

Comrade officers, colleagues, friends,

I am grateful for the invitation to speak at the Military Academy as part of the Army and Society series of lectures. The organisers are doing a great job supporting the tradition of unity of the people and the army, as it should be and has always been in the best years of Russia's history. Today, we will focus on Russia's role in international politics. This theme has always been of interest to our citizens, patriots, and all the more so to servicemen protecting our state.

How is the role of state determined in international politics? Just like in other social disciplines, there are specific fundamental values and criteria in international relations for making judgments on that.

Geopolitical weight is among the most important ones. It is clear that a vast country like Russia, with its wealth of resources and unique geographical location spanning Europe and Asia, is unlikely to remain on the side, let alone be isolated from international processes, especially in the modern era when trade, economic, financial, information, cultural and human relations simply demand that our planet be united into one truly unified space.

I'm aware that some entertain the notion, which is eagerly picked up by Russophobes, that Russia's vast geography took shape due to expansion resulting from an internal sense of insecurity. As if the Russians, who for several centuries expanded their territory, were trying to "push back" a potential aggressor. To this, I can say that the greatest misfortunes in the past centuries came to Russia almost always from the West, while Russia, according to Mikhail Lomonosov's famous dictum, "expanded through Siberia," bringing different peoples and lands in the East under its wing. Many centuries of experience of harmonious coexistence of different ethnicities and religions within one state now allow Russia to promote a dialogue and form partnerships between cultures, religions and civilisations, which is also what happens within the UN, the OSCE and other international and regional organisations.

Another hallmark associated with our vast Russian territory concerns respect for the state, which is the guarantor of the country's unity and the security of its citizens. A strong state also underpins an independent foreign policy. In international relations, all of that is embodied in the notion of sovereignty.

The sovereignty of states, their equality as the main subjects of international relations, was substantiated and approved within the Westphalian system that took shape in Europe in the 17th century. Currently, these traditional notions are being questioned in a number of Western countries. They are trying to secure for themselves, for example, the ability to interfere in other people's affairs under the pretext of non-compliance with all sorts of unilaterally engineered human rights concepts like the so-called "responsibility to protect." We are against such a distorted interpretation of the most important universal international legal norms and principles. Healthy conservatism with regard to the inviolability of the stabilising foundations of international law unites Russia with most countries of the world.

Of course, it takes more than just the size of a country's territory for it to be considered "big and strong" in today's world. There is also the economy, culture, traditions, public ethics and, of course, the ability to ensure one's own security and the security of the citizens under any circumstances. Recently, the term "soft power" has gained currency. However, this is power as well. In other words, the power factor in its broad sense is still important in international relations. Its role has even increased amid aggravated

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~~political, social, and economic contradictions and greater instability in the international political and economic system.~~ We take full account of this fact in our foreign policy planning.

Thanks to its advanced nuclear deterrent capabilities, Russia plays an important stabilising role in global politics. At the same time, strategic stability for us is not confined to maintaining the nuclear balance between us and the United States. Given globalisation processes, the increasing mutual dependence of countries and the development of technologies, including military technology, we're taking a broader view of this concept. In politics, strategic stability is a state of international relations that ensures strict compliance with international law by all countries and their associations, respect for the legitimate interests of all countries and peoples and non-interference in their political affairs. In the military context, it means consistently bridging the gap between military capabilities, ensuring a high level of confidence, transparency and predictability and abstaining from steps which may be perceived as a threat to the national security of other countries, forcing them to resort to retaliatory measures. We stand for the strengthening of all aspects of strategic stability which is the foundation for a lasting peace and reliable, equal and indivisible security for all.

Recently, there has been a push towards forcing the nuclear states to abandon their nuclear arsenals and banning nuclear weapons altogether. It is crystal clear that this is premature. Let me remind you that it wasn't for nothing that the parties to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty wrote into it that the nuclear arsenals had to be fully scrapped but only in the context of general and complete disarmament. We are prepared to discuss the possibility of further gradual reductions in nuclear capabilities but only if we take all the factors influencing strategic stability into account and not just the quantity of strategic offensive weapons. Another reason why we're prepared to discuss this issue is the growing sense of urgency about making this process multilateral. The restrictions on nuclear capabilities which Russia and the United States have repeatedly accepted for many years have led them to a situation where, essentially, they cannot proceed doing this on the bilateral basis.

We take pride in the fact that there has been a qualitative change in the Russian Armed Forces' capabilities in recent years. It's particularly important to note that the position of Russia today is that force can only be used in strict compliance with international law and its own laws and commitments – not to conquer, and not to export political ideas as repeatedly happened in world history and in our past history, for that matter, but to defend our most vital interests, when all other means have been exhausted, or to help our allies and friends at their request, as is happening today in Syria at the invitation of the country's legitimate government.

Regretfully, not all countries in the world are so scrupulous in providing legal grounds for the use of military force. We have noted cases of loose interpretations of the UN Charter and of removing any boundaries for designating something a threat to one's own security.

The negative trend of using economic tools of coercion is accelerating in international relations. These are diverse kinds of unilateral sanctions and restrictions that clash with the UN Security Council's positions and prerogatives. As we know, there are attempts to use these tools on Russia, on the assumption that we are especially sensitive to this kind of influence.

However, it is impossible, and will remain impossible to ignore the fact that Russia is among the largest and most stable economies in the world. It is hard to overestimate its role in some fields of the global economy, particularly in energy, including nuclear energy.

