of civilizations.

As to international questions, Prince Saud has mentioned the main topics we discussed. I want to stress in addition to what he said that we have with Saudi Arabia a common vision of the mainlines of settlement of the problems of the region. Necessarily, there has to be a comprehensive approach here. The key to many problems, not only in the Middle East but also in intercivilizational relations, is the earliest possible reversal of the negative tendencies in Palestinian-Israeli relations. It is necessary to avoid a departure from the existing agreements and the decisions of the UN Security Council and of the Quartet of international mediators. It is important to prevent a situation where the settlement would turn out to be in jeopardy and would be replaced by unilateral decisions.

It is necessary to create conditions for the resumption of direct talks between Israel and the Palestinians and prevent them from collapsing and the ground for talks from turning out to be undermined. In this sense we agree with our Saudi friends that the Palestinians should be encouraged to act unitedly, so that there may be no discord there, let alone an outbreak of civil war, so that all Palestinian political forces - the government and other political groups - may become aware of their responsibility to their own people for the attainment of the perennial dream of the Palestinians, supported by the world community, that of establishing a Palestinian State which will coexist side by side with Israel in peace and security.

On Iraq we, like Saudi Arabia, welcome the announcement of the formation of a new government. We consider that the opportunity has come now to resume the inter-Iraqi dialogue, which in the autumn of last year was organized at the initiative and under the aegis of the LAS. We are convinced that, without such an inter-Iraqi dialogue, a stable development of the political process won't be possible to achieve. In our turn, we are ready to help this forward in every way, to support the efforts of the LAS and all of Iraq's neighbors by all the political methods at our disposal, first of all, through the capabilities of the United Nations and its Security Council.

Regarding the problem of the Iranian nuclear program, we are convinced of the necessity not to allow the nuclear nonproliferation regime to be violated and to work for the aim set exclusively by peaceful means. In this regard, we share the position of our Saudi friends, who consider it necessary not to be obsessed by procedural aspects in the examination of the entire fullness of the problems connected with the Iranian nuclear program, but to look at this situation strategically, proceeding from a strategic aim, to prevent a violation of the nonproliferation regime, but to do it so as to truly ensure the lawful interests of all the countries which, one way or another, are associated with the talks on the matter and, of course, the lawful interests of the entire world community.

We have agreed to continue our dialogue on this theme. We count on its being able to enrich the discussions being conducted on Iran.

Question: What questions are you going to discuss in your talks in Kuwait?

Foreign Minister Lavrov: I can say that we will be discussing bilateral relations. They are evolving quite intensively. By and large we are satisfied that with all the Gulf countries our ties are on the rise. Secondly, the regional agenda, what we talked about here in El Riyadh today: the questions of Middle East settlement, the situation around Iraq, the Iranian nuclear program - this all concerns the Gulf countries, which are united in the Gulf Cooperation Council. All of this affects directly their national interests and daily life. Russia as a participant of the international efforts to settle the various problems of the region is ready and will coordinate its moves with these countries.

Question: Do common points exist between the Russians and Americans on the Iranian nuclear program?

Foreign Minister Lavrov: On most of the problems which now concern the region, our ultimate tasks and those of the US, strategically and in the long term, coincide, I believe. They are the stability of the region, the prevention of the use of this key area of the world for undermining the situation here, for nourishing extremist tendencies and, accordingly, for building up terrorist activities, and the prevention of the use of these conflicts for a split which would bear an intercivilizational character. It is my belief that all these aims in the foreign policies of Russia and the United States objectively, in a long term perspective coincide. What's most important - they coincide with the interests of the region's countries themselves. We are interested in seeing the region evolve dynamically and steadily. Russia holds that to achieve these results is only possible on the basis of full consideration of the approaches which are being worked out in the countries of the region themselves. In this sense my talks today in Saudi Arabia were extremely useful because I heard very thoughtful interlocutors who are well versed in the nuances of the various problems of the Middle East and of the Persian Gulf and have an enormous experience and ability to state their point of view diplomatically, avoid abrupt movements and try to always be guided not by a specific aspect of the nearest political conjuncture, but by the strategic, long-term interests of their people and the peoples of the entire region. In this regard, our agreement to carry on the dialogue exactly in the context of a strategic vision of the development of the problems around Iran's nuclear program or other problems of this region presents a substantial and practical interest for Russian diplomacy. We are grateful to our partners for that.

Question: What sanctions could Russia support against Iran?

Foreign Minister Lavrov: I can't recall a single case in contemporary history when the sanctions would have reached the aim which their initiators had set for themselves.

Question: Of late requests have been coming in to Russia from Syria to lend assistance in Lebanese affairs. Your commentaries?

Foreign Minister Lavrov: I don't know about such requests. I can only say that in respect of Syrian-Lebanese affairs we maintain continuous contact with Damascus and Beirut. We are meeting with the leaders of these countries, with ministers, with government members and with parliamentarians. We urge both parties to tackle the issues in bilateral relations directly, through dialogue and cooperation. I do not think that they need mediators. There are between Syria and Lebanon the old, long-standing traditions of joint existence and interaction. There took place in these traditions moments which, probably, were not always positive. But now relations between Syria and Lebanon are getting rid of these negative moments. We welcome this. We believe that the progress is evident. We urge both countries to move towards the settlement of the problems remaining between them, including the questions of the exchange of embassies and those of the settlement of all border problems. This is a bilateral affair of theirs. A mediator is unlikely to be needed here. I think the Syrians and the Lebanese alike know how to approach these matters. We, I repeat, are interested that this occurs as soon as possible.

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