

**Question:** A year ago the Americans would not allow our diplomats to visit polling stations. At that time Deputy Foreign Minister Sergey Ryabkov said that we will respond in kind. Have we told the Americans that their diplomats won't have the right to visit our polling stations?

**Sergey Lavrov:** I don't think we should send any notifications. For the time being we haven't heard any names or appeals from countries and organisations that would like to send their observers. Needless to say, citizens of those countries that did not let our people visit their polling stations will not be particularly welcome here. We will take a relevant decision.

**Question:** Are we monitoring the conduct, activities and the first steps of the new US ambassador in Russia? To what extent does he cooperate with opposition leaders?

**Sergey Lavrov:** We do not watch ambassadors. We believe the ambassador of any country is supposed to find points of contact and develop warm, friendly, and, most important, mutually beneficial relations with the country where he is accredited. So far we have seen a constructive approach from Ambassador Jon Huntsman. I met with him and had a fairly detailed conversation. He was also received in many other places, including the Defence Ministry and other agencies.

As for his requests for additional meetings, we maintain parity with the way our new Ambassador Anatoly Antonov is received in the United States. Both ambassadors are demonstrating their desire to find constructive ideas that are much in demand in this difficult situation. I hope that a desire to seek benefits will prevail over a desire to harm our relations.

**Question:** Considering the developments in Syria in the context of the Kurdish factor, will it be possible to preserve Syria's territorial integrity without its federalisation? What is our view on its federalisation in general?

**Sergey Lavrov:** We consider Syria's territorial integrity a must. Nobody has yet said and I hope no one will ever say that this principle is subject to doubt. It is stated in a UN Security Council resolution and has been confirmed now at the Sochi summit of the Russian, Iranian and Turkish presidents, and during numerous sessions of various forums on Syria under the aegis of the UN and other agencies, including regional ones, for instance the Arab League.

As for what Syria will look like, besides being sovereign and unified, with its territorial integrity intact – that is to be decided by the Syrians themselves. UN Security Council resolutions and our agreements as part of the Astana format are aimed at starting direct dialogue between the Government of Syria and the full spectrum of the opposition.

UN Security Council Resolution 2254 says that it is for Syrians alone to determine the destiny of their country. Therefore, ideas about the arrangement of the government must be discussed in the course of inter-Syrian dialogue. After many unsuccessful attempts in the UN, this dialogue has finally been encouraged through the Astana process where the Syrian Government and the armed opposition sat at the negotiating table for the first time. Direct dialogue is a forthright requirement of the UN. As you know, at the Sochi summit Russian President Vladimir Putin, President of Turkey Recep Tayyip Erdogan and President of Iran Hassan Rouhani set forth the initiative to convene the Syrian National Dialogue Congress to discuss primarily Constitutional reform and preparations of presidential and parliamentary elections on this basis. But only the Syrians can make all these decisions. The congress we suggest is one of the ways of moving toward this goal. We hope this will contribute to the talks that are expected to be resumed under the aegis of the UN in Geneva.

Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's answers to questions from Interfax news agency, Moscow, November 27, 2017

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**Question:** Will the Syrian National Dialogue Congress be convened before the New Year?

**Sergey Lavrov:** If you read the statements by the three presidents, you probably noticed that the terms of holding it will be coordinated by the sides. There will be an additional announcement about this.