Whether some people like it or not, Russia remains the economic centre of gravity for the post-Soviet countries. This objective factor, not Moscow's mythical urge to "revive the empire", underlies the movement toward Eurasian integration. We and our partners in the Eurasian Economic Union are linked in today's globalised world by centuries-long economic and cultural contacts and the intertwined destinies of our nations. We also advance the EAEU's foreign contacts to implement President Vladimir Putin's initiative to form a multilevel integration model in Eurasia. Interest in this initiative is growing steadily.

Historical traditions should also be mentioned among the factors that determine a nation's role in world politics. "History is the memory of States," said Henry Kissinger, the theoretician and practitioner of international relations. By the way, the United States, whose interests Mr Kissinger has always defended, did not aspire to be the centre of the liberal world order for a greater part of its own fairly short history, and did not see that role as its preeminent mission. Its Founding Fathers wanted its leadership and exceptional nature to derive from its own positive example. Ironically, the American elite, which emerged as freedom fighters and separatists anxious to cast off the yoke of the British crown, had transformed itself and its state by the 20th century into a power thirsting for global imperialist domination. The world is changing, however, and – who knows – America might yet purify itself and return to its own forgotten sources.

Russia has its own experience with messianic fervour. Its current foreign policy is pragmatic, not ideological. Our country has its traditions and wholesome values, and we do not try to impose them on anyone. We warn our partners at the same time that when they are in Rome they should do as the Romans do.

After many centuries of trials, our country made it to the forefront of international and European politics under Peter the Great – his name graces one of the academies whose students, as I understand it, are here today – and then fully participated in European affairs during the Vienna Congress of 1814-1815. At that time, with the direct participation of Alexander I, a system for a balance of power that existed for many years and mutual recognition of national interests, precluding domination of any one state, was created in Europe.

The ensuing developments show us the futility of any efforts to drive our country out of the European or international arena. Resolving any pressing international issues without Russia became impossible. We can also see the major damage caused by such efforts to all the participants in this process. The collapse of the Vienna system (during which events such as the Crimean War of 1853-1856, the unification and the rise of Germany, and the final collapse of monarchy in France took place) resulted in the bloodletting of World War I. After it ended, Soviet Russia was left outside of the Treaty of Versailles, which largely predetermined its brief existence. The distrust of Western democracies and the reluctance to interact with us on an equal footing doomed the attempts to create collective security in Europe in the 1930s, which resulted in the even greater destruction of World War II. Only after it was over were the foundations of the international order laid with our active participation, which remain relevant to this day.

The UN is called on to play the central coordinating role in the international order. It has proved that there are no alternatives to it and that it enjoys unique international legitimacy despite all the shortcomings of this huge "organism" which unites almost 200 states. Russia supports ensuring the inviolability of the UN Charter's key provisions, including those related to consolidating the outcomes of World War II. We

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~~support comprehensive efforts to expand the capacity of this international organisation to efficiently adapt to new international realities.~~

In modern Europe, the roots of many problems can be seen in the irrational and doomed desire to sideline Russia, the Eurasian power. NATO and EU expansion has reached the point where Ukraine and other CIS countries were all but presented a false choice: either you are with Russia, or with Europe. Such an ultimatum was beyond the capacity of yet inherently unstable Ukrainian statehood. As a result, a major crisis in the heart of Europe broke out directly on the borders of Russia and the West. Frankly, the prospects for its settlement and the implementation of the Minsk agreements have so far been bleak. First, this is due to the lack of political will and a realistic vision for the future of this country from the Ukrainian government, and due to its attempts to look for ways to resolve Ukrainian problems not on the basis of pragmatic interests in the name of national harmony and prosperity, but at the behest of external sponsors who have no regard for the aspirations of Russians, Ukrainians and Eastern Slavs, in general.

We do not see that our European partners are willing to work honestly in favour of creating a common security and cooperation space. A fair settlement of the Ukrainian crisis in line with the Minsk agreements, which we have consistently advocated, could become part of it. In general, the European Union has been tangibly “losing itself” recently. In fact, they are serving other people's interests, failing to find their own unified voice in foreign affairs. We are patient people, and we will wait for our colleagues to realise that due to a number of reasons – including historical, geopolitical, economic, and cultural – we, Russia and Europe, need each other.

The historical, geopolitical, moral foundations that shape the foreign policy of Russia are solid and constant. They set the tone of our day-to-day diplomatic efforts which, in keeping with the Constitution, are guided directly by the President of the Russian Federation.

The world is really changing fast. Another “industrial revolution” is unfolding, and a new, more technologically advanced way of life is taking shape. Uneven development, a wider gap in the wealth of states and nations, and the battle for resources, access to markets, and control over transport arteries are exacerbating differences. Competition is acquiring civilisational dimensions and becoming a rivalry of values and development models.

In the region of the Middle East and North Africa, the situation has reached a point beyond which lies the annihilation of states and of the regional political map. This widespread chaos has been conducive to an unprecedented increase in the threat of terrorism embodied by the aggression of the so called Islamic State and other similar groups. Global terror is a challenge to international security, and it can only be addressed by establishing a joint international coalition, acting on a solid legal basis — as Russian President Vladimir Putin suggested in his speech at the 70th United Nations General Assembly.

