

**Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's interview with the TASS news agency for the TV film from the "Formula of Power" series: "The United Nations Turns 70,"**

*Moscow, September 14, 2015*

*Question: What do you think about the importance of the session devoted to the 70th anniversary of the UN, aside from it being an anniversary? What format will it have and what decisions are likely to come of it? What do you personally expect from this session?*

**Sergey Lavrov:** First of all, the United Nations' legitimacy is unique. It is the only mechanism of international cooperation that relies on a solid foundation of international law and covers all spheres of human endeavour without exception: military-political, security, conflict resolution, development of economic and humanitarian cooperation and one more important function – modernisation of international law. There is a special committee that deals with this issue. The 70th anniversary of the UN is a landmark that should compel us to recall what has been done over these decades and draw lessons from it, and also look towards the future. The lessons are obvious to all. The United Nations was born on the ruins of World War II, which was the bloodiest war in human history and should never be repeated. This is exactly why the UN was established. The Soviet Union was one of the three most active founders of this approach. When the Russian Soviet Socialist Federative Republic became Russia immediately after the signing of the Belavezha accords, one of the first and most important steps taken by its Foreign Ministry was the notification that Russia was the successor of the Soviet Union as regards the implementation of all of the latter's commitments stemming from the UN Charter. Our colleagues in the Commonwealth of Independent States, which was only taking shape at that time, fully supported us in this respect. We were also fully backed by the members of the international community. Therefore, our continued permanent membership in the UN Security Council means that Russia is perceived by all states as a founding member of the UN.

The 70th anniversary is inseparably linked with the lessons that we derived from WWII and with the efforts of the majority of countries to prevent the rebirth of the hateful ideology of fascism and Nazism. This will be the subject of yet another resolution, which Russia and dozens of its co-authors promote every year at the UN General Assembly: to prevent the glorification of Nazism, and the emergence of new forms of racial discrimination, xenophobia and all other hateful ideologies.

Apart from this, the session will be intensive. A summit on sustainable development that will adopt a new, 15-year programme until 2030, will be held immediately before a debate on general political issues of global life that will be attended by the heads of state. The programme will embrace international efforts on resolving economic and financial matters in the context of social issues and environmental protection.

In September Russia chairs the UN Security Council and we are preparing a special ministerial session on a comprehensive analysis of the terrorist threats emanating from the Middle East and North Africa. I am convinced that this issue will evoke heated and interested debates at the UN General Assembly. We will try to set the tone at the Security Council meeting in connection with the initiative of President Vladimir Putin to establish a common front to combat terrorist structures of the ISIS type, with parallel support for political settlement processes in the region, in Syria in particular.

***Question:** The UN Charter was signed by Andrei Gromyko for Russia. For almost 30 years, he held the top post at the Foreign Ministry here, at the Smolenskaya Square office. You started your career at the Foreign Ministry and the United Nations when Gromyko was the minister. We can even see a bust of him here. What was his role in the establishment of the UN and in strengthening the relations between our country and the UN? What was the role of the Soviet Union and Russia in building this organisation and winning more authority for it?*

