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The 4th Eastern Economic Forum

The 4th Eastern Economic Forum will be held in Vladivostok on September 11-13. This annual event was initiated by Russian President Vladimir Putin in 2015 to promote economic growth in the Russian Far East and to expand international cooperation in the Asia-Pacific region.

The 4th Eastern Economic Forum's agenda covers a wide range of matters related to improving the competitive advantages of the Russian Far East by streamlining existing (advanced development territories and the free port of Vladivostok) and creating new (financial centre and offshore operations on Russky Island) preferential treatment benefits for business activities, and developing additional measures to promote industry cooperation, high-tech projects, and small- and medium-sized businesses.

Given the current integration agenda and the dynamically changing geopolitical situation in the Asia-Pacific region, special emphasis will be placed on a substantive study of the opportunities opening up for Russia. In particular, the participants will review prospects for harmonising the EAEU and China's Belt and Road Initiative, creating broad integration in Greater Eurasia, and creating an economic cooperation space on the Korean Peninsula (Russia-Republic of Korea-DPRK).

A special programme, Territory of Innovation, designed to support young researchers, inventors and developers and to create an innovative ecosystem for promoting our country's long-term competitiveness, will be held at the forum for the first time.

Russia-ASEAN, Russia-Japan, Russia-Republic of Korea, Russia-Europe, and Russia-China business dialogues are on the forum's agenda.

The 7th APEC conference on cooperation in higher education will take place on the sidelines of the forum. This year, it will focus on digital revolution challenges. Numerous exhibits, sports and cultural events will be held as well.

Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov will take part in a number of meetings at the forum.

[More in US](#)

Conference of young diplomats from the Asia-Pacific countries

A Dialogue of Young Diplomats from the Asia-Pacific region countries will take place in Vladivostok on September 11-12 as part of the forum and the Russian Foreign Ministry's Council of Young Diplomats, which has been in existence for over five years now.

The participants will focus on creating an International Association of Young Diplomats and implementing the horizontal diplomacy concept.

High-ranking guests are expected to attend the event. Minister Lavrov may take part in it as well.

Media representatives are welcome to attend starting at 9 am on September 11 and 12.

For more information about the event of the Council of Young Diplomats, call + 7 916 487 4354.

Second Eurasian Women's Forum

The Second Eurasian Women's Forum will take place on September 19–21 at the Tauride Palace in St Petersburg. Over 1,000 women from 122 countries will attend.

The forum is organised by the Federation Council of the Russian Federal Assembly and the Interparliamentary Assembly of the CIS states. The event is supported by the Roscongress Fund.

The plenary session Women for Global Security and Sustainable Development chaired by Federation Council Speaker Valentina Matviyenko will be the central event. The programme of the Second Eurasian Women's Forum includes more than 40 various events.

The issues related to expanding women's opportunities and their role in politics and the economy, building effective cooperation in support of innovations, developing the digital economy, ensuring environmental safety and promoting charity and humanitarian projects are the most important themes of the forum.

Special sessions of the United Nations Industrial Development Organisation (UNIDO), UNESCO and the World Bank will be held at the forum as well as a meeting of the W20 and the BRICS women's business club, an APEC seminar and a presentation of a WHO report. There will also be meetings between representatives of the Russian, French, German, Indian and Chinese business communities as part of the forum. In addition, the Made in Russia: Women Rein the Export exhibition of women exporters' projects will take place at the forum, as well as a presentation of success stories, a volunteer marathon, and a presentation of Russian female designers.

The forum's goal is to strengthen dialogue and integration processes as well as the development of international cooperation in general.

Eurasian Women's Community website

I would also like to tell you about the Eurasian Women's Community website, which has received the status of the official news agency of the Second Eurasian Women's Forum.

It is a non-governmental independent media established by the Institute for the Humanities and Information Technologies.

In the two years since it was established, the website has published over 1,000 original pieces, and this year it attracted over 1.5 million visitors. This website has an official English version. Visitors come from over 100 countries: 38 per cent from Russia, 25 per cent from Europe, 23 from Asia, and 14 per cent from the US.

On this website you will can find unique reports, interviews and analytics. It has information about the forum's participants from all over the world. The materials are dedicated to women's talents and achievements in various areas, their personal qualities, outlook and experience that helped them on their way.

The website has its own image bank with unique photos. The materials are published exclusively and can be given to the media partners free of charge.

The website's slogan is "Tell each other to tell the whole world." You can see for yourselves.

Why am I speaking about this resource separately? There is a saying that, unfortunately, has already become a rule and something like a slogan: "Good news sells badly, and bad news sells well." Unfortunately, we are mostly living in the world of bad news stimulating with our attention this negative agenda. There will be a very interesting discussion at the forum on whether we can form a positive agenda and create a positive information environment by exchanging stories and news about achievements thus influencing our everyday reality. I think this website is an attempt to do so.

I would like to say, a bit in advance, that we plan to hold another offsite briefing this year like in 2015, on the sidelines of the First Eurasian Women's Forum.

Developments in Syria

We continue noting positive trends in the developments in Syria. The official opening of the 60th annual Damascus International Fair has become the main event in the country's social life. This year it is being held under the motto "The Glory of the Orient starts in Damascus." Official representatives and companies from 48 states are attending the fair that will last through September 15. The Russian delegation is headed by Deputy Minister of Industry and Trade Georgy Kalamonov.

Efforts in Syria's liberated areas to restore the socio-economic infrastructure destroyed by terrorists are ongoing. In connection with the beginning of the new academic year, it was very important to repair and ensure the full operation of schools in districts where children have had no opportunity to receive a normal education for several years. By and large, the Syrian authorities have achieved the goal. The Syrian government has also restored the work of about 60 medical institutions in Eastern Ghouta, in the north of Homs and in the south. The media are reporting the beginning of construction of a major hospital complex at the University of Hama.

Much attention is being given to returning the internally displaced persons (IDP) to their residence and accepting refugees from abroad, whose inflow is gradually increasing. On September 4, Syrians celebrated a year since the lifting of the siege of Deir ez-Zor. About 600,000 IDPs have returned to the province of the same name during this time, mostly in the past two months. Earlier they had to leave their homes, to flee from ISIS and other armed groups.

The Russian military police are helping Syrians restore the regime of the 1974 agreement on the disengagement of Syrian and Israeli troops in the Golan Heights. The territory is being cleared of weapon caches left by the terrorists. Arms and ammunition depots and satellite communications equipment were found there recently.

The Idlib de-escalation zone remains a hot spot in Syria. Currently, most of it is controlled by terrorists that have united around Jabhat al-Nusra as part of the structure called Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham. Even the presence of the Turkish military at 12 observation posts along the zone's internal perimeter has not stopped these successors of al-Qaeda from continuing to commit armed provocations against government army positions, civilians and the Russian military base at Khmeimim. To curb these raids, the Russian Aerospace Forces launched pinpoint strikes at terrorist facilities on September 4 and 5. These facilities were used by terrorists to prepare and launch attacks by combat drones against Russian and Syrian troops, about which the Russian Defence Ministry has made detailed reports.