The redistribution of the global balance of power continues. We are witnessing new centres of economic power and associated political influence come into being in the world. The Asia-Pacific Region has established itself as the driver of the world economy. Latin American and African nations, which have considerable human and resource potential, are taking a more active role. These developments bring into stark relief the cultural and civilisational diversity of the modern world. The need to democratise relations between states is becoming a more pressing issue.

The formation of a polycentric international order is an objective process. It is in our common interest to

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~~make it more stable and predictable. In these conditions, the role of diplomacy as a tool to coordinate~~
balanced solutions in politics, economics, finance, the environment, and the innovation and technology sectors has increased significantly. Simultaneously, the role of the armed forces as the guarantor of peace has increased too.

It is clear that there simply isn't any other way except painstaking daily work to achieve the compromises necessary to peacefully overcome the numerous problems in the world. History shows that betting on hegemony and one's own exceptionalism leads to greater instability and chaos.

There is an objective, growing need for Russia-advanced approaches to key modern issues that are free of ideology and rooted in the principles of multilateralism and respect for international law. More and more countries are coming to share these approaches, which strengthens Russia's authority and its role as a balancing factor in world politics.

We do not favour confrontation or isolationism. Guided by the Foreign Policy Concept approved by President Vladimir Putin, we will continue to advance a positive agenda in our relations with our partners and neighbours, including the United States and the European Union.

Under the current circumstances, there is no alternative to an independent, pragmatic and multi-vector foreign policy based on the consistent defence of national interests along with the simultaneous development of equal cooperation with all who are interested in reciprocating. All our actions are aimed at protecting our sovereignty and creating conditions for the peaceful and sustainable development of Russia and the Russians.

Thank you for your attention. I will now take questions.

Question: Recent experience shows that, in terms of the damage they cause, aggressive actions in the media at times have consequences similar to the use of weapons of mass destruction. In your opinion, isn't it time, at the UN, in the format of bilateral ties with other states, to move forward with drafting and signing a comprehensive treaty in this field, similar to strategic arms limitation treaties?

Sergey Lavrov: We've been working on this for several years now. Russia put forward an initiative that became known at the UN as International Information Security [Initiative]. It has been a subject of independent resolutions at a number of UN General Assembly sessions. While initially these resolutions were rejected by some of our Western partners, in recent years resolutions related to the UN contribution to international information security have been adopted unanimously.

Several years ago, a group of government experts was set up. It drafted a report that was approved by consensus at the UN General Assembly. The General Assembly expressed support for continuing this effort in the context of identifying specific cyberspace risks at present. Another government expert group was also formed, which is beginning to work. It is meant to prepare specific proposals in one and a half years.

I'd like to say right away that despite the apparently constructive participation of all states in this discussion, we are aware of the desire [of certain states] to limit themselves to discussions and not reach practical international legal agreements. So, alongside the work that I just mentioned, Russia and its partners, in particular in the SCO, have drafted a document entitled Code of Conduct for Cyberspace. It

~~was also distributed at the UN and is designed to promote targeted dialogue on the legal aspects of this~~ problem. Overall, we believe (and we have already submitted this proposal) that it is time to draft an international convention on cyber security, including the elimination of threats and risks related to hacking. We were the first to propose penalising and banning hacking within the framework of international law. We will see how those who are accusing Russian hackers of seeking to blow up the world in the style of James Bond will respond to this.

There is another important topic related to these issues. It concerns internet governance. For several years now a discussion on the democratisation of the internet and internet governance has been ongoing at the International Telecommunication Union. A very serious ideological struggle, if you will, is under way. Some people are upholding free market principles but there are also those who believe that farming out the internet to the free market is tantamount to giving it away to just one country. In this context, serious debate lies ahead.

We see all these problems. The majority of countries agree on the need to enforce some generally acceptable order. Focused work is under way but it is too early to expect any results yet.

Question: I am a participant in the Aerospace Forces' operation in Syria, so my question is related to that country. The results achieved by the Russian centre for reconciliation in Syria show how effective it has been. At the same time such things as the search for missing persons and the return of POWs often encounter difficulties related to inter-agency coordination. Do you believe direct cooperation between the centre for reconciliation of opposing sides and the Russian Embassy in Syria in dealing with certain problems would be possible?

Sergey Lavrov: Actually, this comes as a surprise to me. I was under the impression (and I receive daily confirmation of it) that this cooperation exists. If you have facts pointing to insufficient cooperation in this respect, please let us know. The Russian Embassy in Damascus and the centre in Hmeymim are in daily contact on issues of both the centre's practical operation and Syria's international contacts with its foreign partners with our assistance. A delegation of MPs from Europe and the Russian Federal Assembly recently visited it. The Hmeymin centre and our Embassy were actively involved in organising that visit.

If you were somewhat concerned by the topic you mentioned – the exchange of POWs – perhaps the Embassy is not supposed to play a leading role in this process. As far as my colleague and friend Sergey Shoigu and I see our roles, the main objective here is to establish contact with those who are holding POWs who fought terrorists and extremists. The most important thing here is contact between military departments, intelligence services, the Hmeymim centre, our Turkish partners and other countries that have their special forces (or their representatives in other forms) on the ground and have influence with the militants. Politically, we actively cooperate with the Russian Defence Ministry through the Astana process. At the most recent meeting in Astana, a week ago, in addition to preparing constitutional reform, consolidating the ceasefire and developing a mechanism to respond to ceasefire violations, the topic of establishing dialogue between the parties to the conflict with the aim of exchanging POWs as a humanitarian confidence building measure was also addressed. I'm highlighting in particular the aspect you have mentioned. To be sure, things can always be better and communication can always be taken to a higher level. I assure you that the efforts of the Embassy and the Hmeymim centre are well coordinated.