**Sergey Lavrov:** I believe that the Soviet Union played a crucial role in this along with the US and the UK. Speaking of which, in 1943 at the Reception House on Spiridonovka Street in Moscow, the foreign ministers of the Soviet Union, the US and the UK met for the first time. The documents signed at the meeting contain the first mention of the objectives of this organisation. The name United Nations did not exist yet but there was a need to create an international organisation after the end of WWII (the Allies already had no doubt that they would defeat Hitler and his supporters) that would protect humankind from another similar tragedy. The Soviet Union strongly supported those principles of the UN Charter that are the most resilient today. They are equality for all parties, the sovereignty of all states, respect for the people's right to identification as a fundamental principle of the UN, and the obligation of every state to ensure that its peoples' rights are protected and that their peoples are not oppressed. Exactly on October 24, we submitted Ratification 29. It was the last ratification required for the UN Charter to be enforced. Therefore, October 24 is also a date marking ratification of this very important instrument by the Soviet Union. Later, we had to defend key principles of the UN like compromise and the collectivity of the UN Security Council as the main body responsible for global peace. In this regard let me note that the right of veto that is often criticized is in fact the main guarantee of restraint and counterbalance so necessary for any democratic system. It's another thing when somebody tries to provoke a situation that would be the subject to veto – all for a dishonest politically motivated purpose. Several times our Western partners planted resolutions that had absolutely no practical meaning – for example, a resolution on an anniversary of events in Srebrenica. As tragic as the events were, it is not for the UN Security Council to take one side in the remembrance of a conflict 20 years ago, just as it is not up to the UNSC to get involved in the criminal investigation of the MH17 crash.

I won't go into details. More importantly, the UN Security Council remains viable and capable of playing a central role in the resolution of any future international crises. There have been reforms, and as a result, the number of UNSC members was increased from 11 to 15. We support the idea of a further expansion and believe that the developing countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America are underrepresented in the UNSC. Therefore, we support the

applications from India and Brazil for permanent representation in the UNSC. We believe that a permanent presence of the African continent in the council must be ensured in a similar way because, let me stress this again, the developing countries are clearly not sufficiently represented and they could play a bigger role in the main body of this organisation. At the same time, a reform shouldn't be promoted that will not make the UNSC an uncontrollable, slow and inflated structure. Timely response is another key principle of its activity along with due representation of all regions and centres of global development. I think we should consider around 20 members or so maximum.

I will not leave out other areas of UN activity. We strongly support the UN's potential efforts in preventive diplomacy. Much peacemaking experience has been gained. We can see that sometimes in very serious conflicts UN peacemaking missions obtain mandates to carry out external control of the government, ensure security and the protection of human rights. All this is a great responsibility. As a rule, these mandates are adopted after long consultations with the countries that will be sending resources for the peacemaking operation. This is also a new development in the UNSC that is a result of expanded cooperation with other countries that are not members of the council. Let me also point out that the UN puts special focus on supporting the countries that are emerging from a conflict. Peacebuilding is a concept for taking over from the peacemakers and helping with public administration and economics.

*Question: Is this also a UN institution?*

**Sergey Lavrov:** Yes, it is. The Peacebuilding Commission and the Peacebuilding Fund have been established. This important innovation is a joint body of the UN General Assembly and ECOSOC. Human rights is another area of reform. A body dealing with human rights was reformed several years ago and the UN Human Rights Council was established. Its main distinction from its predecessor is that its new charter ensures the principle of equality of all states: each country without exception should periodically report to the Security Council on the implementation of the universal documents urging respect for human rights.

Russia has successfully passed this procedure twice. The United States also went through it recently and received dozens of recommendations on the implementation of which it should report later. As distinct from the former Human Rights Commission, which worked on certain spontaneous principles for the most part (if some country was chosen as a target for criticism it was dragged to the scene and exposed to recommendations), now every state without exception has to report after a certain period. This improves discipline. To an extent, this disciplines our Western colleagues, who tried for some time to present themselves to the entire world as an example to follow in human rights. However, no state is perfect and this applies to them as well.

These reforms are still helping the UN to consistently promote the principles of its Charter and influence international relations. I'd like to mention one more document that will be endorsed before the general debate at the UN General Assembly. This is a document on developing economic, financial and humanitarian cooperation: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. It sets standards that I'm sure should be taken into account, including by decision-makers on running the international monetary-financial system: the

World Bank Group and the International Monetary Fund. The G20 as an informal structure will be simply unable to ignore the universal principles of global economic and social development that have been approved by all states of the world.

