



# LAURENT FABIUS

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Mr. President, ladies and gentlemen, dear friends, Ms. Prime Minister, this has indeed been a very busy week but I was determined to honour this invitation out of respect for our host and because I knew there would be people here willing to discuss the issues together – and that is not a very common occurrence. I have been given 15 minutes. Mr. de Montbrial basically told me, “Fifteen minutes to talk about the world and other problems.” Since I only have 15 minutes, I will just focus on the world and leave out the other problems...

I will begin with a quote from Paul Valéry that will invalidate my remarks before they even begin. Valéry once wrote that, “Everything simple is false and anything that isn’t simple is useless.” Yet, I have 15 minutes to tell you in very simple terms how I see foreign policy in the coming year. As we approach the end of the year, I would like to wish you Happy New Year. Some of my remarks will actually explain why this will be a good year in some respects and not so good in others.

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I am going to spend the first five minutes showing you a mini-slideshow of several countries I think may or may not influence a number of factors in the global order. The first country, which may surprise you, is Libya. People were very interested in Libya a short while ago. There is less interest in it now, but it is attracting the interest of large numbers of terrorists. Libya is tribal and senior leaders want to do the right thing; there are also many weapons and the potential to generate wealth through oil, but there is not really a state. And all of this means that this amazing country full of such great prospects may be the next target area for international terrorism. Everyone is trying to help the Libyan government – the Americans, neighbouring countries, the Russians, the Italians, other European allies as well as France. We are working on it and I hope that next year will not be a dark time for Libya. In any case, I have put it near the top of my list of concerns.

The second country, which will surprise you less, is Syria. We will undoubtedly be attending a conference soon called Geneva II that opens in Montreux, incidentally. We can count on there being a host of problems. Why? According to the invitation letter sent out to the attendees, the objective of the conference is to form a consensus to install a transitional government with full executive powers. That is simple. But it is so simple that some of the attendees may fail to see the relevance. Bachar El-Assad said he would send envoys, but not to discuss how he will be stripped of his own power. The moderate opposition that we support – we neither want Bachar El-Assad nor the terrorists – is now experiencing setbacks. The opposition is also doing some soul-searching. Unfortunately, if the talks are not successful then the suffering will continue in this long-afflicted country, like in other countries in the region. An ally, Libya, has 1 million refugees out of a population of 4 million. In Jordan, there are 800,000. There are also problems, for lack of a better word, in Iraq, Turkey and other surrounding countries. Is the light red or yellow? At any rate, the problems are severe.

The third country is Iran. You have scheduled a session about this nation, about nuclear power in Iran and future outlooks. We have signed an interim agreement that is both compelling and optimistic. France has been negotiating very actively because the French president and I believe that in order to hammer out a solid agreement we had to be firm and not tolerate any of the initial ambiguity that was the agreement. It was a tricky negotiation. It turned out to be fruitful. But the terms we concluded are temporary and now we have to enforce them, on the one hand, and then move toward the second phase of seeking a lasting accord. I am omitting a whole list of issues that are of great consequence, for that matter. But the following question was posed and it has yet to be answered: Does Iran agree to denounce any future hopes of having nuclear weapons? That is our position. When I say “we” I do not only mean France, I am referring to the international community. Does Iran agree to denounce any future hopes of having nuclear weapons or does Iran only agree to put its military nuclear activities on hold and remain at the threshold level? If it is the former, then we will reach an agreement. If it is the latter, I foresee serious problems coming not only from the US Congress but also from the international community. That is the key question that has not been fully resolved for the moment.



As you would expect, I will add the Israeli-Palestinian issue where I am more optimistic than many people about holding frequent talks with both the Israeli Prime Minister and President Mahmoud Abbas. There are likely two pivotal questions at hand. The first one is this: In the wake of the efforts being deployed, especially by US Secretary of State John Kerry, who has done under outstanding job, will the Israeli and Palestinian leaders be able to introduce an unconditional peace agreement to their people, who are currently leaning toward hostility? We acknowledge that this will require concessions from both the Israelis and the Palestinians. Perhaps, if it is once and for all and all accounts are settled. That is the first question. The second is the so-called security question. For understandable reasons, the Israelis say, "We are prepared to make concessions, but we oversee security in Israel and the Palestinian territories and we do not trust anyone else to do it." The Palestinians reply, "We want a sovereign state, and a sovereign state cannot consent to an outside force permanently overseeing security on its soil." This issue is not settled. It will determine the outcome of the negotiation. So these are the handful of countries I have put at the top of my list for consideration and action in the new year.