Question: US President Donald Trump, in a recent statement, unexpectedly proposed revisiting the issue of reducing strategic arms as a platform for bargaining. Should strategic nuclear forces today be a subject

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~~of negotiations with the Americans or would it be advisable at this point to put them outside the bounds~~
of Russian-US relations?

Sergey Lavrov: To a very large extent, President Trump's position on the majority of key issues on the foreign policy agenda, including further steps to limit strategic nuclear weapons as you've mentioned, has yet to be finalised. By the way, if I remember right, Donald Trump mentioned the issue of cooperation with us in this field as an example. He was asked whether he would be prepared to lift sanctions on Russia. I believe that was the way the question was formulated. He responded by saying they should see if there were issues on which they could cooperate with Russia on a mutually beneficial basis in US interests, in particular, mentioning nuclear arms control. At the same time, as you know, the US president said the Americans should modernise and build up their nuclear triad. We need to wait until the military budget is finally approved under the new administration and see what its priorities and objectives are and how these funds will be spent.

As for our further conversation, I briefly mentioned in my address that we are ready for such a conversation but it should be conducted with acknowledgment of all strategic stability factors without exception. Today, those who propose implementing the so-called nuclear zero initiative as soon as possible, banning and destroying nuclear weapons and generally outlawing them absolutely, ignore the fact that since the nuclear bomb was made and this new kind of weapon began to be produced on a large scale in the USSR, the US, China, France and the UK, colossal changes have taken place in military science and technology. What is being developed in the US under the codename Prompt Global Strike are non-nuclear strategic weapons. If they are developed (and this work is moving forward very actively, with the objective of reaching any point in the world within an hour), of course, they will be more humane than nuclear weapons, because there will be no radiation, no Hiroshima or Nagasaki effect. However, in terms of military superiority, my friends at the Defence Ministry tell me the effect will be more devastating than from a modern nuclear bomb.

What's more, our American partners are not abandoning the programme of deploying weapons in outer space, and they are essentially alone in voting against the initiatives co-sponsored by us, China and many other colleagues to commit not to do so. The Americans refuse to ratify the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, which is also an important strategic stability factor. And of course the global missile defence system has an absolutely direct impact on strategic stability.

Another point: imbalances in conventional weapons, which are also being modernised very quickly. We always begin our dialogue with NATO by stressing the need to restore normal relations. We propose normalisation and agreements on mutual verification measures but before that, it is necessary to sit down and look at what each of us has deployed in proximity to each other, as well as in the entire Euro-Atlantic region. There are a lot of factors that need to be considered if we want not simply to ban nuclear weapons as idealists, but to ensure peace and security in the world and ensure strategic stability that will be sustainable and based on global parity. Everything that I've mentioned needs to be discussed. I may have missed some other factors.

I should also add that restrictions imposed by Russia and the US on each other have reached a point where it is hard to say that we will be able to do a great deal together anymore. All states that have nuclear weapons should be brought in – importantly, not only those that have them officially but also de facto.

~~Question: The United States started using the so-called managed chaos technology long ago. What can be used to counter such technology on the international scale? Is there a response to the concept of global stability and security management? Which countries could potentially initiate this project?~~

Sergey Lavrov: The concept of managed chaos appeared long ago as a method of strengthening US influence. Its basic premise is that managed chaos projects should be launched away from the United States in regions that are crucial for global economic and financial development. The Middle East has always been in the focus of politicians and foreign policy engineers in Washington. Practice has shown that this concept is dangerous and destructive, in particular for the countries where the experiment was launched, namely Iraq, Libya, Syria, Yemen and Afghanistan.

In the case of Afghanistan, the United States launched its operation there with international support following the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks. The UN Security Council unanimously confirmed the US right to self-defence under Article 51 of the UN Charter. The US operation against the Taliban and al-Qaeda was supported by all countries. It's another matter that after receiving the international approval, the United States and its NATO allies, which took over in Afghanistan, started acting rather inconsistently, to put it mildly. During their operation in Afghanistan, the terrorist threat has not been rooted out, while the drug threat has increased many times over. The drug industry prospered. There is factual evidence that some of the NATO contingents in Afghanistan turned a blind eye to the illegal drug trafficking, even if they were not directly involved in these criminal schemes. Afghanistan is a separate case, although the current developments there, which are a result of the NATO operation's failure, despite the *carte blanche* the bloc received from the international community, can be considered an unintended cause of managed chaos. In Iraq, Syria and Libya, this chaos was created intentionally.

I have also mentioned Yemen. The situation there can be described as a huge humanitarian catastrophe. It is not at the top of the international agenda, for some reason, although representatives of the UN Secretariat who are responsible for humanitarian affairs have described the situation in Yemen as the "largest humanitarian crisis in the world", larger than in Syria or Iraq. Responsible politicians have come to see that the managed chaos theory is destroying life in many regions. Some parties can benefit in the short term from fluctuations on the raw materials markets provoked by the revolutions orchestrated by external forces, but this theory ultimately backfires at its engineers and executors in the form of massive migration inflows, which terrorists use to enter these countries. We can see this in Europe. Terrorist attacks have been staged even in the United States. The Atlantic Ocean has not protected it from the terrorist threat. This is the boomerang effect. Serious people are coming to see this. Reliance on international law is the only weapon against this threat. The UN Charter offers the necessary tools for this. Military force can only be used by decision of the UN Security Council, or a country can resort to anticipatory self-defence in keeping with the spirit of the UN Charter when an armed attack is imminent and inevitable. Russia acts in keeping with these premises in its relations with other countries. China, India, Brazil and the majority of other countries share this view.