Russian and Syrian military are discussing in detail ways of eliminating the terrorist presence in Idlib with the least damage to civilians. Last week Turkey confirmed at the highest level that it considers Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham a terrorist organisation. Turkish and Russian working groups held talks on regional security issues and the situation in Syria between August 31 and September 4 in Ankara. Both sides reaffirmed their intention to continue cooperating in this area.

Meanwhile, al-Nusra continues to destroy infrastructure in Idlib: exploding bridges and ruining roads in the hope of repelling the onslaught of Syrian government troops, which it expects and is scared of. Civil activists who advocate the signing by non-terrorist armed opposition groups of local reconciliation agreements with Syrian legal authorities are being arrested. The terrorists are preventing civilians from leaving the Idlib zone through open humanitarian corridors and leading residents of villages on the contact line deep into the province in the hope of using innocent people as live shields. This tactic has been used in other parts of Syria as well.

We urge our international partners, who publicly display serious concern over the possibility of a "humanitarian crisis" in Idlib in the event of the onslaught of government forces, to consider the aforementioned facts and reach the honest conclusion as to who is really working to alleviate this crisis. At the same time we would like to reaffirm our position of principle on the need for the complete and final elimination of terrorists on Syria's entire territory. We would also like to emphasise that Russia will do all it can to minimise human loss and damage to civilians in Idlib. We hope that our partners who have the ability to influence events will make their contribution to this goal by facilitating the separation of terrorists from the armed opposition groups that are ready to join the process of political settlement.

I would like to note once again that we have repeatedly told our foreign partners at all levels that the struggle against the terrorists will continue.



Statement by the US Secretary of State's Special Representative for Syria Engagement James Jeffrey

We have taken note of a statement carried by the world media with reference to the US Secretary of State's Special Representative for Syria Engagement James Jeffrey. Let me quote: "The US has repeatedly asked Russia whether it could 'operate' [as part of efforts to combat terrorists] in the Syrian province of Idlib to eliminate the last holdouts of the Islamic State and other extremist groups." For instance, this statement was reported by Reuters.

We have many questions regarding this statement. Since it was made publicly, we would like to clarify some points publicly as well. What is this about? What did the US Secretary of State's Special Representative for Syria Engagement James Jeffrey actually mean? Because this statement is not quite clear to us.



Update on Kirill Vyshinsky

Yesterday, it was reported that the Kherson City Court ruled to extend the detention of Head of the RIA Novosti Ukraine website Kirill Vyshinsky, who was arrested on unfounded treason charges in May. The journalist will remain in custody until November 4, 2018. We again point out that this is a man who performed his professional duties quite openly, in conformity with the corresponding laws of the host country and with respect for and in full compliance with journalism ethics.

We are particularly worried about the declining health of Kirill Vyshinsky, who was rushed to a hospital from the courtroom with preinfarction syndrome. In the isolation cell where the journalist is held, he is being denied the qualified medical aid that he needs.

I would like to stress that this is not a person who pretends to be a journalist, a scriptwriter or an art figure. This is an actual journalist, a person who is well-known to you and the entire international community purely as a journalist. This is a person who did not work in any other profession or try to combine it with journalism or any other humanitarian activity. Kirill Vyshinsky has been a journalist all along, doing his job in a high quality and professional manner. I would like to repeat that it is in this capacity that he was presented in Ukraine. Likewise, he is known to the international journalism community as a journalist.

We demand that Kirill Vyshinsky be released immediately and in the meantime that he be provided with acceptable detention conditions and promptly receive medical aid.

We urge the international community to influence the lawlessness that reigns in Ukraine. The price of ongoing attempts to spin aggressive anti-Russia rhetoric in the Ukrainian media space and of the unprincipled fight against any manifestations of dissent could be yet another human life.

The Ukrainian policy towards their own journalists does not inspire optimism either. We share OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media Harlem Desir's concerns over Ukrainian court rulings granting the authorities access to data from the mobile phones of chief editor of the Schemes programme on Radio Liberty, Natalya Sedletskaia, and Novoye Vremya journalist Kristina Berdinskikh. This is a direct violation of one of the most important principles of freedom of the media – the right of journalists not to disclose their sources of information.

Yesterday, it was also reported that the National Council on TV and Radio Broadcasting of Ukraine decided to temporarily limit the distribution of the Russian-language RTVI channel with a British license on the country's cable networks. We view this decision as part of the ongoing campaign to clear the country's media space of alternative sources of information.

Open disregard for the democratic principles of ensuring freedom of expression and freedom of the media in Ukraine is utterly unacceptable. Kiev's policy will likely result in the further erosion of the right to freedom of expression in that country. The immediate involvement of the entire journalism and human rights communities is necessary to resolve this disastrous situation with freedom of the media in Ukraine.



Update on the Skripal case

As you may have seen, in her speech before Parliament, Prime Minister of Britain Theresa May revealed new information presented by the British police on the Skripal case. The key point of her speech was the statement that investigators had acquired photos and videos depicting two suspects using the chemical agent Novichok, their itinerary in Britain, citizenship, and the names and surnames in the Latin alphabet. At this point, we do not understand and do not know whether this recently released information is complete or just part of what is known. Has this information been homogenised by British law-enforcement bodies or is it factual?

I think everyone read what was published. We did as well. I also hope that you read our statements on this. We published them on the official Foreign Ministry website on the same day. These statements are explicit and detailed. Let's return to this issue with an account of the questions we received.

So, according to the British version, the persons involved in the Skripal case that also includes the poisoning of two residents of Amesbury with a chemical substance are certain intelligence officers, Russian nationals, which were acting with the consent of high-ranking Russian officials. Britain claims at the top level that the crime was perpetrated by certain people depicted in photos released by the police. Scotland Yard immediately expressed the caveat that the family names of the criminals were most likely invented although it is known that they flew in from Moscow and that traces of Novichok were found in their hotel room.

This was followed by accusations that included the phrase "highly likely" that have become common around the world and that has now been upgraded to "almost certainly.". Everything about this story is absurd, especially Theresa May's assertion that "only Russia had the technical means, operational experience and motive to carry out the attack." One gets the impression that the British Prime Minister lives in complete information vacuum and that the numerous statements by the Russian leaders and in general media simply do not reach her, or that they are not reported to her. Possibly, she is only shown excerpts from the programme News of the Week with Dmitry Kiselev, but isn't shown the numerous statements by President of Russia Vladimir Putin, Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, government officials, representatives from the Presidential Executive Office and the Foreign Ministry. I understand that Kiselev's programme on Rossiya 1 is so popular that it is quoted in the British Parliament as Russia's official position.