*Question: You mentioned the potential reform of the UN Security Council. But frankly speaking, I had the honour of talking to you on this subject in this hall ten years ago, when you also spoke about the potential reform of the UN Security Council. An opportunity of expanding it by accepting Asian, Latin American and even some European countries was mentioned then. I even remember a joke you made when you quoted a representative of a European country as claiming a role in the UN Security Council because his country also lost the war. What (or who) prevented you from implementing this reform in the past decade? Can you see the homestretch in this process?*

**Sergey Lavrov:** More than that, if you had met me 20 years ago, I would have told you that the process of reform had been launched.

*Question: This is a tricky issue.*

**Sergey Lavrov:** I think the process was launched in 1993 when the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution on starting consultations with a view to reaching a universally acceptable result: fair geographical representation of all regions in this body in order to enhance its efficiency.

*Question: Are you referring to permanent members?*

**Sergey Lavrov:** No. It simply mentioned the reform of the UN Security Council, including its expansion. The question is what to expand: permanent or non-permanent membership, or add members to both categories. This issue is a subject of heated debates. The process cannot reach the homestretch because there are irreconcilable differences between the two groups of countries, as well as attempts to prove that the five permanent members cannot come to terms, and this is why there is no result.

The main problem is that there are two irreconcilable positions. One group of countries absolutely insists on new permanent seats, whereas the other is adamantly against this and wants to increase the number of non-permanent members.

*Question: Please share the secret with us of what countries are in the second group. As I see it, we are in the first group of states that advocate expansion.*

**Sergey Lavrov:** No, both groups advocate expansion, but the first group holds that new permanent seats should by all means be among the 15 seats that will be added to the current 15 ones. The second group says, No we should not create new permanent seats but should resolve this issue by expanding the number of non-permanent Security Council members.

*Question: Quantitatively?*

**Sergey Lavrov:** No, qualitatively. “Permanent membership” means that a country is permanently represented in the UN Security Council, as with Russia, the United States, Britain, China and France...

*Question: With the right to veto?*

**Sergey Lavrov:** As I’ve already said, India and Brazil are making claims to this status and we consider them fully worthy and very strong rivals. Germany and Japan are also making claims to this status. The Four have launched a serious campaign to support their claims and applications, and urge others to vote for this from time to time. The UN Charter requires that such issues be resolved by two thirds of the UN General Assembly members.

The other group of countries that have united “for the sake of consensus” (as they say themselves) includes Italy, Mexico, Scandinavian countries, Spain, quite a few Asian states, including Pakistan, Malaysia and Indonesia and many Latin American countries. They believe it makes no sense to create new permanent members, as several countries will again occupy the seats and fewer countries will be elected to the Security Council, because the seats that could be rotated are now occupied by new permanent members. This is a simplified explanation of this position. The two groups should seek a compromise.

We are ready to support absolutely any decision. I’m not joking, I’m completely serious. Either add only permanent seats or only non-permanent seats or some of the permanent and some of the non-permanent. The core of our position is to observe the initial mandate of the UN General Assembly for this work. The mandate requires that the final decision should be supported by a broad majority, but it does not at all amount to two thirds of all votes. We are not talking about 100 percent consensus and the General Assembly does not require it. One or two countries can always have their own views and will not join the consensus, but a broad majority is not two thirds. A broad majority is required for a simple reason: if voting on expanding the UN Security Council is held and some countries support a drastic reform with mandatory permanent seats and other additional seats and receive a two thirds majority, this will be a legally correct decision on the basis of the UN Charter. However, politically there will be countries that will form a one third minority and will vote against this. These are not some rogue states, but fairly reputable and well-established countries of medium size. Under the circumstances, Italy, Spain, Mexico, Latin America and Asian states will be absolutely undeservingly isolated. They contribute to the UN budget and peacemaking missions. Scandinavian countries that are part of this group are major donors of large funds aimed at resolving social issues, population issues, including in UNICEF, and so on. In their eyes, the UN Security Council will be much less legitimate than it is now if it is reformed by voting against their desire to find consensus and compromise.

