

Our talks took place in an atmosphere of openness, trust and mutual respect, the traditional atmosphere of bilateral dialogue with our Chinese friends.

We took this opportunity to once again congratulate China's Minister of Foreign Affairs Wang Yi and the leadership of this country on the successful organisation of the Belt and Road Forum in Beijing earlier this month. We have no doubt that working together in this format will contribute to the progressive development and linkage of integration processes in the vast Eurasian space, also in line with the agreements between the leaders of Russia and China on joint development of a larger Eurasian partnership and the Belt and Road initiative.

Today Russia and China have confirmed the high level of cooperation they have achieved, an unprecedented level in the history of bilateral relations. We discussed the schedule of political contacts, which is very packed as always. The main attention was paid to preparations for Chinese President Xi Jinping's upcoming visit to Russia.

Our leaders will also discuss important current issues of the bilateral and international agenda on the sidelines of various multilateral forums planned before the end of this year. Russian Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev's official visit to China to attend the 22nd regular heads of government meeting is also scheduled for the yearend.

We were unanimous in our view of Russian-Chinese cooperation as an important stabilising factor in international affairs. We agreed to continue to step up cooperation and coordination as part of our activities in the UN, BRICS (also during the preparations for the BRICS summit in China's Xiamen in September), the SCO (this organisation's summit will be held in a couple of weeks in Astana), the RIC and other multilateral formats.

We exchanged views on a broad range of key regional and global issues. We have identical positions on the developments in Syria, including support for the Astana agreements that provide for the formation of de-escalation zones in Syria. Implementation of this concept is bound to become a major instrument for maintaining the cessation of hostilities, facilitating humanitarian access and creating better conditions for the start of the inclusive inter-Syrian dialogue in Geneva in line with the international documents adopted by the UN Security Council.

We paid significant attention to the developments on the Korean peninsula and reaffirmed our consistent line on the strict observance of relevant UN Security Council resolutions by all parties concerned. We support the adoption of measures that would prevent the further development of North Korean nuclear missile programmes but without escalating tensions in the region and without destroying chances for a political and diplomatic settlement of the nuclear problem on the Korean peninsula. Russia and China are firm advocates of the peninsula's denuclearisation. At the same time we emphasised that the attempts to use Pyongyang's actions as an excuse for building up surplus military capabilities in the region are counterproductive. This applies, in part, to the deployment there of a new positioning area of the US global missile defence system.

We are pleased with the results of the talks that again confirmed our mutual determination to continue expanding and deepening our multifaceted bilateral strategic cooperation and comprehensive interaction.

Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's statement and answers to media questions at a joint news conference following talks with Minister of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, Wang Yi, Moscow, May 26, 2017

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Question (addressed to Wang Yi): ~~Your recalled that the One Belt – One Road forum took place in Beijing in mid May. How do you see Russia's participation in the new belt of the Silk Road?~~

Sergey Lavrov (speaking after Wang Yi): As you know, Russia and its EAEU partners are promoting open, future-oriented approaches to Eurasian economic integration. The Silk Road Economic Belt project was developed by China in parallel. Since both initiatives do not involve the formation of any closed or isolated mechanisms but, on the contrary, are designed to be open, there was naturally an opportunity and a desire to harmonise them. This gave rise to the agreement to draft a document on cooperation between China and the EAEU. This led to the agreement to promote concrete approaches to linking integration within the framework of the EAEU and the initiatives that comprise One Belt – One Road. At the same time, Russian President Vladimir Putin has proposed considering the formation of a large Eurasian partnership by expanding the EAEU's external ties given the interest of several dozen countries in establishing relations with it. Members of the EAEU, SCO and ASEAN could cooperate within the framework of the proposed partnership. This initiative was mentioned at the Russia-ASEAN summit in Sochi a year ago.

In parallel the Chinese concept of the Silk Road Economic Belt evolved into the increasingly comprehensive One Belt – One Road project. At the latest meeting in Beijing, President Vladimir Putin and his Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping agreed to think together about the large Eurasian partnership and One Belt – One Road concepts. This is a multifaceted process and it is only in the development stage. Their success is guaranteed because they are based on an open approach to integration in Eurasia and are aimed at searching for constructive and mutually beneficial solutions for all.

Question: What could you say about the development of business cooperation between Russia and China? What do you expect from the forthcoming visit of Chinese President Xi Jinping?