However, I am forced to disappoint Ms May. Russia's official position has been expressed repeatedly by President Vladimir Putin, Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, official representatives of Russian government agencies and ministries, official spokespersons of the Presidential Executive Office and the Foreign Ministry.

It was also announced in London that Britain has repeatedly demanded that Russia report on its actions in Salisbury, whereas in response Russia has allegedly lied and tried to confuse everyone. This is simply untrue. This is not just an invention or an insinuation but simply an outright lie. All that was demanded of us on the very first day was to acknowledge two facts – either both or one of them. We were given a choice to admit that Russia: a) committed a crime in Salisbury or b) lost control of toxic chemical agents. We were also told that the matter deals with chemical warfare agents. No other questions were asked and no other agenda was suggested by Britain. Russia was offered a choice from these two options.

Although this was done in an unacceptable manner and was in effect an accusation in the form of an ultimatum, the Russian Federation continued the dialogue as we thought appropriate. In reality this has been a monologue that continues up to this day. During this monologue (we hope it will become a dialogue at some point), the Russian Federation sent many inquiries to official London. We published part of our unilateral correspondence on the official Foreign Ministry website. This is not just a list but documents that the Russian Federation sent to its British colleagues at its own initiative through diplomatic channels. Moreover, I'd like to note that the British officials told us they could not present information through diplomatic channels and suggested that the Russian Embassy in Britain address the hospitals and the police independently, verifying and making the required inquiries. The Russian Embassy in Britain followed this advice and began addressing the police stations and hospitals. When they were swamped by Russian inquiries and did not deem it possible to respond, another "piece of indispensable advice" arrived. We were told that the Russian Embassy in Britain should not initiate inquiries to British hospitals and the police but should appeal to British diplomats via government channels. The Russian Embassy not only took notice of this information but began sending inquiries to the Foreign Office. We did not receive even formal replies to most of these inquiries.

So, when Theresa May says that Russia was offered an opportunity to answer questions, to submit a report but did not take advantage of this chance – this is far from the truth and more like overt misinformation. Let me repeat that Russia sent inquiries to Britain many times. Apart from the practical questions of what happened in Amesbury and Salisbury and a striving to receive concrete data in order to facilitate our own investigation in Russia, we also asked for direct access to the Skripals. We also suggested that representatives from law enforcement bodies in both states begin to conduct the investigation jointly.

At yesterday's session of the UN Security Council many states made absolutely absurd statements, urging Russia to start cooperating with British investigators. This is a mirror-world, beyond the theatre of the absurd, just delirium. Let me repeat again that we had to publish excerpts from the documents that we forwarded to the British side. Let me say it again, we published parts of them but we can publish all of them if need be. Needless to say, this does not conform to diplomatic practice but what London is doing does not conform to any civilised practice at all.

I'd like to draw your attention to the fact that we received many questions about these people and requests to confirm or reject their involvement with Russian government bodies.

After receiving the first information about the event in Salisbury, Russia made well-grounded official statements and not only at the political level but also at the highest government level that the Russian Federation had nothing to do with what had happened there.

Therefore, what happened in London on September 5 is yet another attempt to attract the attention of the international community, states, public organisations and journalists to these photos and present them as photos of people linked with Russian government bodies. This is a classic example of misinformation. Our position was well known in London. It was stated on the record and repeatedly conveyed to Britain through diplomatic channels, to British Ambassador in the Russian Federation Laurie Bristow and via the Russian Embassy in London.

I would like to repeat the most important points that we have already presented.

1. The statement by British Prime Minister Theresa May in British Parliament on September 5, as well as her previous statements on Salisbury and Amesbury were made in an unacceptable tone.
2. The latest statement, as well as the previous statements on this issue, contains unsupported accusations against the Russian Federation.
3. We resolutely reject the insinuations made by Britain. I think this is a tell-tale phrase. I'd like to emphasise that this statement is not being made for the first time. For over five months we have repeatedly expressed the Russian position at all levels.
4. We have noted the phrase that "only Russia had the technical means, operational experience and motive to carry out the attack" in Salisbury. This statement was made immediately after the release of the report by the OPCW Secretariat. I would like to emphasise that this is the only "evidence" on which Britain's entire accusation rests. After all, the photos and videos that were presented are no evidence but just the photos of the so-called accused. As for the evidence itself, we were again told to take it at face value. I'd like to emphasise again that this is the only "evidence," notably that only Russia had the technical means, operational experience and motive to carry out the attack. We have repeatedly explained in this hall where representatives of the diplomatic corps were present, went on record in the OPCW and published on the official Foreign Ministry website the facts related to who tested this substance, on what scale, and who can produce it. We were not speaking alone. I'd like to recall that after several months it transpired and was confirmed by EU countries that similar substances were produced and tested in EU countries. Naturally, Britain itself and the United States have much experience in this respect. To a large extent, they are the main beneficiaries of this global provocation.

I'd also like to mention that the Foreign Ministry's official website carries many materials, including references, on this matter. We will update this information in a timely manner.

Report by Director General of the IAEA on the implementation of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) on Iran's nuclear programme

On August 30, IAEA Director General Yukiya Amano released a regular report on the agency's verification work in Iran as part of the implementation of the JCPOA and UN Security Council Resolution 2231 of 2015. The document will be considered at the September 10 session of the IAEA Board of Governors.

The Director General has once again confirmed Iran's strict compliance with its obligations under the JCPOA.

This conclusion is in itself evidence of the exclusively peaceful nature of Iran's nuclear programme. It shows that in this respect, the JCPOA is effectively meeting its objectives. The IAEA verification process in Iran is by far the most comprehensive and specific, more so than in any other country. Tehran's approach also confirms its willingness to keep the agreement in force, something Russia, for its part, fully supports.

We continue our active work with a view to preserving the JCPOA, including jointly with the other parties to the agreement.



Opening of the 39th session of the UN Human Rights Council

On September 10, the 39th session of the UN Human Rights Council will open in Geneva.

The session agenda will be very rich as usual and will include extensive discussions on a wide range of human rights issues, such as the problems of indigenous peoples, the prevention of genocide, the impact of unilateral coercive measures on human rights, countering racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerances, the rights of the elderly, the right to development, a fair and democratic world order, the use of mercenaries, the human rights aspects of combating modern forms of slavery, forceful disappearances and arbitrary arrests. The human rights situation in a number of countries, including Syria and Ukraine, will also be reviewed.

The council will discuss the May 2011 Universal Periodic Review process by 14 states, including the Russian Federation.

On the sidelines of the session, Russian non-governmental organisations will hold a series of events devoted to countering contemporary forms of racism and xenophobia, as well as the problem of limiting the Russian-language educational and information landscape in the Baltic countries and Ukraine. The Russian delegation intends to organise a presentation of the Master's Degree Programme in Human Rights Education, which has been successfully offered in the Russian Federation for many years in cooperation with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights.