There are many reasonable members of the world community (including us) that support the idea of seeking compromise. If some positions are poles apart, let’s find something in between. Some countries are suggesting creating a third category of members that would be neither permanent nor non-permanent but semi-permanent.

*Question: That will come and go?*

**Sergey Lavrov:** No, semi-permanent members. Non-permanent members are elected now for two years without the right of immediate reelection in the next two years. The idea is to establish a new category of members with the right to be elected for a longer term, eight or even ten years, with the right of immediate reelection. This means that if an applicant works well with its partners, it may be permanently represented in the UN Security Council. I am not saying that we should immediately promote this idea, but it shows that people are thinking about how to bring irreconcilable positions closer together.

*Question: Your involvement with the UN and such deep knowledge of the subject are probably not in the least due to the fact that you worked in the building on the East River for 10 years. For 10 years, you were head of our UN mission. I'm aware that the Ambassador and, above all, the Permanent Representative to the United Nations, carry out the decisions made by the central authorities. How much leeway do you have? How free is the Ambassador to influence certain decisions? If you look back on those times, which of your decisions were the most difficult? What did you lose sleep over in New York?*

**Sergey Lavrov:** If you are tense to the point where you can't sleep at night, you won't be able to function properly during the day. In general, your best bet in this line of work is to break yourself of the habit of being nervous, because it's all about patience, consistency and checking and rechecking whether your arguments are accurate, whether you are successful in getting your message across. You should listen to the other party and see if his or her words or reasoning can be used to bring your positions closer, or promote your own position, or just take account of what they are offering, unless it runs counter to your interests.

Of course, an Ambassador represents the President. Foreign policy is determined by the President. All our ambassadors and permanent envoys to the UN, the OSCE, the Council of Europe, and other international institutions act based on instructions they receive before leaving for duty. These instructions are approved by the Foreign Ministry based on the foreign policy principles and priority areas determined by the President in accordance with the Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation and other doctrinal and conceptual documents. Certainly, it's the basis of our work, but an ambassador must always check with these instructions. By the same token, no one document can foresee every scenario, and extraordinary events happen often. That is why someone is appointed ambassador and has extraordinary powers: because they have ample experience and sufficient vision, or sophistication, if you will, to be able to stack up any situation, even an unexpected turn of events, against the basic principles that they had been instructed to advance in a particular country or organisation.

I can't even remember all the minutiae of my work there. Often, during nighttime meetings when Moscow is asleep, someone might ask us to call Moscow for an opinion. You respond that you won't call, because you already have all the instructions. Importantly, you must see the limits of the possible. But when you realise that fundamental matters are at stake, such as our basic interests, then you can't cut yourself any slack, and in such situations you must go ahead and use your veto power.

There was a time when we had to deal with a problem that no one saw coming. It was in the mid-1990s. I was relatively new to New York, arriving probably a year or a year a half before the incident. Cuban exiles residing in Florida made regular flights on small planes over Cuba scattering leaflets, thus violating the Cuban airspace. The Cubans protested, issued notes and warned that next time they would use physical means to protect their sovereign airspace. The Cubans shot down one plane. It was nighttime in Moscow. US Permanent Representative to the UN, Madeleine Albright, immediately convened the UN Security Council and demanded that the Cuban government be condemned for an act of terrorism. The language was tough. Along with our Chinese colleagues and several other UNSC members from among the developing countries, we sat down to give proper wording to this statement, so that it didn't prejudge the investigation or accuse anyone without grounds. We were able to draft a text which was later approved even by the Cuban government. That is what I remember, because this work took us many long hours to complete. Ms Albright called Washington, but in the end we prevailed.