I will add another issue that you may think is unrelated to the others, and that is the dilemmas, if not disasters, that can be caused by the worsening of climate-related problems. I will come back to this in a moment. Scientists are telling us with great accuracy that we are hurtling toward the abyss if we do not act quickly and decisively. There are warning signs.

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My second set of remarks are about what the determining factors will be. Ladies and gentlemen, if you only had to remember one thing about what I say here, it would be this: For many years, the world was bipolar with the United States on one side and the USSR on the other. They were in opposition, but this opposition also took the form of shared ownership. And when push came to shove and the two sides chose to resolve the crisis, they did. Then for a short time during the collapse of the Soviet Union and the fall of the Berlin Wall, the world became unipolar. The United States was the superpower in every domain. I would like to see us move toward an organized multipolar world under the guidance of the United Nations with regional organizations and the rule of international law. Thus, the goal is a multipolar world. Yet, today the world is more "nonpolar" or apolar. What I mean by this, and I point this out every week as do my fellow foreign affairs ministers in other countries, that there is no one power or even a group of powers that can resolve these issues single-handedly. This is why there is gridlock in the United Nations Security Council, for example why it is impossible to resolve the crisis in Syria or any other issues that at other times this single power or group of powers would have dealt with. And in today's world that I am calling "nonpolar," some countries are exerting power that is at times commensurate to their economic weight, but sometimes exceeds it, like the United States. Or China, even though for now it still chooses to restrain its own diplomatic power, or Russia, which is very active on the global stage. Then there is France with a population of only 66 million that is still a world power and, as a permanent member of the Security Council, is taking a clear position of influence.

So in terms of the questions I have raised, the answers will not only depend on a single power, which was the United States, not on an established group of powers, but on alliances and, as it happens, shifting alliances.

The United States was criticized when it took on highly interventionist stances. Now it is being criticized for taking a step back. It is distancing itself from situations in Europe, the Near East and the Middle East. President Obama explained the reasoning behind this. When running for his second term, he said, "First and foremost, I am interested in the United States of America, the turnaround in Asia, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. We went into Afghanistan and paid a very high price. The US also went into Iraq, with heavy and arguable consequences." There is a "fatigue" in the United States. It does not want to intervene every time in every conflict. This completely justified stance creates a sort of vacuum. How will this vacuum be filled?

In a different case, the same reasoning applies to Russia. A few years ago when President Putin was not president, he did not have many cards to play, to use a common expression. In today's apolar/nonpolar world, Russia is making its great comeback to the world stage because of strong posturing in Syria, the Near East and the Middle East. Yet there are several limitations, one of which requires some serious thought. If Russia is going to balance its budget, the price of oil has to reach at least \$114 per barrel. But all the efforts being made by this power to mediate the situation in the Near East and Middle East are bringing the price of oil and gas down considerably! This creates an endless debate.



China is having a critical impact as well. At the recent Geneva conference that resulted in an agreement between five permanent members of the Security Council as well as between Germany and Iran, China – and this has not been said enough – played a major and positive role. It wanted to create a kind of buffer zone around its territory. It has its differences with Japan, namely over sea and air space, which should be watched very carefully. I personally do not think that China is becoming a warmonger. But it is a major power and a string of tensions could arise in the region in 2014. France will always work toward peace and security.

There is also Iran's position. Perhaps more than the interim agreement, the major event this past year was the election of President Rohani. That said, the events are related. Will the election generate sufficient change in Iranian society? Or, given the disillusionment and division that may emerge, will we watch them backpedal?

The answer to all the questions I have mentioned will primarily lie in the hands of these four powers, on the condition that they want to find a solution. It goes without saying that I would add the European Union to this list.

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I will dedicate the last five minutes of my speech to France. What are our foreign policy objectives? I would sum them up in four words: peace, the planet, Europe and recovery.

Peace may seem paradoxical when some people are saying, "But why is France sending troops to Africa?" One of the first decisions that President François Hollande made was to withdraw our troops from Afghanistan. As a matter of tradition and by choice we are not a warmongering country; we want peace. But we know that peace and security are the fruits of great resolve and the resources to carry it out. Back in June 2012, we offered a solution in Syria and if it had been implemented quickly at a time when there were no Iranians, no Hezbollah or terrorists, it would have been the appropriate response.

We did not send our soldiers to Mali because of some hawkish impulse. It is because the UN and the Africans requested our presence and because one evening while I was with President Hollande, he received a telephone call from Mali's interim president Dioncounda Traoré, who said, "Mr. President, if you do not send in troops to help us, I will be dead tomorrow." The terrorists were moving into Bamako. This happened in early January 2013. François Hollande gave the order and our soldiers did an amazing job along with the Africans and other forces. Since then security has been restored, although there are still some problems. In less than a year, they have a democratically elected president and tomorrow on Sunday there will be a national assembly. And the conditions have been reinstated to achieve growth.

