

Speech and the Following Discussion at the Munich Conference on Security Policy

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Vladimir Putin: Thank you very much dear Madam Federal Chancellor, Mr Teltschik, ladies and gentlemen!

I am truly grateful to be invited to such a representative conference that has assembled politicians, military officials, entrepreneurs and experts from more than 40 nations.

This conference's structure allows me to avoid excessive politeness and the need to speak in roundabout, pleasant but empty diplomatic terms. This conference's format will allow me to say what I really think about international security problems. And if my comments seem unduly polemical, pointed or inexact to our colleagues, then I would ask you not to get angry with me. After all, this is only a conference. And I hope that after the first two or three minutes of my speech Mr Teltschik will not turn on the red light over there.

Therefore. It is well known that international security comprises much more than issues relating to military and political stability. It involves the stability of the global economy, overcoming poverty, economic security and developing a dialogue between civilisations.

This universal, indivisible character of security is expressed as the basic principle that "security for one is security for all". As Franklin D. Roosevelt said during the first few days that the Second World War was breaking out: "When peace has been broken anywhere, the peace of all countries everywhere is in danger."

These words remain topical today. Incidentally, the theme of our conference – global

crises, global responsibility – exemplifies this.

Only two decades ago the world was ideologically and economically divided and it was the huge strategic potential of two superpowers that ensured global security.

This global stand-off pushed the sharpest economic and social problems to the margins of the international community's and the world's agenda. And, just like any war, the Cold War left us with live ammunition, figuratively speaking. I am referring to ideological stereotypes, double standards and other typical aspects of Cold War bloc thinking.

The unipolar world that had been proposed after the Cold War did not take place either.

The history of humanity certainly has gone through unipolar periods and seen aspirations to world supremacy. And what hasn't happened in world history?

However, what is a unipolar world? However one might embellish this term, at the end of the day it refers to one type of situation, namely one centre of authority, one centre of force, one centre of decision-making.

It is world in which there is one master, one sovereign. And at the end of the day this is pernicious not only for all those within this system, but also for the sovereign itself because it destroys itself from within.

And this certainly has nothing in common with democracy. Because, as you know, democracy is the power of the majority in light of the interests and opinions of the minority.

Incidentally, Russia – we – are constantly being taught about democracy. But for some reason those who teach us do not want to learn themselves.

I consider that the unipolar model is not only unacceptable but also impossible in today's world. And this is not only because if there was individual leadership in today's – and precisely in today's – world, then the military, political and economic resources would not suffice. What is even more important is that

the model itself is flawed because at its basis there is and can be no moral foundations for modern civilisation.

Along with this, what is happening in today's world – and we just started to discuss this – is a tentative to introduce precisely this concept into international affairs, the concept of a unipolar world.

And with which results?

Unilateral and frequently illegitimate actions have not resolved any problems. Moreover, they have caused new human tragedies and created new centres of tension. Judge for yourselves: wars as well as local and regional conflicts have not diminished. Mr Teltschik mentioned this very gently. And no less people perish in these conflicts – even more are dying than before. Significantly more, significantly more!

Today we are witnessing an almost uncontained hyper use of force – military force – in international relations, force that is plunging the world into an abyss of permanent conflicts. As a result we do not have sufficient strength to find a comprehensive solution to any one of these conflicts. Finding a political settlement also becomes impossible.

We are seeing a greater and greater disdain for the basic principles of international law. And independent legal norms are, as a matter of fact, coming increasingly closer to one state's legal system. One state and, of course, first and foremost the United States, has overstepped its national borders in every way. This is visible in the economic, political, cultural and educational policies it imposes on other nations. Well, who likes this? Who is happy about this?

In international relations we increasingly see the desire to resolve a given question according to so-called issues of political expediency, based on the current political climate.

And of course this is extremely dangerous. It results in the fact that no one feels safe. I want to emphasise this – no one feels safe! Because no one can feel that international law is like a stone wall that will protect them. Of course such a policy

stimulates an arms race.

The force's dominance inevitably encourages a number of countries to acquire weapons of mass destruction. Moreover, significantly new threats – though they were also well-known before – have appeared, and today threats such as terrorism have taken on a global character.

I am convinced that we have reached that decisive moment when we must seriously think about the architecture of global security.

And we must proceed by searching for a reasonable balance between the interests of all participants in the international dialogue. Especially since the international landscape is so varied and changes so quickly – changes in light of the dynamic development in a whole number of countries and regions.

Madam Federal Chancellor already mentioned this. The combined GDP measured in purchasing power parity of countries such as India and China is already greater than that of the United States. And a similar calculation with the GDP of the BRIC countries – Brazil, Russia, India and China – surpasses the cumulative GDP of the EU. And according to experts this gap will only increase in the future.