There is one more thing connected with the issue of managed chaos and its consequences.

The policy of countries in Africa and Latin America, as well as their regional organisations – the African Union and the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) – is based on a formal principle on the unacceptability of the unconstitutional change of power via a *coup d'état*. Since this danger is not purely African or Latin American (we have seen it surface in other parts of the world), we have proposed that the UN General Assembly formalise the universal unacceptability of coups as a means

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~~of changing government. Last autumn, a resolution was adopted at the initiative of a large group of co-~~ authors – our Cuban colleagues were among the most active advocates of this idea, alongside other countries. This resolution recognised the importance of creating a more democratic and equitable world order and openly rejected the change of governments through unconstitutional coups and attempts to interfere in the internal affairs of states and to impose alien ideas and values on them as unacceptable. It is also unacceptable when national jurisdictions are applied extraterritorially, when a country hunts down other countries' legal entities and nationals around the world even though they have not violated international law but are believed to have violated the national legislation of the said country. Three countries voted against this resolution and a few dozen countries – mostly Western ones – abstained. The resolution was adopted by a far larger vote than some other resolutions that our Western partners like to quote, for example the resolution on the violation of human rights in Crimea.

Question: Because of the sharp decline in authority of international institutions, including the UN, the OSCE, and the Council of Europe which are potentially under the influence of their American partners and curators, the Russian Federation needs other alternatives to solve vital issues, sometimes directly with the heads of states including the US, Germany, India, China and other powers. Don't you think we should resume direct state-to-state relations?

Sergey Lavrov: Direct state-to-state relations have never been suspended. In spite of the very tight agenda of international organisations, bilateral dialogue with the overwhelming majority of states has today become even more intensive. For now there is an objective pause in our relations with the US because our American colleagues, the new administration has not yet made all its post appointments for the leading positions at the State Department, the Pentagon and other agencies. In addition to departmental heads, their deputies have yet to be appointed, which calls for Senate approval. And it is unclear when these appointments will be made, so there is a natural waiting period. But I have met with US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson. As for the General Staff, several meetings have been held between the Chief of the Russian General Staff Valery Gerasimov and US General Joseph Dunford who heads the US Joint Chiefs of Staff. There has been contact on another level on how to avoid unforeseen and unintended incidents in Syria between the Russian Aerospace Forces and the US-led coalition. So, bilateral dialogue is important with any country. Regarding multilateral, universal and regional institutions, we are well aware of their shortcomings, but these are, if you like, inevitable.

The UN has 193 member countries. The West, Russia, China, India, Africa and Latin America – they are all interested in promoting their viewpoints on decisions that are taken and then implemented, or set the political agenda for further discussions. Of course, we would like to have a say on all these matters. From time to time our Western partners find a way to obstruct us, or put forward absolutely unacceptable ideas which we have to block. In such situations some “well-wishers” like to say that the UN has outlived its usefulness because the right of veto is abused and so on. This is disingenuous. The veto was included in the UN Charter at the insistence of the US after the League of Nations came to a sad end precisely because its activities and mechanisms did not provide for a special role of the big powers. Because of this the US decided that it had no time to just listen to moralising without being able to exert decisive influence. That's why today the right of veto is not some kind of privilege, but an instrument for maintaining stability in international affairs which guarantees that no decision by the international community can be taken unless it is backed by the five permanent UN Security Council members. This needs to be understood.

Our French colleagues are pushing the idea that the UN Security Council members should voluntarily

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~~refrain from exercising their veto when mass human rights violations are involved. We asked them how~~ they see it from the purely practical point of view. If there are 99 victims, this is not yet a violation, and if there are a hundred, we should refrain from using the veto? This is an old concept. Previously it was served "under the guise" of responsibility to protect, of humanitarian intervention, arguing that the international community had the right to intervene in certain conflicts regardless of UN Security Council resolutions if genocide or some other mass human rights violations are taking place in a country. This is a mathematical approach. Who will determine whether or not mass violations are taking place? This is a very cynical approach, where they say that the death of one person is a tragedy, but a list of military casualties are statistics. You can discuss this at length, but the right of veto must remain part of any concept for reforming the UN Security Council. It needs to be reformed and made more representative. Without the right of veto by current permanent Security Council members it will be unable to function and will morph into an organ that rubberstamps shortsighted and ideologically charged documents. The OSCE does not have the veto right, but it has the principle of consensus which also sometimes leads to exhausting debates. Nevertheless consensus safeguards the interests of those who take part in that organisation. This can be useful in spite of all the criticism it incurs in connection with OSCE activities in Ukraine. In any case the presence in that country of a special monitoring mission, which we support, helps to bring down the level of violence and keep the situation under control. We witnessed a flare-up of violence, for example, the day before yesterday the radicals from the Azov battalion were acting provocatively around Mariupol. The mission records these facts which we then use in our work with the Normandy four, at the Contact Group to motivate the Ukrainian authorities to stop sabotaging the Minsk Agreements.