During the session, the Russian delegation will pursue a policy of developing constructive dialogue and seeking mutually acceptable solutions to key issues on the international human rights agenda, and preventing the politicisation of human rights issues and using it as a tool of political pressure.



NATO's reaction to Vostok 2018 military exercise

In the spirit of transparency and predictability, well in advance, as early as in May this year, Russia informed the North Atlantic Alliance member countries about this event at a meeting of the Russia-NATO Council. NATO military attachés were invited to observe the exercise. I think this goodwill gesture on our part is clear. Let me remind you that the Russian Federation also took similar steps last year for the Zapad 2017 exercise. But last year also there was criticism of that exercise, of Russia's unprecedented openness, allegedly because it was so unexpected and the reasons of the exercise were not clear. The West lacks an understanding of the actions taken by the Russian side.

Unfortunately, we have become used to NATO and some member country claims that Russia is allegedly preparing for some "large-scale conflict." The West clings to its attitude of seeing a Russian threat in any event or occurrence. There are no grounds for that.

The Vostok 2018 military exercise is held far from NATO's area of responsibility, the Euro-Atlantic, and has no effect on the security of its member countries.

For our part, however, we cannot help but factor in the decision by some NATO countries to significantly increase defence spending, which even now makes up over a half of the world's expenditures to that effect and exceeds Russia's spending manifold – in total by about 14 times, as well as the intensity and number of NATO drills near our borders.

We have commented a number of times on the increasing intensity and scale of the training activities of the NATO member states in regions that border Russia. Russia's stance remains unchanged – these activities cause serious concern, they do not enhance security but rather undermine it by creating the additional risk of a military incident involving the use of weapons.



Events in honour of the 70th anniversary of the Israeli diplomatic mission opening in Moscow

In connection with the 70th anniversary of the opening of the Israeli diplomatic mission in Moscow, a history seminar was held at the Diplomatic Academy of the Russian Foreign Ministry in Moscow on September 6, arranged by the Embassy of Israel with support from the Russian Foreign Ministry. Taking part in the seminar were Russian and Israeli diplomats and politicians, members of the academic community and public figures. On the same day, the Golda Meir exhibition was unveiled in the Moscow Choral Synagogue featuring some documents from the Foreign Policy Archive of the Russian Federation, for the first time.

On September 5, a memorial plaque was unveiled on the door of a suite in Metropol Hotel, the residence of Golda Meir, the first Envoy Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Israel to the Soviet Union.



Regular round of US senate hearings with Facebook and Twitter representatives

We noted with interest a regular round of the hearings in the US Senate that took place on September 5 at the Select Committee on Intelligence with representatives from the Facebook and Twitter social network services. Once more the issue of Russia's mystical involvement in the election process in America and other Western countries was discussed. There were strong politically charged accusations by Senate members against Moscow, claiming, in particular, that "Russia was acting not only against the US government but against the American people," and "a weak America is good for Russia," while Russian information agencies RT and Sputnik were publicly called agents of Russian intelligence services just because they strive to offer an alternative point of view. When BuzzFeed publishes data

on the Russian Embassy's financial activity and funding transfers, we are perfectly aware that this data could be passed to this source only by representatives of certain US services, no one in the US Congress considers this media outlet, as it calls itself, an agent of the special services. Whereas this is exactly mediation services that the media outlet carries out between the special services and, sadly, the general public. But no one even raises this issue.

Twitter CEO Jack Dorsey was asked a direct question as to whether Twitter is an American company and whether he prefers to see America remain the world's dominant global superpower. Is it okay to put this question to a representative of a networking service at all? During the past ten years, the American side has insisted that networking services are "new media," "the journalists of a new era."

This is probably where the core of the problem lies. The aim is not the protection of users but the United States' imperial ambitions. Sadly, this is the consequence of the Russophobia of the past several years.

Speaking more specifically on the actual problems? the networking services admitted they had not done enough to prevent uncontrolled activity on their social networks. We cannot help but agree with this. They mentioned the astonishing numbers of blocked fake accounts, with 1.27 billion fake accounts deactivated by Facebook between October 2017 and March 2018. However, for example, a fake account of the "Russian Embassy in Czechoslovakia," which spreads misinformation about Russia in a derisive manner, is still active. We have repeatedly addressed Facebook's administration, asking them to take measures but have only received the response that "the page does not violate the rules of a social platform." Obviously, the time has come to raise the question in practice and invite networking services representatives to Moscow for an engaging and substantive talk similar to the one that took place in the United States. It would be interesting to know whether Facebook, an American company, would prefer to see the United States remain the world's dominant global superpower. Why can't we talk about this in Moscow, for example?

Indeed, the problem with fake news and pages does exist. As I said, it took us much time and effort to close the Russian embassies' fake pages. For several weeks we could not get Russian embassies' fraudulent pages closed in the EU countries. We provided all the information to our colleagues at Facebook. This problem remains pervasive outside the United States as well. Let's talk about it together and not behind the scenes, calling somebody on the carpet and asking them whether they prefer that the US remain the world's dominant global superpower.

We increasingly see the necessity for developing a more transparent and independent universal system of identifying fake accounts with due consideration for internationally accepted ethical and cultural norms and freedom of speech, which do not violate the domestic legislative standards of other countries. We have noted that the representatives of network services' administrations voiced the awareness of this problem and assured that they are taking efforts to improve the system of monitoring and filtration. For our part, we believe that one of the most important steps in this regard is making the information on blocked accounts available to the public and specifying the reason they were blocked. With the word "Russia" constantly mentioned, it would be interesting to know what fake accounts hide behind the country's name.

That said, we emphasise, that given the global nature of the problem, we deem the US administration's attempts to exert pressure on social networks unacceptable. We encourage professional discussion instead of reprimands and demands for a report on what is being done to make sure America remains the only global superpower.



The problem of distorting the truth in US politics

Lately we have been using the words "fake," "propaganda" and "blatant lie" during all our briefings. My colleagues and I have carried out a little research on this, where we tried to examine the problem of distorting the truth in US politics. In order to be as objective as possible, we only used information by US experts published in open sources. We saw an interesting picture.

According to assessments by US experts, the practice of neglecting facts and cause-and-effect relationships regarding domestic and foreign events, which took root in the US media and politics, has become unprecedented in scale. This is not our assessment but that of US experts. A number of experts call this phenomenon "truth decay." It happens when the line between an opinion and a fact becomes blurred. In the analysis of events, opinions and personal experience have preference instead of an analysis of what really happened. In addition, the information is rarely double-checked, and respect for fact sources declines. They just go unnoticed.

Analysts note that today, when media and social networks have total audience reach and the staged political battles in government agencies have become an everyday routine, this "truth decay" in the US shows no sign of returning to the norm. This results in political institutions losing their ability to perform their original functions and the population losing interest in their activities.

Michael Rich, the president of Rand Corporation, a US think tank, notes that open debates are being replaced by "backstage" speeches and that oversight over agencies has lost its effectiveness and has been addressing secondary problems.