There is no reason to doubt that the economic potential of the new centres of global economic growth will inevitably be converted into political influence and will strengthen multipolarity.

In connection with this the role of multilateral diplomacy is significantly increasing. The need for principles such as openness, transparency and predictability in politics is uncontested and the use of force should be a really exceptional measure, comparable to using the death penalty in the judicial systems of certain states.

However, today we are witnessing the opposite tendency, namely a situation in which countries that forbid the death penalty even for murderers and other, dangerous criminals are airily participating in military operations that are difficult to consider legitimate. And as a matter of fact, these conflicts are killing people – hundreds and thousands of civilians!

But at the same time the question arises of whether we should be indifferent and aloof to various internal conflicts inside countries, to authoritarian regimes, to tyrants, and to the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction? As a matter of fact, this was also at the centre of the question that our dear colleague Mr Lieberman asked the Federal Chancellor. If I correctly understood your question (addressing Mr Lieberman), then of course it is a serious one! Can we be indifferent observers in view of what is happening? I will try to answer your question as well: of course not.

But do we have the means to counter these threats? Certainly we do. It is sufficient to look at recent history. Did not our country have a peaceful transition to democracy? Indeed, we witnessed a peaceful transformation of the Soviet regime – a peaceful transformation! And what a regime! With what a number of weapons, including nuclear weapons! Why should we start bombing and shooting now at every available opportunity? Is it the case when without the threat of mutual destruction we do not have enough political culture, respect for democratic values and for the law?

I am convinced that the only mechanism that can make decisions about using military force as a last resort is the Charter of the United Nations. And in connection with this, either I did not understand what our colleague, the Italian Defence Minister, just said or what he said was inexact. In any case, I understood that the use of force can only be legitimate when the decision is taken by NATO, the EU, or the UN. If he really does think so, then we have different points of view. Or I didn't hear correctly. The use of force can only be considered legitimate if the decision is sanctioned by the UN. And we do not need to substitute NATO or the EU for the UN. When the UN will truly unite the forces of the international community and can really react to events in various countries, when we will leave behind this disdain for international law, then the situation will be able to change. Otherwise the situation will simply result in a dead end, and the number of serious mistakes will be multiplied. Along with this, it is necessary to make sure that international law have a universal character both in the conception and application of its norms.

And one must not forget that democratic political actions necessarily go along with discussion and a laborious decision-making process.

Dear ladies and gentlemen!

The potential danger of the destabilisation of international relations is connected with obvious stagnation in the disarmament issue.

Russia supports the renewal of dialogue on this important question.

It is important to conserve the international legal framework relating to weapons destruction and therefore ensure continuity in the process of reducing nuclear weapons.

Together with the United States of America we agreed to reduce our nuclear strategic missile capabilities to up to 1700–2000 nuclear warheads by 31 December 2012. Russia intends to strictly fulfil the obligations it has taken on. We hope that our partners will also act in a transparent way and will refrain from laying aside a couple of hundred superfluous nuclear warheads for a rainy day. And if today the new American Defence Minister declares that the United States will not hide these superfluous weapons in warehouse or, as one might say, under a pillow or under the blanket, then I suggest that we all rise and greet this declaration standing. It would be a very important declaration.

Russia strictly adheres to and intends to further adhere to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons as well as the multilateral supervision regime for missile technologies. The principles incorporated in these documents are universal ones.

In connection with this I would like to recall that in the 1980s the USSR and the United States signed an agreement on destroying a whole range of small- and medium-range missiles but these documents do not have a universal character.

Today many other countries have these missiles, including the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, the Republic of Korea, India, Iran, Pakistan and Israel. Many countries are working on these systems and plan to incorporate them as part of their weapons arsenals. And only the United States and Russia bear the responsibility to not create such weapons systems.

It is obvious that in these conditions we must think about ensuring our own security.

At the same time, it is impossible to sanction the appearance of new, destabilising high-tech weapons. Needless to say it refers to measures to prevent a new area of confrontation, especially in outer space. Star wars is no longer a fantasy – it is a reality. In the middle of the 1980s our American partners were already able to intercept their own satellite.

In Russia's opinion, the militarisation of outer space could have unpredictable consequences for the international community, and provoke nothing less than the beginning of a nuclear era. And we have come forward more than once with initiatives designed to prevent the use of weapons in outer space.

Today I would like to tell you that we have prepared a project for an agreement on the prevention of deploying weapons in outer space. And in the near future it will be sent to our partners as an official proposal. Let's work on this together.

Plans to expand certain elements of the anti-missile defence system to Europe cannot help but disturb us. Who needs the next step of what would be, in this case, an inevitable arms race? I deeply doubt that Europeans themselves do.