I can cite some positive examples for any international organisation, but we have to keep in mind that none of them – neither the UN, nor the OSCE, nor the G20, not even BRICS or the SCO -- will follow the wishes of any one country a hundred per cent. It's always a compromise, a consensus or a balance of interests. As our President Vladimir Putin constantly stresses, we are not imposing anything on anyone, we are always ready to look for a balance of interests through mutual concessions with any country that is ready to talk with us as an equal. This is how diplomacy works. The same is true for bilateral relations. Sometimes it is even more difficult to reach an agreement bilaterally than multilaterally because in a multilateral format, say at the UN, you have allies you can call on and they will exert additional pressure. In bilateral talks your partner is sitting opposite you and it's either you or him who gains the upper hand. It's better that no one should gain the upper hand and that there should be a consensus. We are ready for this kind work, including, as I said, with the US because we are well aware what great influence the relations between the two biggest nuclear powers have on the overall situation in the world. We are prepared to exercise our responsibility for such influence through dialogue with the US.

Question: Today we see a growing split of the world political elites. There are globalists who express the interests of transnational corporations and world financial organisations and there is a new political concept, the so-called populists who express the interests of the people in their countries. A vivid example is the election of US President Donald Trump, and there are a number of other political leaders who are seen as fringe politicians in the West, for example Marine Le Pen. Given this, it is not by chance that Russia is seen as a leader in half of the world. Is this view justified? Can we talk about a future victory for one of these ideologies? How would this influence today's world order?

Sergey Lavrov: I wouldn't call Donald Trump or Marine Le Pen "fringe politicians" if only because they absolutely fit into the principles that underlie the functioning of the American and French states. Marine Le Pen is a European member of parliament and her party is active in the national parliament. Donald

~~Trump has been elected in full accordance with the American constitution, with its two-level indirect~~ system of electing the president. I would not even call them populists. The word "populist" has a negative connotation. You said interestingly that populists are those who represent the people. There are nuances in the interpretation of the word "populist." In modern Russian it tends to be applied to people who go into politics, but do not bear the responsibility for their words and just seek to lure voters. A populist is someone who might promise to triple wages while the budget absolutely cannot support it, etc. So I would rather call them realists or anti-globalists, if you like. Having said that, anti-globalists are also associated with hooligans who try to disrupt the G20 and G7 summits, and so on. Come to think of it, even now that the new president of the world's largest power has declared that it is necessary to think not of global expansion, but of how America lives, the role of globalists will be changing. American corporations have already demanded a reduction in manufacturing in developing countries to move it to the US in order to create jobs there. Granted, this may not be very good news for the consumer because labour is more expensive in the US, so the prices for goods, cars and so on will increase. But this is the trend. In general, President Trump's conceptual slogans during his election campaign to the effect that America should interfere less in the affairs of other countries and address its own issues send a very serious signal to the globalists themselves. Again, up until now the US has been perceived as a symbol of globalism and the expansion of transnational corporations. Those who represent their interests are the huge team that has taken up arms against President Trump and his administration and in general against everything he does, and which tries, in any way possible, to throw a spanner in the works. Something similar things are happening in France where mountains of compromising materials of ten or fifteen years ago have been unearthed which invariably are presented through an "anti-Russia prism." It's been a long time since I've seen such a dirty campaign when at stake are the concepts and ideas of how to develop the state and their country, and a smear war is being waged. We had this not so long ago, and I don't see anything good about it.

In parallel the global market and the global trade system are being reappraised through the actions and statements of the new US administration. As you know, they have walked away from the Trans-Pacific Partnership, from the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership and said they would work through regional and bilateral agreements. We believe, though, that the World Trade Organisation which it took us such a long time to join did provide a common umbrella for world trade. Some regional structures could be built into these universal systems so as not to break the ties with the non-members of these regional organisations to maintain some common contact and exchanges through the WTO. That too is now under threat. So, we are in a period of rethinking our approaches, and I don't think it has everything to do with Trump. These changes have been brewing; otherwise the American position on so many issues could not have changed so abruptly. They were long in coming, and the WTO was in a major crisis when the Western countries categorically refused to listen to the leading developing countries on a range of issues connected with investment, financial services, etc.

I wouldn't say that there are globalists and populists. There are simply people who want to get elected and follow a well-trodden path and preserve the neoliberal structures that are all over the place in the West, and then there are people who see the neoliberalism and permissiveness which are part of the neoliberal approach as a threat to their societies, traditions and cultures. This is accompanied by philosophical reflections and practical discussions of what to do about the problem of illegal migrants, their own roots and religions, whether it is politically correct to remind people that you are an Orthodox or Catholic or whether you should forget about religion altogether. I have said more than once that the European Union wanted to adopt a constitution many years ago and was drafting it. The commission was headed by Giscard d'Estaing and he proposed a very simple sentence about Europe having Christian

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~~roots. He was prevented from doing so on the grounds that it would not be politically correct and would~~ insult the Muslims. In reality it turns out that if you are cautious about making your religious roots known you end up not caring about the religious roots of others and the consequences are not usually good. Therefore, at the UN and UNESCO, we actively support all the initiatives that are particularly relevant today: the Dialogue of Civilisations, the Dialogue of Cultures and the Dialogue of Religions. It is not by chance that they have become topical issues on the agenda because they reflect the fermentation within societies and the need to somehow search for a national consensus.

