

## Russia's Lavrov: There Is No 'Deal' Against Iran

Russia and Iran continued negotiations on March 13-14 in the effort to find a solution to the dispute over Iran's nuclear program. An Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman described the talks as successful, underlining that both sides agreed "on the necessity to abstain from hasty decisions."

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, in a March 13 interview with the Moscow daily *Vremya Novostei*, was asked about a reported effort of the Bush Administration to entice Russia to support confrontation with Iran, by offering it entry to the World Trade Organization (WTO). Lavrov vigorously denied this: "A deal—how would that work? What kind of deal could there possibly be? We join the WTO, then we let the Americans bomb Iran—is that it? . . . You know, we will never exchange what is rightfully ours for anything."

Lavrov insisted that there is no strategy to transfer the Iran issue from the International Atomic Energy Agency



(IAEA) to the UN Security Council, as the United States, Britain, and France are demanding. "We do not agree with those who, it seems to us, in their actions are trying to exploit the situation around Iran to solve political tasks in their dealings with the regime which is currently in Tehran. . . . Iran does not refuse to work on these questions. . . . As for a strategy of action in the Security Council, where the exhortations are, to refer the substance of the entire work on Iran, there is no such strategy."

"Our Western partners understand that without the IAEA, this problem . . . can't be solved," he said. "But there is some dichotomy observable among them. They are saying: Let us start working in the Security Council as well as continuing to work in the IAEA. It is not understandable to us, so far, how this can tactically be written into the very same strategy which we have not yet discussed. Therefore, we will explicitly proceed from the priority of agreeing upon a strategic line. . . . We insist that the IAEA should professionally continue working. But sometimes our Western partners suggest acting according to the following logic: 'Now that there is no clarity, let us step up pressure and impose sanctions as quickly as possible.'"

Lavrov emphasized that Russian policy is based on its national interests: "Exchanges are possible when there are objective reciprocal interests. And when you exchange with your partners a thing that does you no harm. That is, you give away something or agree with something that does not run counter to your interests. And an escalation of the situation around Iran does run counter to our interests in the most direct way. This is quite near our region, our borders, and we consider any military action inadmissible. We're having no exchanges on Iran. On Iran we're exchanging views as to what to do next. We are working out a strategy which would not permit exploding the situation, and which would not isolate Iran, and would not drive it into a corner. For he who is driven into a corner does not act quite rationally. And if the IAEA ceases working in Iran, then we will have no possibility to understand what is happening there. That's exactly what we want to avoid. Simultaneously, we want Iran to cease taking ill-considered steps in relations with the IAEA. This concerns . . . a resumption of the moratorium on all enrichment work for the period of the clarification of the questions about the nuclear program. So here we have two absolutely self-valuable questions in this regard. And each of them affects our national interests."

The Foreign Minister was asked about a "set of chessmen" he had given President George Bush when he was in Washington, and whether that contained a "hint" that Bush should study his next moves, as in a game of chess. Lavrov answered wryly that "there was no such hint. And even if we had wanted to do so, then that would not have been required; for George Bush himself, speaking of how to act towards Iran, said that it was necessary to show caution and, before making the first move, one ought to think out all the subsequent moves completely. But that's also Russian policy a full 100 percent!"