Missile weapons with a range of about five to eight thousand kilometres that really pose a threat to Europe do not exist in any of the so-called problem countries. And in the near future and prospects, this will not happen and is not even foreseeable. And any hypothetical launch of, for example, a North Korean rocket to American territory through western Europe obviously contradicts the laws of ballistics. As we say in Russia, it would be like using the right hand to reach the left ear.

And here in Germany I cannot help but mention the pitiable condition of the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe.

The Adapted Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe was signed in 1999. It took into account a new geopolitical reality, namely the elimination of the Warsaw bloc. Seven years have passed and only four states have ratified this document, including the Russian Federation.

NATO countries openly declared that they will not ratify this treaty, including

the provisions on flank restrictions (on deploying a certain number of armed forces in the flank zones), until Russia removed its military bases from Georgia and Moldova. Our army is leaving Georgia, even according to an accelerated schedule. We resolved the problems we had with our Georgian colleagues, as everybody knows. There are still 1,500 servicemen in Moldova that are carrying out peacekeeping operations and protecting warehouses with ammunition left over from Soviet times. We constantly discuss this issue with Mr Solana and he knows our position. We are ready to further work in this direction.

But what is happening at the same time? Simultaneously the so-called flexible frontline American bases with up to five thousand men in each. It turns out that NATO has put its frontline forces on our borders, and we continue to strictly fulfil the treaty obligations and do not react to these actions at all.

I think it is obvious that NATO expansion does not have any relation with the modernisation of the Alliance itself or with ensuring security in Europe. On the contrary, it represents a serious provocation that reduces the level of mutual trust. And we have the right to ask: against whom is this expansion intended? And what happened to the assurances our western partners made after the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact? Where are those declarations today? No one even remembers them. But I will allow myself to remind this audience what was said. I would like to quote the speech of NATO General Secretary Mr Woerner in Brussels on 17 May 1990. He said at the time that: “the fact that we are ready not to place a NATO army outside of German territory gives the Soviet Union a firm security guarantee”. Where are these guarantees?

The stones and concrete blocks of the Berlin Wall have long been distributed as souvenirs. But we should not forget that the fall of the Berlin Wall was possible thanks to a historic choice – one that was also made by our people, the people of Russia – a choice in favour of democracy, freedom, openness and a sincere partnership with all the members of the big European family.

And now they are trying to impose new dividing lines and walls on us – these walls may be virtual but they are nevertheless dividing, ones that cut through our continent. And is it possible that we will once again require many years and decades, as well as several generations of politicians, to disassemble and dismantle these new walls?

Dear ladies and gentlemen!

We are unequivocally in favour of strengthening the regime of non-proliferation. The present international legal principles allow us to develop technologies to manufacture nuclear fuel for peaceful purposes. And many countries with all good reasons want to create their own nuclear energy as a basis for their energy independence. But we also understand that these technologies can be quickly transformed into nuclear weapons.

This creates serious international tensions. The situation surrounding the Iranian nuclear programme acts as a clear example. And if the international community does not find a reasonable solution for resolving this conflict of interests, the world will continue to suffer similar, destabilising crises because there are more threshold countries than simply Iran. We both know this. We are going to constantly fight against the threat of the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.

Last year Russia put forward the initiative to establish international centres for the enrichment of uranium. We are open to the possibility that such centres not only be created in Russia, but also in other countries where there is a legitimate basis for using civil nuclear energy. Countries that want to develop their nuclear energy could guarantee that they will receive fuel through direct participation in these centres. And the centres would, of course, operate under strict IAEA supervision.

The latest initiatives put forward by American President George W. Bush are in conformity with the Russian proposals. I consider that Russia and the USA are objectively and equally interested in strengthening the regime of the non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and their deployment. It is precisely our countries, with leading nuclear and missile capabilities, that must act as leaders in developing new, stricter non-proliferation measures. Russia is ready for such work. We are engaged in consultations with our American friends.

In general, we should talk about establishing a whole system of political incentives and economic stimuli whereby it would not be in states' interests to establish their own capabilities in the nuclear fuel cycle but they would still have the opportunity to develop nuclear energy and strengthen their energy capabilities.

In connection with this I shall talk about international energy cooperation in more detail. Madam Federal Chancellor also spoke about this briefly – she mentioned, touched on this theme. In the energy sector Russia intends to create uniform market principles and transparent conditions for all. It is obvious that energy prices must be determined by the market instead of being the subject of political speculation, economic pressure or blackmail.

We are open to cooperation. Foreign companies participate in all our major energy projects. According to different estimates, up to 26 percent of the oil extraction in Russia – and please think about this figure – up to 26 percent of the oil extraction in Russia is done by foreign capital. Try, try to find me a similar example where Russian business participates extensively in key economic sectors in western countries. Such examples do not exist! There are no such examples.

I would also recall the parity of foreign investments in Russia and those Russia makes abroad. The parity is about fifteen to one. And here you have an obvious example of the openness and stability of the Russian economy.

