

NATO stuck between past and future – Lavrov ('Russia Today')

September 1, 2010

Moscow expects more clarity in relations with the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov has said.

On September 1, when the academic year begins, Lavrov addressed Russia's future diplomats – students of the Moscow State University of Foreign Relations (MGIMO).

"We expect more clarity from our partners in NATO. I think this organization has been balancing between the past and the future far too long," he said.

The minister mentioned discussions about NATO's new Strategic Concept, which is to replace the 1999 concept, as an example of such duality.

In May this year, the so-called group of Wise Men – led by former US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright – presented their analysis and recommendations for the alliance's strategic goals for upcoming decade. The report will have to be considered by the 28 member-states and approved at the Lisbon Summit in November.

Lavrov agreed with analysts that the report "can hardly be considered a strategic response to Russia's security initiatives."

Russia has been pushing for a new treaty on European security, which would allow signatory states to provide military assistance to each other. Back in autumn last year, President Dmitry Medvedev sent foreign leaders and international organizations a draft for the new agreement. So far, Moscow has not got a clear response to its proposal.

"We would like to see NATO finish its political transformation into a modern security organization so that it is ready to take part in parity-based network co-operation with other players, including Russia and the [Collective Security Treaty Organization]," Lavrov said Wednesday. "Of course, such co-operation can only be possible if the parties unconditionally respect international law, the UN Charter first and foremost."

Lavrov also stressed that it is important to achieve progress in fighting with drug trafficking from Afghanistan which "has become a real threat to international peace and security."

"It is directly used to finance extremism and terrorism," Lavrov pointed out.

Visa regime hampers joint Russia-EU plans

Addressing the students, Lavrov spoke in favor of harmonizing relationships with the countries that can contribute to the modernization of Russia.

He stressed that Russia needs modernized alliances with European states, including with Germany, Italy and the EU as a whole, "in order to create a common economic and humanitarian space."

"Since we are now in a fundamentally new situation, we need to harmonize our relationships with all the partners that can become external sources of our modernization," he stressed, adding that Russia's partners also need Russia's potential for their development.

"If Russia and the European Union mutually allow visa-free travel, this would entirely transform European politics. On the other hand, if the visa regime is retained, this may hamper implementation of our joint plans," Lavrov said.

He reminded that, three months ago at the Russia-EU summit in Rostov-on-Don, Moscow handed over to its European partners a draft agreement on scrapping the visa regime. "We are expecting a constructive reaction," he said.

"Sanctions against Iran won't be effective"

The Russian Foreign Minister also touched upon the issue of the Iranian uranium enrichment program that has been a headache for the international community over fears that Tehran is seeking the creation of a nuclear weapon.

"We are concerned about Iran because it has become a major issue in global politics," Lavrov said. According to Russia's top diplomat, the Islamic Republic must "demonstrate openness and willingness" to co-operate with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

Tehran, he said, "must clarify all remaining questions with respect to its nuclear program". The Russian Foreign Minister added that "Iran itself will benefit from this."

"The problem of Iran is a systemic one. It has to do with the deficiency of the current non-proliferation regime. Non-proliferation should be based on international law," Lavrov stressed. "It is obvious that sanctions against Iran won't be effective."

He went on to say that it is impossible to isolate a country without global consequences. "We will have to reach a compromise, no matter how hard it may be. It is impossible to isolate Iran without consequences for the entire region," Lavrov underlined.

"We believe that global problems can never be resolved by force," he pointed out. Sergey Lavrov specifically mentioned US President Barack Obama's position on Iran, namely his intention to engage Tehran in talks. "We welcome the normalization of relations between the US and Iran," Lavrov stated.

Russia-US "can't always agree on everything"

As for Moscow-Washington relations, Lavrov welcomed innovative cooperation between the two states, saying that it creates "a positive agenda" in relations. However, he said, Moscow cannot fully agree with President Obama's National Security Strategy that was released in May.

"The document contains a lot of old, traditional elements of US foreign policy, which have all but grown obsolete," the Russian Foreign Minister said. "But what is important here are the things that bring our countries closer together, namely the understanding that national security should be based on stable and consistent internal development," he went on. According to Lavrov, President Medvedev's recent visit to the US has demonstrated that, when the two countries work together on innovative projects, this provides a positive agenda in Russian-US relations.

"The world's largest powers will not always agree on everything. But if they are willing to hear each other and to come to a common understanding on the current stage in global development, that is, what sort of world we live in and where it is going, then this helps us have more harmony at the level of practical politics and approaches to specific international problems as well," the minister pointed out.

The US and Russia, Lavrov added, share a common approach to security, "which is based on the realization that military force alone can only get us so far."

"We also welcome the recent shift towards multilateral diplomacy and collective efforts in resolving problems that are common to all nations," Lavrov said.

Middle East conflict sides should abandon their "medieval" views

The Russian Foreign Minister has called on the sides of the Arab-Israeli conflict to abandon their "medieval" views regarding each other and said that no one would benefit if a new conflict in the Middle East region broke out.

"The sides should get rid of their medieval, even Old Testament-esque, ideas about each other and start negotiations," he said, cited Interfax. And they get a chance to do so "literally tomorrow", on September 2, when Israeli-Palestinian peace talks are due to resume in Washington.

"The basis for agreements [between the two sides] exists in the UN resolutions, as well as in the Arab Peace Initiative and documents drafted by the Quartet [of mediators consisting of the UN, EU, the US and Russia]," Lavrov said.

On a broader scale, he went on, "there is a need for a comprehensive strategy on solutions to all key interconnected problems of the Middle East, which also requires the end of the nuclear arms race in the region." Lavrov reminded that the Middle East has already been "subject to destabilization by external forces aiming at reshaping it to meet someone else's interests."

The Russian top diplomat stressed that no one would benefit if a new large-scale conflict was unleashed in the region, but on the contrary, "everyone would lose."

He has called on all that parties to the Middle East peace process to make their choice in favor of collective efforts that are meant to bring peace to the region.

"Politics, as you know, is primarily a skill to choose. And I would like everyone to make a choice in favor of a responsible collective strategy that would offer solutions to problems but would not create new problems," Lavrov concluded.