Now, under completely different circumstances, we are facing another situation that must be resolved in Central Africa. The Central African Republic has been suffering for a long time. It has seen a succession of coups since 1965. As its name indicates, it lies at the centre of a group of countries, with Chad to the north, the two Sudans that are not known for a peaceful existence, Congo and Cameroon. Problems could arise in those nations if a country like Central Africa implodes, which has 4.5 million people in an area larger than France. Yes, there are threats of a Civil War when they began taking up arms, heavy weapons on one side and machetes on the other. One side said, "We are Christian," and the other side replied, "We are Muslim." As things stand today, there is only one country in the vicinity with the means to take quick action and that is France. We intervened at the request of the UN and the Africans because it is our tradition and our worldview not to look away when friends are being massacred and to sit idly by. But we need to have a long-term vision. That is why, along with Europe, we are making the case for building the first-ever inter-African force over the next few years, a well-equipped and large enough force that can respond to crisis situations. It is not up to France to intervene every time. Africa is an amazing continent, a continent of the future and if we want the conflicts there to be resolved by the Africans themselves, they must have a permanent force.

The planet. France submitted a bid to host the next Conference on Climate Change in 2015. We were selected. We were the only candidate...Our "win by default" prompted many ministers to come see me, not sure whether to congratulate me or express their condolences. We are committed. And this vitally important conference must be a success. We are heading toward an abyss. Scientists tell us that temperatures will not be two degrees higher than in the pre-industrial era, but four or five degrees higher! People call it "global warming." I refuse to use that term. After all, even on a beautiful day people in Monaco are not shocked if the temperature rises three or four degrees. "It's going to be a little hotter?" Not at all! This is a shift in the climate. This is a massive vortex that in some parts of the world will cause temperatures to plummet and in others will exponentially increase the strength of typhoons, lead to



desertification, submersions and mass migrations. We must take action, not just through much-needed regulation that should be international and distinctive, but also to give all this momentum a positive direction. As you know, I worked with François Mitterrand for a long time and he had a saying that applies here. He would say, "If you are in politics and you tell people today is bad, tomorrow will be worse and I won't even talk about the day after tomorrow... there is little chance people will listen to you." I agree. This initiative must be given a positive agenda. The changes that need to happen can generate growth.

Europe. Some of my fellow European foreign affairs ministers are here today. I bid them a warm welcome. We will also be seeing each other next Monday at the European Council on Foreign Affairs.

The main question is knowing whether or not Europe wants to be a power. Those that are here tonight would like to see it become one. Twenty-eight and soon perhaps more. We must organise ourselves. So people say, "We need a core circle." They often mention France and Germany, although others are also involved. Next Wednesday, Angela Merkel will be sworn in as Chancellor of Germany and that afternoon she will be in France to meet the French President. They both have the same amount of time left to serve. In light of the role that France and Germany are playing in the European initiative, I would like to see a master plan for all of our fellow leaders. It would help Europe, which is the world's leading market power with boundless capabilities, restore its vitality and sense of promise in areas like growth, energy, jobs, defence and new technologies.

And finally, recovery, influence. France's recovery, of course. France's influence. France is a powerful cultural force. Right now, over 200 million people speak French. With the development in Africa, there will soon be 750 million French speakers. We have one of the most far-reaching diplomatic networks in the world. As for our economic capacity, we may only have 66 million inhabitants but we are still the fifth largest economy in the world. And we have amazing capacities for invention, research and innovation. And this is the recovery we must achieve, not only for France but for Europe, rooted in a set of ideas that have spread throughout the world.

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Ladies and gentlemen, that is what I wanted to tell you in a few words. Since I wanted them to be simple, according to Paul Valéry, they were perhaps not very useful. I am not an expert. I have been working in public affairs for a long time and at the same time I am a pragmatist. Incidentally, Valéry had this to say about experts. People would ask him, "What is a competent man?" and he would answer, "Someone who makes mistakes by the rules." I hope I have not shocked anyone! We must listen to the experts, the competent people. But we need to know how to go beyond that, we have to offer ideas and take action. This is true in a family, this is true in a company, this is true for a nation and this is true for a continent. We must have a vision, what I have been known to call a grand design. We also must have places where well-intentioned men and women can talk about these things together. The World Policy Conference is one of those places and that is why it gave me great pleasure to be with you tonight. Thank you.