Economic security is the sector in which all must adhere to uniform principles. We are ready to compete fairly.

For that reason more and more opportunities are appearing in the Russian economy. Experts and our western partners are objectively evaluating these changes. As such, Russia's OECD sovereign credit rating improved and Russia passed from the fourth to the third group. And today in Munich I would like to use this occasion to thank our German colleagues for their help in the above decision.

Furthermore. As you know, the process of Russia joining the WTO has reached its final stages. I would point out that during long, difficult talks we heard words about freedom of speech, free trade, and equal possibilities more than once but, for some reason, exclusively in reference to the Russian market.

And there is still one more important theme that directly affects global security. Today many talk about the struggle against poverty. What is actually happening in this sphere? On the one hand, financial resources are allocated for programmes to help the world's poorest countries – and at times substantial financial resources.

But to be honest — and many here also know this — linked with the development of that same donor country's companies. And on the other hand, developed countries simultaneously keep their agricultural subsidies and limit some countries' access to high-tech products.

And let's say things as they are — one hand distributes charitable help and the other hand not only preserves economic backwardness but also reaps the profits thereof. The increasing social tension in depressed regions inevitably results in the growth of radicalism, extremism, feeds terrorism and local conflicts. And if all this happens in, shall we say, a region such as the Middle East where there is increasingly the sense that the world at large is unfair, then there is the risk of global destabilisation.

It is obvious that the world's leading countries should see this threat. And that they should therefore build a more democratic, fairer system of global economic relations, a system that would give everyone the chance and the possibility to develop.

Dear ladies and gentlemen, speaking at the Conference on Security Policy, it is impossible not to mention the activities of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). As is well-known, this organisation was created to examine all — I shall emphasise this — all aspects of security: military, political, economic, humanitarian and, especially, the relations between these spheres.

What do we see happening today? We see that this balance is clearly destroyed. People are trying to transform the OSCE into a vulgar instrument designed to promote the foreign policy interests of one or a group of countries. And this task is also being accomplished by the OSCE's bureaucratic apparatus which is absolutely not connected with the state founders in any way. Decision-making procedures and the involvement of so-called non-governmental organisations are tailored for this task. These organisations are formally independent but they are purposefully financed and therefore under control.

According to the founding documents, in the humanitarian sphere the OSCE is designed to assist country members in observing international human rights norms at their request. This is an important task. We support this. But this does not mean interfering in the internal affairs of other countries, and especially not imposing

a regime that determines how these states should live and develop.

It is obvious that such interference does not promote the development of democratic states at all. On the contrary, it makes them dependent and, as a consequence, politically and economically unstable.

We expect that the OSCE be guided by its primary tasks and build relations with sovereign states based on respect, trust and transparency.

Dear ladies and gentlemen!

In conclusion I would like to note the following. We very often – and personally, I very often – hear appeals by our partners, including our European partners, to the effect that Russia should play an increasingly active role in world affairs.

In connection with this I would allow myself to make one small remark. It is hardly necessary to incite us to do so. Russia is a country with a history that spans more than a thousand years and has practically always used the privilege to carry out an independent foreign policy.

We are not going to change this tradition today. At the same time, we are well aware of how the world has changed and we have a realistic sense of our own opportunities and potential. And of course we would like to interact with responsible and independent partners with whom we could work together in constructing a fair and democratic world order that would ensure security and prosperity not only for a select few, but for all.

Thank you for your attention.

END OF SPEECH / STARTS QUESTIONS

Horst Teltschik: Thank you very much for your important speech. We heard new themes, including the issue of global security architecture – one was not in the foreground over the last few years – disarmament, arms control, the issue of the NATO-Russian relations, and cooperation in the field of technology.

There are still a whole number of questions and Mr President is ready to answer.

Question: Dear Mr President, thank you for your speech. I would like to emphasise that the German Bundestag is convinced of Russia's importance as Europe's partner and of the importance of the role you play. The Federal Chancellor said this in her speech.

Proceeding from experience, I would like to mention two issues in your speech. First of all, on your opinion of NATO and NATO expansion, a phenomenon that you consider dangerous for Russia. Would you acknowledge that this phenomenon is, in practice, not expansion but rather the self-determination of democratic states who want this? And that NATO finds it difficult to accept states that do not declare this readiness? You could admit that thanks to NATO expansion eastern borders have become more reliable, more secure. Why are you afraid of democracy? I am convinced that only democratic states can become members of NATO. This stabilises neighbours.

About what is happening inside your country. The murder of Anna Politkovskaya was a symbol. One can say that this affects many journalists, makes everybody afraid, and the law on non-governmental organisations also causes alarm.

Question: I well understand your comments about non-proliferation. Especially at the end of the Cold War we saw a reduction of the deployment of nuclear weapons, but we also saw increased terrorism. Nuclear materials must be kept away from terrorists.