Question: The traditional definition of war is “war is nothing more than an extension of state policy by alternate means.” We usually understand “alternate means” as military violence and therefore claim that war always involves military action. Do you think it would be correct to say that the nature of war has changed in contemporary circumstances, that is, now the term includes measures for information, economic, political and psychological impact?

Sergey Lavrov: You know, in the West they coined the term ‘hybrid war.’ As a matter of fact, this is the concept they seem to be forming based on their experience. Unilateral economic sanctions are definitely a declaration of war, no doubt about it. An information war is underway when slander becomes a mandatory condition for the media. This is an objective fact. These days we talk a lot about Syria. Allegedly, there is a non-governmental organisation called the White Helmets funded by several Western countries and countries in the Persian Gulf. A film about this organisation won the Oscar for best documentary this year. They present themselves as a humanitarian agency helping people attacked by bombs – particularly, in Syria. On several occasions, they were caught lying and showing staged video clips. For one such clip, they painted a girl with red paint and on camera she was sitting down and allegedly suffering from Russian and Syrian bombs. Several days ago in Geneva, an American journalist presented research in which he proved that the White Helmets are fake and that they only deal with developing falsified and provocative news, while dragging Russia, Iran, the Syrian government and armed forces through the mud. He also proved that they are providing direct assistance to terrorists and extremists, including medical supplies and equipment, and treating injured members of extremist groups. This is just one example. But anywhere you go, when I just try talking to my Western colleagues, the White Helmets are exempt from any criticism and seem to have a monopoly on the truth. There are many other tricks like that. Certainly, in a wider perspective, cyberspace is an area where there is a material possibility to inflict potentially very serious harm. Cyber forces were created and, apparently, they have some significance. This is exactly why we need forums where these things can be discussed as a single package. The military discusses purely military issues, which now extends to cyberwars. Those dealing with information and sharing experience are trying to convince each other that the media must be used not for provocation but to reconcile people. When it comes to the economy, it should be understood – and many have come to realise this – that unilateral sanctions will come back like a boomerang and hit the countries that joined them, especially small countries. It is very short-sighted to impose unilateral sanctions on a country like Russia, with its huge potential, human and natural resources. By encouraging dialogue in each of these areas to build a general understanding, mutually beneficial and generally acceptable approaches, we need a forum where all these issues can be considered in their relation to each other because they all affect the general status of international relations. Except for the UN, there is no other framework like this. This is a very topical issue and we have no doubt that it will be in the centre of very heated and engaging debates for the foreseeable future.

Question: For quite a long time, the Balkans have played an important role in world politics and were a region of interest to Russia. What are our foreign policy priorities and prospects in that region today?

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Sergey Lavrov: It is also a region that for some reason the West regards as a field of Russia's incendiary activity. Here, the Western approach is based on the same inadequate logic that is applied to the post-Soviet space: "either with us or against us." Any normal ties that Russia has with Balkan countries immediately become a subject of major concern that is enunciated by politicians in the spirit of statements such as "Russia is now pushing into the Balkans." Many people do not know history. They can be forgiven for this. How much Russian blood has been spilled in the Balkans! We'll leave this on their conscience. We are unfazed by such approaches. We can see a similarity of fundamental interests between us and the countries of the region on many issues. This applies to our relations with Serbia, which are now going through a period that is probably the best in many years. The two countries' leaders, foreign, defence, emergencies and economic development and trade ministers meet on a regular basis and joint mechanisms are active. Serbia is establishing contact with the Eurasian Economic Union and now has observer status in the CSTO Parliamentary Assembly. We have wide-ranging, multi-level ties, as evidenced by our practical economic and investment cooperation, where our positions are strong and beneficial for our Serbian partners. This is also evidenced by humanitarian exchanges and well-developed interreligious ties. The paranoia that exists in the West over the fact that we have good relations with our long-standing partners in the Balkans is evident in the EU's position on the humanitarian centre that we have established in the city of Nis jointly with Serbia. It is a centre where essential equipment for humanitarian operations is based and where our aircraft can refuel when they participate in aerial firefighting operations. The West is literally hanging on the Serbian leadership's arms in an effort to prevent this centre from acquiring regional status so that other countries would not participate in its activities and so that its employees would not enjoy privileges and immunities that they are entitled to as employees of an international organisation. All this despite the fact that through this centre Russia has provided assistance to many EU countries in putting out fires on their territory. Actually, it is plain wrong to use the services of an agency that you want to restrict and hinder its activities.

As for other countries, we would like to have friendly relations with Croatia. At a recent security conference in Munich, I had a meeting with Croatian President Kolinda Grabar-Kitarovic. We are interested in high- and top-level contacts. We have good economic projects.

In Macedonia, the situation is very complicated due to a deep crisis that was to a very large extent provoked artificially. Essentially, moves are afoot to divide Macedonian society and violate the agreements that were signed many years ago in the city of Ohrid and that granted the Albanian minority some serious rights within the framework of the Macedonian state. Incidentally, at that time we said we would like the EU to back granting corresponding rights to the Albanian minority in Macedonia and come out in support of the same rights being provided to ethnic Russians in the Baltic countries. However, they shied away from that. Now they are trying to unravel the agreement. I hope that the West is aware of the danger of such attempts but is unable to stand up to them. Nevertheless, we do have long-standing and very good relations with the Macedonians. If it were not for this crisis, we could work effectively, without being distracted by internal political squabbling.