He also voiced his doubt that any reform of Congress that has been discussed in the US for many years will show any significant result. The excessive degree of interparty polarisation of approaches to all key problems forbids members of Congress from cooperating constructively. Senior Fellow of the Royal Institute of International Affairs Michah Zenko states that the policymakers' views of their tasks have changed. Michael Rich agrees saying that the current Congress members realise their ambitions not through thoughtful work on legislation or policy but by their involvement in disgusting theatricalised actions.

Experts are especially concerned over the possible consequences of "truth decay" in foreign policy. These are not our assessments but US ones. It is said that some of the greatest political failures in US history took place due to a lack of attention to the facts or their alteration.

A piece written by Senior Fellow of the Brookings Institution Thomas Mann and his colleague Norman Ornstein directly says that Democrats are actively distorting reality in the eyes of the Washington establishment.

It is also curious to hear the thoughts of Rodger Baker, Senior Vice President at Stratfor, a US private analytical company, who says that streams of lies that are produced by the political opponents of Donald Trump are based on their confidence that the liberal world is universal in its nature, being the best form of organisation for a society or a state and unavoidable in the future. The expert believes that none of this is true.

According to Brian Katulis, a senior fellow at the Center for American Progress, the US has enough educated people who notice the country's foreign policy predicament. However, there is an acute demand for specialists who could offer ways to overcome this.

We would like to note that former US President Barack Obama saw this problem, too – although in his own way – and stated in 2016 that if the West did not learn how to tell the truth and propaganda apart, it would face great difficulties. Unfortunately, these words of his were in many respects prophetic.

It is obvious that the US intellectual elite realises how fatal and strategically unviable it is to distort the truth about the political life in the country. But as we see, there is no answer so far about how to stop this or how to make the public see the dreadful consequences of a fake reality.



French think tanks' report on manipulation of information

Russophobic sentiment in the media is being ratcheted up in France under the pretext of countering disinformation. On September 4, a report by French Foreign and Armed Forces ministries' think tanks on information manipulation was released. It added to famous French initiatives like the draft bill on fighting disinformation which aims at strengthening control over the media, and the proposed separation of news resources into "right" and "wrong" within the project to establish so-called "Journalism Trust Indicators." But this is France, the cradle, as we used to say, of the modern perception of free speech, ethical standards and requirements for journalism. This is the country that laid the foundations for modern democracy and, of course, the basics of modern understanding and realisation of freedom of speech.

This document, that even by any possible stretch can't be called "expert" due to the abundance of opinionated claims and propagandistic clichés, is shocking in its unveiled anti-Russia bias and sharp hostile rhetoric towards our media operating in France.

In France, they openly call RT and Sputnik propagandists and, in particular, allege that they cannot qualify to be called media. Moreover, the report claims that these information resources disseminate only propaganda. Meanwhile, no proof whatsoever or even arguments are given to support such allegations which are, in my view, an example of the work of a fake entity with which they propose fighting. If you put forth allegations and fail to include facts, what are you proving? In the same vein, the ostensible exposures of episodes in the information war allegedly waged by Russia in different regions of the world are given. For example, RT is charged with making a report that "Spanish is studied as a foreign language in Catalonia," whereas the TV channel never broadcast that report. If it did, please forward a screenshot, or any details of the report.

I know correspondents can make mistakes. Recently our colleagues from the Foreign Ministry in Azerbaijan reported to us that erroneous information was posted on a particular resource of RT, of which we informed them. It appeared that RT had already been notified by users, made the correction and issued an apology.

Moreover, the report contains a list of 50 recommendations to "countries, civil society and individuals." One of the points recommends they not accredit RT and Sputnik journalists: "First, they should be named... then accreditation should be rejected or suspended and their journalists should not be invited to press conferences." As an illustration for the proposal of "naming", a President Macron quote is given in which he calls RT and Sputnik "agents of influence." As we have said, the whole RT story in France is built up solely on Emmanuel Macron's personal attitude towards that media outlet. Why he harbors a grudge against them is a question for the French side. Unfortunately, the trend started with him. There is no other fact-based confirmation. It is a different matter that state bodies, possibly, sensing a demand or maybe fulfilling an order, attempt to substantiate Macron's point with facts but they are failing to do so.

Apparently, the goal of the report is creating the image of an external enemy. In reality we think this targets not so much isolating RT and Sputnik as justifying the measures being undertaken in France to limit free speech. RT and Sputnik were chosen as a smokescreen. This is convenient.

We expect a proper response from the respective international bodies and NGOs. This cannot be left unanswered. First of all, we expect a comment from Harlem Desir, OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media and his expert opinion concerning the way such documents, which in fact reflect the position of the corresponding French authorities, comply with the obligations undertaken by the French Republic within the OSCE, including following the principles of freedom of expression and equal access to information for everyone.



Russian mass media situation in Latvia

We continue to monitor the situation with the Russian mass media in Latvia. The official Riga is again making attempts to restrict the broadcasts of Russia's Rossiya RTR television channel. This time, the pretext was violations in the form of "hostile rhetoric" in programmes shown on the channel, allegedly found by Latvia's National Electronic Mass Media Council. Can you imagine what would happen if the "hostile rhetoric" pretext was used against US mass media, such as CNN, or Britain's BBC? For instance, a speech by British Prime Minister Theresa May broadcast by BBC fits very nicely into this "hostile rhetoric" towards Russia definition. Should BBC be closed now? We are talking about countries of a single ideological space. Why do these countries, which make statements based on the West's single ideological platform that should become globally dominant, show such different attitudes? Just make up your mind about who is right? Riga or London. Is the "hostile rhetoric" only a pretext for closing the channel, or is it the norm and free speech?

We view this politically charged step by the Latvian authorities toward the TV channel as a blatant discrimination and an unlawful effort to limit access of Latvia's Russian-speaking residents to alternative sources of information. It is clearly obvious that Riga is trying to play the Russophobic card ahead of the parliamentary elections in the country by making mass media hostages of the domestic political struggle.

We call for the specialised international structures and non-governmental organisations to respond to this. We await assessments from Vienna and Brussels on whether such policy of the official Riga corresponds to pan-European values and the European Union norms. We would like to again bring this to OSCE's and Harlem Desir's notice.



Ongoing glorification campaign of Nazi in Estonia

The reconstruction on September 2 of the notorious monument to 20th Waffen Grenadier Division of the SS in Lihula, Estonia, which was pulled down on 2004, cannot but arouse indignation.

The fact that the event was held with the full acquiescence, and without a word of disapproval, of the country's authorities is yet another proof that a policy calling for the actual promotion of Nazi ideology is surreptitiously being implemented by Tallinn. It appears that hardly anybody in the Estonian political establishment is concerned about that fact that such events desecrate the memory of millions of those who fell fighting against Nazism. How can all this exist on one and the same continent? How can all this exist within the same international institutions? support and promotion of the need to seek historical truth, alongside the installation of monuments and the profound indifference from the authorities?