Question: Coming back to the question that was also asked to the Federal Chancellor. What does the future hold for Kosovo and Serbia? What is your opinion of Mr Ahtisaari? How will Russia influence resolving this problem?

Question: Can you comment on the experiences of Russian servicemen in Chechnya? And about your comments on energy: you briefly mentioned the market role energy plays in politics. The EU is interested in reaching a partnership agreement that contains fixed policy principles. Are you ready to guarantee reliable energy deliveries, including in the agreement?

Question: Mr President, your speech was both sincere and frank. I hope that you understand my frank and direct question. In the 1990s Russian experts actively

helped Iran develop missile technologies. Iran now has advanced medium- and long-range missiles that would enable it to strike Russia and part of Europe. They are also working towards placing nuclear warheads on these missiles. Your country has made efforts to negotiate with Iran on this issue and supported the UN Security Council resolution to prevent Iran from carrying out such a policy.

My question is as follows: what efforts will Russia make – through the UN or otherwise – to stop these very serious events in Iran?

Question: I am confident that the historians of the future will not describe our conference as one in which the Second Cold War was declared. But they could. You said that it is necessary to put pressure on Iran and to provide positive incentives. But is it not true that Russia is interfering with the process of applying strong pressure through sanctions? Secondly, with regards to deliveries of weapons, Russia is encouraging Iran, especially since these weapons appeared in Lebanon and in Gaza. What are your comments on this?

Question: I understand your sincerity and I hope that you will accept our sincerity. First of all, about arms control. Who needs a new arms race? I want to point out that the USA has not developed a new strategic weapon in more than two decades and that you recently tested the Topol-M missile, and that it is already deployed in silos and on mobile installations. You criticised the USA for unilateral actions and said twice that military actions can only be legitimate if they receive UN approval. The USA is carrying out military actions in Iraq and in Afghanistan according to UN decisions and today in Kosovo the majority of troops are supporting peace-making operations in this country.

My question is the following: are you saying that independently of how Russia perceives a threat to its international interests, it will not undertake military operations without UN approval?

Question: You talked about the danger of a unipolar world in which one sovereign makes a decision without consulting anyone else. In many people's opinion, in Russia we are seeing an increasingly unipolar government where competing centres of influence are forced to tow the party line, whether it be in the State Duma, the regional leadership, the media, business communities or non-governmental organisations. Would a unipolar government be such a reliable partner when

the issue of energy security is at stake?

President Vladimir Putin: First of all I would like to thank you for your questions. Very interesting. It is a shame that we have little time left because I would be pleased to have a separate discussion with all of you. I very much enjoy this, I like it.

I will begin with the last question about the unipolar nature of the Russian government. Today the Communist Party of the Russian Federation, the United Russia Party, the Liberal Democratic Party and other political forces as well sit in the Russian parliament. And their basic positions differ significantly. If you aren't aware of this then just have a talk with the leadership of the Communist Party of the Russian Federation and then with the leader of our liberal democrats, Mr Zhirinovskiy. You will see the difference at once. If you cannot see it now, then have a talk with them. There is no problem here, simply go to Moscow and talk to them.

About our future plans. We would like to have a mature political system, a multi-party system with responsible politicians who can anticipate the country's development and not only work responsibly before elections and immediately after, but in a long-term future as well. That is what we aspire to. And this system will certainly be a multi-party one. All our actions within Russia, including changing the State Duma election regime, the election regime in the Russian parliament, are designed to strengthen a multi-party system in Russia.

And now about whether our government cabinet is able to operate responsibly in resolving issues linked to energy deliveries and ensuring energy security. Of course it can! Moreover, all that we have done and are doing is designed to achieve only one goal, namely to transfer our relations with consumers and countries that transport our energy to market-based, transparent principles and long-term contracts.

I will remind you and my colleague, the President of Ukraine, who is sitting opposite from me, also knows this. For fifteen years prior to 2006, as long as we did not make the corresponding decisions during our difficult talks, deliveries of Russian energy and, first and foremost, of gas to Europe depended on the conditions and prices for the deliveries of Russian gas to Ukraine itself. And this was something that Ukraine and Russia agreed among themselves. And if we reached no agreement, then all European consumers would sit there with no gas. Would you like to see this

happen? I don't think so. And despite all the scandals, the protection of interests, and differences of opinion we were able to agree with President Yushchenko. I consider that he made a responsible, absolutely correct and market-oriented decision. We signed separate contracts for the delivery of our gas to Ukraine and for delivering Russian gas to Europe for the next five years. You should thank us, both Russia and Ukraine, for this decision. And thank you also for your question.

It would have been better if I answered your questions at once.