Sergey Lavrov: Speaking at the opening of this news conference with my Chinese colleague, we said that Russian-Chinese relations are on the upswing. They have reached an unprecedented level in the entire history of our ties and embrace all possible fields of interstate cooperation and, probably, human interaction.

We have a unique ramified mechanism for organising practical partnership at the official level. Along with annual summits, there are annual prime minister meetings on the sidelines of international events (usually from five to seven per year) and mechanisms that prepare documents for them. In addition, we have mechanisms that are headed by four deputy prime ministers on both sides. This cooperation embraces investment, energy in all its forms (electricity, hydrocarbons and nuclear industry), space and other high-tech areas as well as military-technical ties.

Russia and China are building up cooperation between their regions. It is enough to mention such major projects as Volga-Yangtze and cooperation between Russia's Eastern Siberia and Far East with China's northwestern areas.

We also have agencies for promoting routine contacts between business circles. There is a forum at which the public of both countries holds regular meetings and searches for new forms of contacts between people that are of mutual interest. There are also many other things.

As for our foreign policy cooperation, we have described it more than once at top and high level meetings

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~~as playing a major stabilising and balancing role at this very difficult stage of world development.~~

I am convinced that important decisions that will allow us to take additional steps will be made in all areas of cooperation during the forthcoming visit of Chinese President Xi Jinping to Russia. I think the sides will pay special attention to implementing the major treaty on neighbourly relations, friendship and cooperation. The Russian and Chinese leaders regularly approve relevant plans of action. I believe they will also give their assessment of the world situation. In this context, our presidents will formulate their views on how to overcome the difficulties that continue piling up in international relations.

Question: You said you discussed the protection of de-escalation zones in Syria with Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi. Yesterday Iran objected to US participation in this process. What is Russia's attitude to this?

Sergey Lavrov: The initiative to create de-escalation zones in Syria with the consent of its Government and support of the armed opposition involved in the Astana process came from the three guarantors – Russia, Turkey and Iran. Currently experts continue consultations with all interested parties on how to implement this initiative, including monitoring of compliance with ceasefire commitments, checkpoints for civilians, humanitarian supplies and so on. What countries will be invited to send their servicemen and police for monitoring and checkpoints will be decided at consultations that will be primarily held with the Syrian Government. There is no other way. The consent of the receiving side plays the most important role in any peacekeeping efforts.

Of course, in this context we will actively work for such groups of military observers and police to be formed as soon as possible and include nationals that will be welcomed by Syria on the one hand and ensure the efficient and balanced functioning of these de-escalation zones on the other.

Question (addressed to both ministers): What are Russia's and China's views on the way out of the crisis on the Korean Peninsula? What specific steps are required in this respect? What do both countries think about the positions and actions of the United States and North Korea's neighbours – South Korea and Japan – on settling the Korean crisis?

Sergey Lavrov (speaking after Wang Yi): I can support everything that has been said now. We consider it very important to adopt urgent measures to prevent the further escalation of the confrontation on the Korean Peninsula. All UN Security Council resolutions must be observed. As a reminder, they provide for the cessation of nuclear missile tests by Pyongyang and certain measures to compel it to fulfil this demand. They also envisage the continuation of the talks aimed at finding a strictly political solution to this problem.

Scenarios based on the use of force are considered pernicious by all countries. Thus, US Defence Secretary Jim Mattis said recently that any military solution to the North Korea crisis would be a tragedy on an unbelievable scale. It is necessary to look for a political solution.

It seems there are voices supporting the resumption of contacts but only on certain terms. They are heard in Washington, Seoul and now even in Pyongyang. Let me repeat that each side is setting terms that imply that someone else should take the first step. Pyongyang insists on getting full security guarantees now, that is, before the resolution of the nuclear problem. The United States wants North Korea to dismantle its nuclear missile programme. But ultimatums will hardly allow us to make tangible progress

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~~without delay.~~

We support what China suggested after analysing this situation, notably, parallel progress so that no country feels the pressure of ultimatums and has to comply with unilateral terms. Parallel progress is a concept on which practical steps out of the current deadlock should be based. I hope very much that this progress would ultimately lead to the full denuclearisation of the Korean Peninsula and the formation of a system that would make it possible to ensure security, peace and mutually beneficial cooperation on the Korean Peninsula and, more broadly, in Northeast Asia. I hope all participants in this process, including Japan as you mentioned, realise that there is no alternative to this approach.a