Montenegro has unfortunately succumbed to the ultimatum – either with Europe or with Russia – and decided to sacrifice its relations with our country, a long-standing and good friend, to its Euro-Atlantic ambitions. I leave this on the conscience of the incumbent Montenegrin leadership and on NATO's conscience. It is absolutely incomprehensible how NATO's security will benefit from Montenegro's accession. It is likewise incomprehensible how Montenegro's security will benefit because there have never been any threats to its existence. The Montenegrins, at least the Montenegrin leaders, must have forgotten something. Following the breakup of Yugoslavia, the Union of Serbia and Montenegro

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~~remained. Javier Solana, the EU high representative for common foreign and security policy, helped~~
Belgrade and Podgorica come to agreement to preserve that union for three years and then, at the end of the three-year period, each country would have been able to hold a referendum. However, when the three-year period expired, no steps were taken to preserve the union with outside support. The EU asked Russia to help persuade the Montenegrins not to go ahead with the referendum. We said at that time that they had made that agreement themselves. We helped them coordinate a document stating that in three years they had a right to hold a referendum, that we would not interfere in the Montenegrins' internal affairs and that they should decide the issue for themselves. They must have forgotten about that. However, I believe it was a decent, absolutely friendly and comradely gesture. Let God be their judge. I'm sure all of this will pass and we will return to the time when what Vladimir Vysotsky wrote about Montenegro will revive in the Montenegrin hearts, not only in ours. There is a monument to him in Podgorica and ordinary people, who understand very well the provocative nature of their leadership's approach towards Russia, bring flowers to it.

There are difficulties in Bosnia and Herzegovina and there are attempts to derail the Dayton Agreements. It may be recalled that they ensured the cohabitation and coexistence of the Bosnian, Serb and Croatian entities that constitute the state of Bosnia within the framework of a single state, but based on the principle of decision-making by consensus among all the three entities. Today, when attempts are being made to infringe on the rights of the Serbs and Croats in Bosnia, we explain the unacceptability of that step. Russia is a member of a steering committee that was set up to bring about a political settlement in Bosnia. It has to be acknowledged that our assessments are reckoned with, including by the Europeans. There is an outdated institution of the Office of the High Representative, which was created when Bosnia had just been put together after the wars in Yugoslavia. This High Representative has a dictator's powers. He can revoke any decision and issue any decree at his own discretion. This is a shame, of course. Since its creation, Bosnia and Herzegovina has already been elected a nonpermanent member of the UN Security Council but it is still watched over by some "uncle" who has clearly lost the sense of reality and goes far beyond the bounds of even his dictatorial powers. This situation is far from simple. However, there have never been simple situations in the Balkans. Perhaps the main lesson that should be drawn from this long-suffering region is that it is high time to stop using it in geopolitical games and stop dragging countries under one wing or another. It is necessary to build common, European security, in the framework of which NATO and CSTO members, as well as countries that are not party to any military political alliances, will be able to feel comfortable, equally well protected and in a situation of equal and undivided security. There is no other way. Otherwise, due to Western pressure to remain NATO-centric and refusal to address issues of legal security guarantees outside NATO, we will be constantly stepping on the same rake.

Question: The Chinese leadership is consistently and pragmatically defending its interests, unlike the EU countries, which are acting on US orders to the detriment of their own economic interests. You just gave an example – the humanitarian centre the EU countries are trying to close. Do you think this situation could change in our favour if the forthcoming elections in France and Germany are won by candidates the West tends to describe as "pro-Russian"?

Sergey Lavrov: First of all, you know that we do not interfere in the internal affairs of other states, including in their preparation and holding of the elections. It's amazing to see how the media in the countries you mentioned and other EU countries come up with absolutely fictional and, most importantly, inept, clumsily written articles and reports about Russia's widespread influence on their electoral processes. I would say they should be ashamed of having election systems they cannot even protect from

Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's remarks and answers to questions during a lecture for senior officers of the Military Academy of the General Staff, Moscow, March 23, 2017

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~~external interference. I am referring to such major countries as Germany and France, not some small~~ countries. Second, they do not offer a single fact. We constantly remind them about it; President Vladimir Putin regularly communicates with German politicians and business leaders. My German counterpart, German Foreign Minister Sigmar Gabriel, has visited Russia recently. He met with President Putin and they had a frank discussion of these issues. When you talk to them at our regular meetings, they show no such fanaticism. But obviously, someone really wants this fanaticism to be artificially maintained and whipped up. I could never imagine that these self-respecting media outlets could sink so low – to flagrant slander without even bothering to provide facts.

As for the outcomes of these elections, we are certainly watching these countries' own assessments of their candidates' chances through their rating agencies. But, as in the case with the US election, we will respect the choice of the German and French people, as well as any other people who vote in their national elections and we will be ready to work with whomever these people elect. Of course, when we hear the speeches of candidates during the election campaign, we do take note of their statements about being ready to work closely with Russia, or implying a totally different approach. Naturally, we pay attention to this. Of course, it will be easier for us to work with those who want cooperation, and do not want to continue to slide further into confrontation. But I repeat once again that we will accept any choice of any people with respect and will be open to cooperation with the authorities that these people have elected.

Question: Will Russia do anything in retaliation to Yulia Samoilova's non-admission to the Eurovision song contest?

Sergey Lavrov: I have already said all I had to say. Let this remain on the conscience of the organisers of this event.