Regarding our perception of NATO's eastern expansion, I already mentioned the guarantees that were made and that are not being observed today. Do you happen to think that this is normal practice in international affairs? But all right, forget it. Forget these guarantees. With respect to democracy and NATO expansion. NATO is not a universal organisation, as opposed to the UN. It is first and foremost a military and political alliance, military and political! Well, ensuring one's own security is the right of any sovereign state. We are not arguing against this. Of course we are not objecting to this. But why is it necessary to put military infrastructure on our borders during this expansion? Can someone answer this question? Unless the expansion of military infrastructure is connected with fighting against today's global threats? Let's put it this way, what is the most important of these threats for us today – the most important for Russia, for the USA and for Europe – it is terrorism and the fight against it.

Does one need Russia to fight against terrorism? Of course! Does one need India to fight against terrorism! Of course! But we are not members of NATO and other countries aren't either. But we can only work on this issue effectively by joining our forces. As such, expanding infrastructure, especially military infrastructure, to our borders is not connected in any way with the democratic choices of individual states. And I would ask that we not mix these two concepts.

You know, I wrote so illegibly here that even I cannot read my own writing. I will therefore answer what I can read and if I do not answer something, please remind me of the question.

What will happen with Kosovo and with Serbia? Only Kosovars and Serbs can know. And let's not tell them how they should live their lives. There is no need to play God and resolve all of these peoples' problems. Together we can only create certain

necessary conditions and help people resolve their own problems. Create the necessary conditions and act as the guarantors of certain agreements. But we should not impose these agreements. Otherwise, we shall simply put the situation into a dead end. And if one of the participants in this difficult process feels offended or humiliated, then the problem will last for centuries. We will only create a dead end.

What does our position consist in? Our position consists in adhering precisely to this principle. And if we see that one party is clearly dissatisfied with the proposals to resolve the situation then we are not going to support this option.

I did not exactly understand what you meant when you asked about our servicemen's experience in Chechnya. Their experience is not pleasant, but it is extensive. And if you are interested in the general situation in Chechnya, then I can tell you that a parliament and a president have been elected, and that the government is functioning. All the bodies of authority and administration have been formed. Practically all the political forces in Chechnya have been involved in work in the Republic. As an example, the former Defence Minister of Aslan Maskhadov's government is now a member of parliament in Chechnya. And we made a whole series of decisions that would allow former insurgents to return not only to normal life, but also to the Republic's political activities. As such, today we prefer to act by using economic and political means and, in practice, we have transferred the responsibility for ensuring security almost 100 percent to the Chechen people. Because the agencies of law and order that were formed in Chechnya are almost 100 percent composed of local citizens, from those living in Chechnya on a permanent basis – from Chechens.

As to Lebanon, I also did not quite understand what you meant. But, yes, the fact that we sent military construction workers to Lebanon to restore bridges and infrastructure that was destroyed in the conflict with Israel is a confirmation of a well-known situation, the one I described just now. And military units protecting these builders were made up of servicemen from Chechnya and with Chechen origins. We recognised that if our servicemen must operate in regions inhabited by Muslims, sending a contingent of Muslim servicemen would be no bad thing. And we were not mistaken. The local population really gave a warm welcome to our military builders.

Now about the energy agreement with the European Union, since this is how I understood the question. We have said many times that we are not against agreeing on the principles underlying our energy relations with the EU. Moreover, the principles contained in the Charter are generally comprehensible. But the Charter itself is not so acceptable to us. Because not only Russia but also our European partners do not adhere to its principles. It is enough to remember that the market for nuclear materials remains closed for us. Nobody has opened this market to us.

There are also other moments which I simply do not want to draw attention to now. But as to the principles themselves, we are already using these principles in our work with German companies. I shall remind you of the transaction that took place between Gazprom and BASF. As a matter of fact, this was an asset swap. We are ready to continue to work this way. We are ready. But in each concrete instance we must understand what we give, what our partners give, calculate, have an independent international expert evaluation, and then make a decision. We are ready to engage in this work. We have actually just recently done something similar with our Italian partners, with the company ENI. And we did more than simply sign an agreement about deliveries until 2035 – I think – we also talked about swapping assets. And we are studying this same type of cooperation with our Ukrainian friends. This is going ahead.

And is it necessary to fix these principles in a possible future fundamental text between Russia and the EU? It is possible to have different opinions on this issue. I consider that it is not necessary because, in addition to energy, we have other spheres in which we cooperate with the EU, including agriculture, high-tech and transportation. And all of this is very important and very interesting. And we cannot put all of this in one fundamental act that should act as a framework document. Or would you want us to put only what you need in the document and leave what we need outside of the framework? Let's discuss things honestly with one another and take mutually acceptable decisions.

"In the 1990s Russia helped Iran develop missile technologies". I think that you asked me this question. "Today Iran wants to put nuclear warheads on these missiles that could reach Europe. What is Russia going to do about the Iranian nuclear programme?" Is that so?