The fact that the "civilized" Europe, which should see the unacceptability of Nazism, Neo-Nazism, racism and xenophobia as part of its common system of values, is keeping silent makes this even more saddening.

We call for our international partners and the specialised agencies to pay close attention to a spate of profane attempts to rewrite the outcome of WWII, which have become an ordinary occurrence in post-Soviet Estonia, and give these attempts the assessment they deserve.



Joint efforts to establish the name and burial place of a Soviet soldier killed during the liberation of Czechoslovakia

The joint efforts of our embassies in Astana and Bratislava, public organisations and historian O.Alibekov to fulfil the request of residents of Nevidzany, Slovakia, to find out personal data of a Red Army soldier from Kazakhstan D.Kharishmbayev (Khashimbayev), who was killed during the liberation of the village from Nazi occupiers in 1945, helped to set the real name of the hero: Zh.Koshkimbayev.

It is planned to hold restoration work at Koshkimbayev's burial place, where the remains of 11 other Soviet liberator warriors of the 1st Guard Paratrooper Division are buried.

We express our deep gratitude to the residents of Nevidzany. These people sincerely wish to build a memorial to the Soviet soldiers who gave their lives to liberate Europe. It is especially important at this moment, when attempts are constantly made to rewrite history and denigrate the heroic deeds of those who fought and died to protect their homeland, Europe and the entire world.



Russian-Azerbaijani interregional forum

The multifaceted cooperation between Russian regions and the Republic of Azerbaijan, which is developing based on the agreements between the Azerbaijani government and Russian regional governments, is an important element of Russian-Azerbaijani relations. As of today, there are 17 agreements and a number of new ones are being drafted.

In particular, the following facts prove the effectiveness of interregional ties with Azerbaijan: there are representations of Dagestan and Tatarstan, Ural Trading House and Tatarstan Trading House, as well as several regional airlines (Bashkir Airlines, Perm Airlines, Pulkovo Airlines, Samara Airlines and Ural Airlines) and some Russian businesses (Khazar Lada, the official AvtoVAZ dealer and Vostok-Service Group) in Baku. Azerbaijani entrepreneurs invested in the construction of a resort in Yessentuki as well as in plants that produce tinned vegetables and dry mortar in the Krasnodar Territory; projects are also being implemented in Kabardino-Balkaria and Dagestan.

The annual Russian-Azerbaijani interregional forum is a venue for discussing and preparing new cooperation projects. The ninth forum is being prepared now.

We will provide you with more details later.



Answers to media questions:

Question: On September 5, the Trilateral Contact Group had a meeting in Minsk where the Russian Federation refused to discuss exchanging Russian nationals who had been taken captive in Ukraine. After the conviction they wrote a petition in prison about the exchange addressed to the President of the Russian Federation Vladimir Putin. There is a petition there, including by one of your acquaintances Viktor Ageyev, someone you have been asked about a number of times. Will you please explain why the Russian Federation abandoned its citizens in Ukrainian prisons and does not agree on an exchange?

Maria Zakharova: The Russian Federation has not abandoned its nationals, I would like to ask you to choose your words more carefully. If you do populism and propaganda, will you please keep it to the pages of whichever publication you are working for. If your media outlet has such a policy, it is your business. I strongly advise you to remember that we are not having a campaign meeting here and it is not the Ukrainian Independent Information Agency of News (UNIAN) but a briefing for the press. There are no instances when the Russian Federation abandons its nationals, especially when it comes to such aggravated situations, conflict zones etc.

As to the request sent, I will find out what it is about.

Question: Yesterday you told journalists that the British Foreign Office refused to give Russia additional information on the two suspects in the Salisbury case.

Maria Zakharova: Not additional, but any information at all. This is a very important point. The British side refused to give Russia any data at all. It is not about additional data, it is about us sending notes, letters, requests, speaking publicly about it as soon as the first spring birds flew off from the London nest with charges against Russia. But after another salvo with photos which were presented as evidence I cannot figure out (I am a person who is not close to law enforcement bodies) how the published photos can be evidence, and evidence of what? Photographs and names were published and they are said to be suspects. But where is the evidence here? How long do they think they can take the world for a bunch of fools? Is this a guessing game where we have to try and make out what the footage we are taking a look at is all about? Cross-check those photos, understand where they were from, double check this? We immediately contacted the British side, we did it both in London as well as in Moscow. The Russian Charge d'Affaires Ivan Volodin was summoned to the Foreign Office in London, the British Ambassador to the Russian Federation Laurie Bristow was contacted in Moscow too. In both cases we tried to ask the questions that everybody is worried about. Who are these people? Is there any particular information about them – passport numbers, at least patronymic names, data received upon them applying for visas and so forth? Of course, we asked questions also about what can be simpler than giving the Russian side information about the fingerprints. All our questions met the same answer — we will not present or give you anything, so don't even try asking any questions. It was worded like this in London — we are not responding to your questions. So it is not about additional data, it is in essence about the position of the UK which said that it would not present anything in response to the inquiries made by the Russian side.

Question: As a follow-up on the previous question, you also said yesterday that the data will probably arrive via Interpol. Do we understand correctly that nothing has been received so far? Can we say that cooperation with Interpol is currently more successful than with Great Britain?

Maria Zakharova: The point is that if the UK has charges against residents of other nations, as they claim, it would be logical to suppose that they should somehow address international bodies. I think it would be better if you were to address this question to a law enforcement official who is able to put you in the picture on how this mechanism works. But this follows from the logic of what the UK is doing. Apparently, the next stage is to approach Interpol. Then, if they do not present Russia with official data, we will be waiting for them to approach Interpol and then we will be waiting for those fingerprints and data from Interpol. It borders on absurdity claiming that those people are the suspects, and releasing evidence in the form of photos with an immediate caveat that everything is most likely fake and likewise the names and documents. So will you please share what you have.

Question: Do you know that they flew and left the country with Aeroflot? Given that you have photos and you know the flight numbers, it is easy to determine who they are.

Maria Zakharova: I have no doubt that in present-day conditions in our country and in the world there is an opportunity to find out whether they were traveling on those flights. But this isn't just a five minute job. The main thing is that the British side had the data, photos and names before September 5 or even September 4. This material they had certainly had for several months. Why didn't they hand it over to us beforehand? If they did not want to communicate directly with us they could have provided us with the information through a third party. By the time it was published, we could have already done some of the work. We did ask them for it. If for some reason or other they didn't want to speak to us directly, why didn't they choose a mediator? The data can always be transferred via this manner. Then we could have already done some work on this matter by September 5 or 6. But I have the impression that they wanted to buy some time so as to make it as hard as possible for the Russian side. The longer the time, the more difficult it is to look into a matter.

