

Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's reply to a media question about Russia's retaliation against the expulsion of Russian diplomats

Moscow, March 29, 2018

Question: Will you retaliate against the expulsion of Russian diplomats using tit-for-tat methods or something stronger?

Sergey Lavrov: We will retaliate in kind, but there will be more. Virtually right now, US Ambassador to Russia Jon Huntsman is at the Ministry and Deputy Foreign Minister Sergey Ryabkov is explaining to him the substance of our retaliatory measures with regard to the United States. These include the expulsion of the same number of US diplomats and our decision to withdraw our consent to the operation of the US Consulate General in St Petersburg. As for the number of diplomatic mission staff from the other countries who will be leaving Russia, it is also a tit-for-tat procedure. Basically, this is it.

I would like to say right away that in addition, we want to do more than just respond to the absolutely unacceptable actions taken against us under the harshest ever US and British pressure predicated on the "Skripal case." By the way, I would like to mention with some satisfaction that earlier today the British authorities informed us about the condition of at least Yulia Skripal. They said Yulia is rapidly recovering. We again urged them to provide us with access to Yulia as a Russian citizen. I hope our British counterparts will be able to perform its obligations under the Consular Convention and the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations.

We will not just respond reactively to what the Anglo-Saxon tandem is doing with regard to Russia, forcing everyone to follow the anti-Russian course. We would like to establish the truth. Since the very start of this crisis, we have repeatedly stated that British Prime Minister Theresa May has baselessly accused Russia of being implicated in the poisoning of Sergey Skripal and his daughter. She urged us in an ultimatum-like manner to answer a question that could not be answered: she demanded that, within 24 hours, we confirm that the Russian leadership had ordered the poisoning of the Skripals or that they had lost control over their chemical arsenal. Clearly, it is impossible to respond to these things, even if we tried hard to find some answers. Instead, we suggested that they refer to international law, the Chemical Weapons Convention which contains a special article. Under this article, if any party to the CWC has questions for another party, it is recommended that they get in contact with each other, hold a bilateral exchange of views and information, and hold consultations. Great Britain arrogantly turned this down and instead dug out of the CWC a technical clause to the effect that a party to the Convention can apply to the OPCW Technical Secretariat for technical assistance. Under that clause, OPCW experts have now arrived in Britain at its invitation to form an opinion and analyse the substance, which, as the British allege, was used to poison Sergey and Yulia Skripal. I would like to note right away that this article only enables the OPCW Technical Secretariat to identify the chemical composition of a substance that will be presented for analysis. The OPCW Technical Secretariat has no power to confirm or verify Britain's conclusions. It has no such rights. Also, the investigation itself is not over yet. As you know, Scotland Yard says that it will take months, but the verdict has been returned nonetheless. This is sad, because we have not seen so much mockery of international law for quite a long time.

To get a normal discussion and to establish the truth, we have officially proposed to convene an extraordinary session of the OPCW Executive Council on April 4, where we will present a summary of the specific questions that we have repeatedly asked. I hope that our Western partners will not evade an honest conversation. Otherwise they will confirm once again that what is happening is a premeditated gross provocation.

* * * * *

Source: http://www.mid.ru/ru/press_service/minister_speeches/-/asset_publisher/7OvQR5KJWVmR/content/id/3145578