Well first of all, I do not have data that in the 1990s Russia helped Iran create its own missile technologies. It was other countries that worked very actively towards this. And technology was transferred through different channels. And we have proof of this. At the time I gave these proofs directly to the President of the United States. And technology also came from Europe and from Asian countries.

So Russia is hardly at fault here. I assure you. Russia is the country least involved here. Least of all. If it is involved at all. At the time I was still working in St Petersburg, but we were not involved with this. I can assure you of this. But you know that at the business level something could have happened. We trained experts in institutes and so on. And at the request and according to the information of our American partners we reacted harshly to this. Immediately and harshly. We did not observe such a reaction from our other partners, including European partners. Moreover, I do not know whether you are aware of this or not but you should know that military technology and special equipment is still coming from the United States. Until now. Until now spare parts for F-14 planes come from the armed forces and the Pentagon. As far as I know, there is even an investigation taking place in the United States on this account. And despite the fact that this investigation is proceeding and that these spare parts were seized at the border and then sent back, after a certain amount of time, according to the data I have – and if they are not correct then check them – those same cargos were again seized at the border. Even bearing a tag ‘material evidence’.

You know, this stream is really hard to stop. We need to work together to do so.

About whether or not Iran has missiles that threaten Europe. You are mistaken. Today Iran has – Mr Gates is here today and certainly knows this data better than I do, and the Russian Defence Minister is also here – missiles with a range of 2000 kilometres.

Russian Defence Minister Sergei Ivanov: 1600–1700 kilometres.

Vladimir Putin: 1600–1700 kilometres. Only. Well, count how many kilometres there are between Munich and the Iranian border. Iran has no such missiles. They plan to develop some with a range of 2400 kilometres. It is not known whether they have the technology to do so. And with respect to 4000, 5000 or 6000 kilometres, then I think that this would simply require a different economy. So, it is improbable

in general. And Iran is not threatening Europe. With regard to the idea that they are preparing to use nuclear warheads then we do not have such data. We do not have this data about nuclear warheads.

North Korea has tested a nuclear device. Iranians are constantly saying that their nuclear programme has a peaceful character. But I agree with you that the international community has concerns about the character and quality of Iran's nuclear programmes. And Mr ElBaradai recently stated these concerns in what I think were six or seven points. I agree with you about this. And I do not understand why the Iranian party has still not reacted in a positive and constructive way to the concerns that Mr ElBaradai stated and therefore assuaged these concerns. I do not understand this just as you do not understand it.

What are we going to do? I think that together we need to work patiently and carefully. And, that's right, to create incentives and show the Iranian leadership that cooperation with the international community is much better than confrontation.

Yes, and again about the deliveries of weapons to Iran. You know that there has been more talk than deliveries. Our military and technical cooperation with Iran is minimal. Simply minimal. I am not sure what minimal figures it is estimated at. In general we deliver much less arms to the Middle East than other countries, including the United States. No comparison is possible there. We recently delivered an anti-aircraft weapon system to Iran – that is true – with a medium range, approximately 30 to 50 kilometres. That is true. Why did we do this? I can explain why. We did this so that Iran did not feel it had been driven into a corner. So that it didn't feel that it was in some kind of hostile environment. Rather that Iran could understand that it had channels of communication and friends that it could trust. We very much expect that the Iranian party will understand and hear our signals.

As to our weapons in Lebanon and in the Gaza strip. I am not aware of our weapons in the Gaza strip. I have not heard of such examples. Well, Kalashnikovs are in general the most widely used small arms in the world. They are probably everywhere. And probably there are still automatic Kalashnikovs in Germany or, in any case, some that have still not been destroyed. That is one hundred percent certain.

In Lebanon it is true. Elements of our anti-tank systems really have been seen there. That is true. Our Israeli partners told me about this at once. We carried out a thorough investigation into what happened. And we determined that these systems had remained in Lebanese territory after the Syrian army left. We carried out the corresponding work with our Syrian partners. We determined that our future military and technical cooperation with Syria would exclude the possibility that weapons could fall into any hands other than the ones they were destined for. We developed such a system. Among other things, we agreed on a system of possible warehouse inspections, at any time that is convenient for Russian experts. Inspections in warehouses after deliveries of Russian weapons systems to Syria.

“The USA are not developing strategic weapons but Russia is. Will Russia use force in the future if it is not sanctioned by the UN? Russia is developing a system of strategic weapons”.

Fine question, excellent! I am very grateful to you for this question. It will give me the opportunity to talk about the essence of what is happening. What are we indebted to in the past decades if there was a stand-off between two superpowers and two systems but nevertheless a big war did not take place? We are indebted to the balance of powers between these two superpowers. There was an equilibrium and a fear of mutual destruction. And in those days one party was afraid to make an extra step without consulting the other. And this was certainly a fragile peace and a frightening one. But as we see today, it was reliable enough. Today, it seems that the peace is not so reliable.