*Question: And the symbols you mentioned... The world sees the picture of the UN Security Council. We always see that picture on TV. But next to the Security Council's main session hall there is a small room, and, as you told me, it's called the "Russian room" for some reason (I tried to find out why), where the Security Council meets behind closed doors and where the main stew, so to say, is actually being cooked.*

**Sergey Lavrov:** Yes.

*Question: And what's that special room like?*

**Sergey Lavrov:** Yes. That room was initially planned by the architects who designed the UN building. There were Soviet architects among them, so it was an international team. That room is called the Consultations Room.

*Question: For the UN Security Council?*

**Sergey Lavrov:** Yes. It has armchairs, one for each Permanent Representative, and the armchairs stand much more closely to each other than in the main hall – the official session hall. Behind each armchair for permanent representatives there are two armchairs for their assistants. Also, there are several armchairs against the wall. So perhaps, in total, each delegation can be represented by the "permanent representative plus three" at most. And even then they are packed in like sardines. It's a very small and compact room.

I'll tell you a story. Shortly after I began my career as Permanent Representative, repairs had started, and the Security Council members were asked: "Do you want your areas to be reformatted?" In addition to the main session hall and Consultations Room, there is a kind of anteroom furnished with sofas and a TV set, where you can sit for a while and drink a cup of coffee, rest a little, and there is one more room, adjacent to this anteroom, which can hold a dozen or so people. We were asked whether this "consultation room," considering that it is always packed full, whether it should be enlarged by combining it with the anteroom and removing the wall for more space. I don't want to let anyone down, but one of the Council's

permanent members, an ambassador (not from Russia), said: “No, gentlemen, let’s not remove that wall for the time being, because as soon as we do it, we’ll immediately be tempted to push for expanding the UN Security Council as there will be room for expansion. It’s sort of a joke, of course...”

*Question: Is this why the UN Security Council reform is treading water?*

**Sergey Lavrov:** There are many people with a good sense of humour. Without it, working at the Security Council would be a chore.

*Question: By the way, Secretary General Ban Ki-moon is one of those people who, I think, has a good sense of humour. He has a nice smile, but, in any case, he will have to leave office at some point. In this regard, do Russia and our Foreign Ministry have any priorities in terms of the future UN secretary general candidacy? It is widely known that there is a regional rotation, etc. In his interview, Ban Ki-moon said that a woman is overdue for this position. How realistic is it that a woman could become the secretary general next year?*

**Sergey Lavrov:** I’m not sure who thinks a woman is overdue in this office...

*Question: Ban Ki-moon said so.*

**Sergey Lavrov:** That may well be the case. But the gender issue shouldn’t be an end in itself. Among the reforms implemented in the UN, there is one that focuses on creating a hybrid structure dubbed The UN Women, which represents governments and NGOs. This is an inclusive issue that encompasses the rights of women in the family, equality issues, the rights of women and children in different situations, conflict zones, and more. This is an important issue, and it should be promoted.

But in the case of the UN secretary general, professionalism and experience come first. Considering that the UN is a ramified organisation, taking this office without any knowledge of the system is a tough proposition. Of course, the principles of UN’s universality should be taken into account. There must be a rotation, although the Charter does not say so. What it says is that being the chief administrative officer, the UN secretary general must ensure the proper functioning of the organisation; he has the right to hold consultations with the heads of UN intergovernmental agencies and to make his ideas, including on issues related to peace and security, known to the UN Security Council. He performs many functions. They are formulated succinctly and in broad strokes, and provide sufficient leeway. As a matter of fact, it would be nice to slightly improve the overall accountability of the Secretariat to intergovernmental bodies, as there is no transparency at times. I understand that lots of things are confidential, but everyone must be honest with the UN Security Council. The Secretariat should have no secrets from the UN.

Speaking about electing a new secretary general, we have great respect for Ban Ki-moon. We are on good terms. He has been to Russia on many occasions, and met with President Putin many times. In 2016, his second term will expire and, in accordance with the UN Charter, he may not be re-elected. Hence, the issue of ensuring universality and fairness in terms of the geographical representation of the heads of the Secretariat. This position was filled many



times by representatives from Western Europe, Asia, Africa (Boutros Boutros-Ghali and Kofi Annan), and Latin America. But the Eastern European regional group, which has existed in the UN since the Soviet era, has never been represented officially.