Just look at what we are being directed towards and pushed into. We are constantly being forced to act on the defensive. We have to make excuses all the time. But what for? And most importantly, what legal basis is there for us to come up with arguments and present facts showing that we are innocent? We live in a different kind of world. The core of the presumption of innocence and the basis of democracy lie in the following: It is not a person, country or organisation that have to prove they are innocent. On the contrary, evidence of guilt must be presented to them. When British Prime Minister Theresa May five months ago immediately pointed the finger at Russia it runs contrary to its own legal norms and rules. They bought time for several months and provided no information, and then they posted the photos and said this was the evidence. What evidence? Someone can post a photo of you tomorrow, and you most likely travel from Russia, maybe to London or somewhere else. This is simply

absurd. There is no doubt that the identity and the number of the passengers can be determined as well as the number of passengers returning back. But it requires time and this is not just a 15 minute job.

Question: But considering that you are eager to cooperate and say that you want to do this with the law enforcement agencies, can you really say that you are making an effort to do this and you will hand over information?

Maria Zakharova: Do you know that Russia is carrying out an investigation? Under this investigation, all the gathered information is both considered as well as analysed. The only thing we are asking for is to return back to the norms of a civilised manner of doing things so that we can get this information directly from British law enforcement bodies and verify it. But if we are offered, in a non-civilised and weird way which is outside the legal framework, a chance to obtain information from the mass media, then we will analyse this information. But we are asking that the Russian law enforcement bodies be involved in working with the information sources that British law enforcement bodies have. What is taking place in Great Britain together with all the information published is being examined by the Russian law enforcement bodies. They may not know in Great Britain that Russia has launched an investigation, but it is underway and everything that has been published will be analysed and receive a response. But I represent the Foreign Ministry, I am not involved in the matters related to analysing information or looking for people and determining whether or not they were on the flight. I can only use the data that has been verified and presented by law enforcement bodies.

As regards the involvement of the Russian Federation and its government agencies in what happened in Salisbury and Amesbury, we have repeatedly voiced and reaffirmed our stance, including during today's briefing. The details will be thoroughly and meticulously examined by the law enforcement bodies, and we will comment at a later stage.

Question: Do you think it's possible that these people and their names are established and the passport details exist? Will these people somehow be revealed?

Maria Zakharova: Why should I think that? It should be established who these people are, whether there are such people or not. This is a matter of checking. We want to do it as fast and effectively as possible and this is why we again ask the UK for help in establishing these people's identities once this information was published. If for some reason unclear to us the UK refuses to do this, we will have to take the longer way around this. But this is not a matter of suppositions which I think is unacceptable. What can be presumed by looking at two photos and seeing two names common in Russia and post-Soviet republics? I am not entitled to make guesses in this regard as an official representing the Foreign Ministry.

I understand that the whole situation is used for political purposes and I do this on the basis of the analysis of statements made by the UK and the USA together with the dividends they receive. This is what I can establish. But I cannot identify these people by putting my hand on the screen. It is a matter for the law enforcement bodies which are currently dealing with it within the opened criminal case.

Everyone paid attention to the mismatch of the photos, the date, the time and the place of shooting. Why should we all tell fortunes in a tea cup, make guesses and use such words? Why can't they give us and sent all the existing material? Why should we read statements published by former UK Ambassador to Uzbekistan Craig Murray in social networks claiming that he was in that place and that there are not so many corridors there? It is absurdity and delirium. Why should we play this game? Why can't they just make copies of the documents, application forms, and present information regarding where the people were from the British point of view and what specifically they are charged with and hand over to us some of the initial data? Instead, they suggest we should exonerate ourselves in the absence of any information (I am not even speaking about official information). What was presented is some "shattered pieces" abundantly stuffed with commentaries and piled up in that political rhetoric.

There will be no assumptions and no guesswork. All information will be analysed by law enforcement bodies, and respective statements will be made upon the results thereof.

As to the involvement of the Russian government bodies in the developments, I can say once again that there is no complicity which is what Russian President Vladimir Putin and government officials said a number of times.

I would like to draw your attention again to the fact that on September 6 the Russian President's press secretary Dmitry Peskov said that Russia had and has nothing to do with the Salisbury events. Russia is not complicit in it in any way. We have reaffirmed our initial position yet again.

Let me repeat that everything published and planted in the information space will be analysed within the framework of the respective criminal case.

Question: Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu has said that the Government of Syria is trying to seize Idlib, and that Russia, Turkey and Iran are discussing ways of preventing this. Ankara expects that during today's summit, guarantor countries will put an end to violations in Idlib. Does the Russian Foreign Ministry share the position of the Turkish Foreign Ministry?

Maria Zakharova: First, let's not anticipate the goal of the summit, which is due to take place today at the highest level, involving the countries you have mentioned.

Second, this matter will be discussed in great detail, on a priority basis.

Third, this concerns the territory of Syria per se. It is impossible to seize anything on one's own territory, but it is possible to continue a counter-terrorist operation. Damascus has set forth precisely these goals.

I don't want to evaluate statements that have already been made, considering the fact that the main multilateral dialogue will have to be conducted today. All assessments and results, including those in the public sphere, will be summed up this afternoon.

Question: What does the Foreign Ministry think about the outcome of the talks between President of Russia Vladimir Putin and President of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev in Sochi? What part does this visit play in the system of bilateral cooperation between Russia and Azerbaijan?

Maria Zakharova: We do not comment on the presidential agenda. I would like to remind you that all assessments, including those regarding this visit, are posted on the website of President of Russia Vladimir Putin.

We have already discussed the development of bilateral relations today. We anticipate their development with enthusiasm. They have tremendous potential. Much is being implemented and discussed.

Question: Several days ago, former Ambassador of the United States to Afghanistan Zalmay Khalilzad was appointed the US State Department's advisor on Afghanistan. Earlier, he said Russia should involve Western countries, including the United States, in achieving peace in Afghanistan. What is your comment on this statement?

Maria Zakharova: Did he serve as US Ambassador to the United Nations?

Question: Yes, and he also served as Ambassador of the United States to Afghanistan and Iraq.

Maria Zakharova: The Russian side is not supposed to comment on these domestic US appointments.

The situation in this region remains complicated and, unfortunately, continues to get worse in some respects. In this connection, Russia is implementing a number of measures, including cooperation within the SCO and interaction with political forces in Afghanistan, while respecting legal norms. We maintain contacts with the official authorities and are trying to implement multilateral diplomacy.

We are following regional developments extremely closely and with great concern, and we regularly assess the situation.

Regarding specific statements, we will analyse them and share our reaction.

Question: Could you comment on US Special Representative for Syria Engagement James Jeffrey's statement that Washington has tangible evidence of Damascus preparing a chemical

attack in Idlib?

Maria Zakharova: But we have tangible evidence of the terrorists preparing a chemical attack. We did not just talk, but provided factual evidence. If the American side has factual material they are concerned about, they are welcome to send it through bilateral channels.