Yes, the United States is ostensibly not developing an offensive weapon. In any case, the public does not know about this. Even though they are certainly developing them. But we aren't even going to ask about this now. We know that these developments are proceeding. But we pretend that we don't know, so we say that they aren't developing new weapons. But what do we know? That the United States is actively developing and already strengthening an anti-missile defence system. Today this system is ineffective but we do not know exactly whether it will one day be effective. But in theory it is being created for that purpose. So hypothetically we recognise that when this moment arrives, the possible threat from our nuclear forces will be completely neutralised. Russia's present nuclear capabilities, that is. The balance of powers will be absolutely destroyed and one of the parties will benefit from the feeling of complete security. This means that its hands will be free not only

in local but eventually also in global conflicts.

We are discussing this with you now. I would not want anyone to suspect any aggressive intentions on our part. But the system of international relations is just like mathematics. There are no personal dimensions. And of course we should react to this. How? Either the same as you and therefore by building a multi-billion dollar anti-missile system or, in view of our present economic and financial possibilities, by developing an asymmetrical answer. So that everybody can understand that the anti-missile defence system is useless against Russia because we have certain weapons that easily overcome it. And we are proceeding in this direction. It is cheaper for us. And this is in no way directed against the United States themselves.

I completely agree if you say that the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI) is not directed against us, just as our new weapons are not directed against you. And I fully agree with my colleague and my friend about another thing. Do you know – and I will not be afraid of the word – that in spite of all our disagreements I consider the President of the United States my friend. He is a decent person and I know that today the wolves can blame the United States for everything that is being done on the international arena and internally. But I know that he is a decent person and it is possible to talk and reach agreements with him. And when I talked to him he said: “I proceed from the fact that Russia and the USA will never be opponents and enemies again”. I agree with him. But I repeat once again that there are symmetries and asymmetries here, there is nothing personal. It is simply a calculation.

And now about whether Russia will use military force without the sanction of the UN. We will always operate strictly within the international legal framework. My basic education is in law and I will allow myself to remind both myself and my colleagues that according to the UN Charter peace-keeping operations require the sanction of both the UN and the UN Security Council. This is in the case of peace-keeping operations. But in the UN Charter there is also an article about self-defence. And no sanctions are required in this case.

So, what have I forgotten?

Question: My question was about multipolarity in Russia itself and about the attitude of the international community towards Russia if Russia does not observe these

principles, in reference to the murder of journalists, fears, anxieties, the absence of freedom and non-governmental organisations.

Vladimir Putin: I will say a couple of words. I already answered part of the question when I talked about the structure of the Russian parliament. Look at who is represented there, the political views of the people who have leadership positions in parliament, the legitimate parties. Now, as to non-governmental organisations, they are working actively in Russia. Yes, we introduced a new system for registering these organisations. But it is not that different from registration systems in other countries. And we have not yet seen any complaints from non-governmental organisations themselves. We have not refused registration to almost any organisations. There were two or three cases that were refused on simply formal grounds and these organisations are working on correcting certain provisions in their charters and so on. Nobody has been refused registration based on substantial, fundamental issues. All are continuing to work in the most active possible way and will continue to do so in the future.

What bothers us? I can say and I think that it is clear for all, that when these non-governmental organisations are financed by foreign governments, we see them as an instrument that foreign states use to carry out their Russian policies. That is the first thing. The second. In every country there are certain rules for financing, shall we say, election campaigns. Financing from foreign governments, including within governmental campaigns, proceeds through non-governmental organisations. And who is happy about this? Is this normal democracy? It is secret financing. Hidden from society. Where is the democracy here? Can you tell me? No! You can't tell me and you never will be able to. Because there is no democracy here, there is simply one state exerting influence on another.

But we are interested in developing civil society in Russia, so that it scolds and criticises the authorities, helps them determine their own mistakes, and correct their policies in Russian citizens' interests. We are certainly interested in this and we will support civil society and non-governmental organisations.

As to fears and so on, are you aware that today Russians have fewer fears than citizens in many other countries? Because in the last few years we made cardinal changes to improve the economic well-being of our citizens. We still have a great many problems. And we still have a great many unresolved problems. Including

problems linked with poverty. And I can tell you that fears basically come from this source.

As to journalists then yes, this represents an important and difficult problem. And, incidentally, journalists are not only killed in Russia, but in other countries as well. Where are most journalists killed? You are an expert and probably know in which country the most journalists died in, say, the last year and a half? The largest number of journalists were killed in Iraq.

As to tragedies within Russia, we will certainly struggle with these phenomena in the most thorough way possible and sternly punish all criminals who try to undermine trust in Russia and damage our political system.

Thank you for your attention.

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