The UN has five groups: Asia, Latin America, Africa, Western Europe (which includes the United States, Australia and New Zealand), and Eastern Europe. Originally, the groups were created not for political reasons, but rather to ensure the effective, efficient election of UN governing bodies with limited membership. For example, representatives of 54 countries are elected to the Economic and Social Council. The Human Rights Council also does not represent as many countries as one would like. They do not represent all nations. There are numerous bodies whose representatives are elected from among UN members. These groups were created to represent, more or less equally, all of the world's regions in economic and human rights bodies. They agree upon candidates, including to the Security Council, ECOSOC, HRC, and others, among themselves. When the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Treaty ceased to exist, the Eastern European group was kept because it is not political and must be there to hold such elections.

The Eastern European group now has a consensus, which we and all of its members — regardless of their affiliation with NATO — supported. We signed a circular, which was distributed among all UN members, that we are convinced that the next UN secretary general should be a representative from Eastern Europe. There are about 10 such candidates (women, too, by the way) from different countries. The group as a whole is unlikely to come to an agreement, but the procedure for electing the UN secretary general and fielding candidates is a flexible process. I do not rule out that the Eastern European group will put forward several candidacies for consideration by the General Assembly. Some candidates will be eliminated in the course of consultations. There will definitely be more than one candidate, but I don't see anything wrong with the General Assembly receiving a list of several names.

***Question:** The UN Security Council consensus is not required?*

**Sergey Lavrov:** Yes, it is mandatory. First, the list goes to the UN Security Council. It has its own procedure, and there is also a non-binding blind vote, so no one knows who votes for whom, but you can always know which candidate received the required nine votes. There are other tricks as well. However, in the current situation, submitting several candidacies to the UN General Assembly is the most likely outcome of the review to be performed by the UN Security Council.

***Question:** Does a candidate need to have the majority of votes or two-thirds of the vote?*

**Sergey Lavrov:** There has always been one candidate because the UN Security Council screened candidates using the above-mentioned procedure. This time, knowing the candidates, I do not see how you can choose one without hurting the feelings of the other worthy candidates.

**Question:** *We are now in the Foreign Ministry museum. This in itself is a one-of-a-kind place. Are there foreign ministry museums in other countries?*

**Sergey Lavrov:** I am sure there are.

**Question:** *But I am sure none of the other museums has what I saw in yours. That is unique.*

**Sergey Lavrov:** Don't forget to put it back on your way out, please.

**Question:** *This is a book of poems written by Russian and Soviet diplomats. It has your poems as well, which says a lot about the minister. This is probably the only museum that has a book of poems written by diplomats. As we are talking about the programme related to the anniversary UNGA session, and the UN, in general, I assume those 10 years that you spent on the East River inspired you to write some poems.*

*This collection of poems is titled, "Escape." It has your picture. You are very young here. This poem was written when you already worked at the UN. The first quatrain reads as follows:*

*We were born in the shade of the great MGIMO  
The fairest of all earthly dynasties.  
So many generations have been woven forever here,  
May God grant it immortality and happiness.  
You dedicated these lines to your alma mater.*

**Sergey Lavrov:** Yes, I did. Now, they have become the MGIMO anthem that is performed every September 1. I am very pleased and flattered, but I have nothing to do with this choice. The decision was made by the rector.

**Question:** *Much is written about MGIMO in memorandums, reports and dissertations. However, I believe, no one said it better in a poem. Here are some of your other lines:  
It helped us see what we are made of  
Through glory, woe and wealth.  
It taught us to appreciate life  
And retain student brotherhood ...  
As far as I know, you kept this your entire life. Thank you, Mr Lavrov.*

**Sergey Lavrov:** Thank you.

**Source:**

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