Once again, I repeat that no one is questioning the fight against terrorists in Syria. It is still the most important task. What we find odd is that on the one hand, our Western colleagues tell us publicly (while doing much behind closed doors) that a peaceful life cannot be restored in Syria because the country is unstable and the return of refugees is impossible. Consequently, it makes no sense to provide humanitarian aid, to restore civilian infrastructure while it is unstable on the ground and terrorists are still around. At the same time, nobody seems in a hurry to dissociate moderate opposition from extremists in Idlib, specifically.

As far as the policy largely pursued by US ruling circles is concerned, there is certain logic in this – to delay disengagement while at the same time refusing to provide assistance because it is unsafe for refugees to return, amid attempts to dissuade the world community from supporting the return of refugees to Syria by lobbying the same approach in the UN, as we said.

This sounds like a weird approach – not because it is out of touch with reality, but in the context of what is happening in the region. The sooner moderate opposition is delineated from extremists and terrorism, terrorists and extremist militants are defeated, including in Idlib, the sooner Syria will be able to begin getting life back to normal, taking back refugees and restoring its civilian infrastructure.

Question: Some observers of the situation in Idlib note that Turkey has begun demobilising the opposition and is conducting anti-terrorist operations against Hayat Tahrir al-Sham. How does Russia and you personally assess Turkey's efforts to separate moderate groups from radical ones?

Does Russia have a specific plan for the post-war recovery of Syria?

Maria Zakharova: Regarding the interaction with our Turkish colleagues, I already gave my assessments when commenting on the situation in Syria as a whole. Please look at that part. My assessments have already been given.

As for the settlement plan, of course, we do have a global plan. It was announced after the elimination of the international terrorist group, which tried to set down roots in Syrian soil. First and foremost, a combination of two factors is needed: the return of civilians, refugees and internally displaced persons to their places of residence and the restoration of civilian infrastructure. All this should be done while keeping in mind the main goal – the restoration of the country as a sovereign, independent and unified state in which people of different religions, ethnicities and political views would coexist as equals and in peace. This is also about a political reform we have discussed and facilitated in practical terms, in particular, by hosting the Syrian National Dialogue Congress in Sochi. Both opposition and government members were represented there. This is our general plan.

Question: To follow up on the previous question, I would like to clarify if negotiations are being held on involving Europeans and the Chinese in restoring Syria (because obviously we cannot do this alone)?

Maria Zakharova: Of course. We are talking with specific countries, but we are also acting globally through the UN. We raise this issue in almost all bilateral negotiations with our Western colleagues and big players in regional affairs of Asian countries.

Question: Yesterday Chief of the Russian Armed Forces' General Staff Valery Gerasimov said that the Vostok 2018 military exercise will not take place on the Kuril Islands. Does this mean that Russia has taken Japan's position on this issue into account?

Maria Zakharova: It means exactly what General Gerasimov said. I consider it impossible to give additional explanations when the military have already said everything there is to be said. There cannot be a more accurate expert opinion.

Question: Representatives of a US military agency said that Russia warned the US military twice last week that Russian and Syrian forces are ready to attack the zone of the US military base Al-Tanf on the border of Syria, Jordan and Iraq, where US soldiers are deployed. Can you confirm that this issue has been discussed with Washington via diplomatic channels?

Maria Zakharova: I think this question should be addressed to our military. In any case, I can double check and give you an answer.

We have mutual commitments with our American colleagues to evaluate information on the ground and exchange it. In general, I can confirm that such cases are discussed. I will check the specific instance you have mentioned and give you an answer.

Question: The media is reporting that, according to the New York Times, Sergey Skripal worked with Spanish intelligence. In your opinion, why has the British Government not taken this into consideration, like many other facts?

Maria Zakharova: I don't know whether the British Government has taken this into account or not. It is beyond my area of expertise, given that we have no official interaction with the British authorities on the Salisbury-Amesbury case. Accordingly, we have not asked these questions and have received no answers. I think you should ask the British authorities directly.

Question: Can you explain on what legal grounds Russian Security Service investigators went to eastern Ukraine, an uncontrolled part of the country, to investigate the murder of Alexander Zakharchenko? The Russian security services have spoken about this. In particular, can you explain the legal grounds given that Russia recognises the territorial integrity of Ukraine?

You demand that the British give you proof of Russia's involvement in the Salisbury events. Nevertheless, you have said that Ukraine is involved in Zakharchenko's murder. Can you provide any evidence?

Maria Zakharova: Wait, when you posted your articles on the portal where you work, did you mention how many times I said that this matter should be addressed to the investigation? I said this repeatedly, officially, during the interview. It is up to the investigators to find out what happened and who organised this terrorist attack.

But the point is that, of course, there is a feeling and understanding that political forces in Kiev might be behind it. Unfortunately, they were celebrating and making statements right after the murder. Officials of various levels made so many statements, that they even confirmed my words. Rather than reading statements by your politicians, read what the officials said. They encouraged such a course of events and suggested that it was the right direction for Ukraine. And you are asking me why I said that the Kiev elite and Kiev regime might be involved in this? Ask them, your politicians, on what grounds they made their statements about "go ahead, we will see victory soon." Ask them.

As for legal grounds, I think this question is for the law enforcement agencies. I can ask them and then tell you. I will do that.

Question: In March, the US Special Representative for Ukraine said the Donetsk People's Republic and Lugansk People's Republic should be eliminated as states. On August 31, Alexander Zakharchenko was killed in a terrorist attack. We saw an inappropriate reaction. I'd like to remind my fellow journalists that we must be more sensitive when such things happen.

Maria Zakharova: I just said this to your Ukrainian colleague – let's avoid political declarations. If you have emotional or other reasons to make a political statement, you can do it anywhere, but you come here to ask questions. Please, let's go no further. If there is a specific question, I am ready to answer or take time to find out. If you have a declaration, it is not for today's briefing. This is about information that is useful, and a chance to ask a question and get an answer. Political declarations, statements, or rallies are beyond the framework of a briefing. Respect your colleagues, because once you start doing this, everyone will do it. That is why I try to be as objective as I can, whatever I feel and whichever position I choose. I would also ask you to respect each other and not use this time to express your political preferences and views.

Question: The Presidents of Russia and Azerbaijan discussed important issues of regional security during a meeting in Sochi. What are the prospects for greater cooperation between these countries in this area?

Maria Zakharova: There are appropriate mechanisms in place, such as foreign ministerial consultations on various topics, including those on security issues. They are held regularly. I'm not sure if there should be more of them or if they should become less frequent. This mechanism works excellently.

There is a dialogue between other agencies and government bodies in Russia and Azerbaijan, whose competence directly includes discussion of security issues. It also works well. We effectively interact on these issues within many international organisations. I would not discuss any need for intensification in this case, because everything is already working quite well. But if either party decides a particular issue should receive more attention, it can always be done. Our dialogue with Baku is unfolding perfectly.