

# JEAN-MARC AYRAULT

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Your Excellency,

Ladies and gentlemen,

I am delighted to be with you here today in Doha, and to have the opportunity to share my thoughts on the prospects of the Middle East with you, on this region which, now more than ever before, is the focal point of most of the major challenges the international community has to face.

I would like to pay tribute to the French Institute for International Relations (IFRI) for organizing this World Policy Conference, which over a few years has become a major event and an opportunity to promote a world of dialogue and discussion. I am particularly grateful to its President, Thierry de Montbrial.

Almost a month ago now, His Highness Sheikh Hamad Bin Khalifa Al-Thani passed away, he who contributed so much to the friendship between France and Qatar. I would like to honour his memory and tell you that France shares the sadness of the Qatari people.

Qatar and France both face, like the international community, an uncertain world.

Our world is uncertain because, increasingly, issues are part of a global context where nothing is possible without the action of all parties. This is particularly true as regards the preservation of the environment.

It is uncertain because the effectiveness of each of us depends on collective action: that is interdependence. I have in mind the economy, international trade and security issues.

It is uncertain because the desire of certain States to affirm their position on the international stage or to recover the expression of past power undermines the balances that were – rather hastily – considered stable.

Lastly, it is uncertain because it is subject to the global threat of terrorism that plays on borders and imposes a new type of warfare which strikes at the very heart of our States and societies, combining the most retrograde ideology and the most barbaric methods with the latest technologies.

As you know, France has been hit on several occasions and most recently on 14 July this year, our national holiday, by deadly attacks. We will not forget the exceptional wave of solidarity we received from around the world: marches, monuments illuminated in the colours of our flag – as was the case in Qatar – and many leaders expressing their solidarity. My people was very touched by these messages and I would like to express my gratitude, from here in Doha at the very heart of the Arab world which pays by far the heaviest price for the terrorism of Daesh.



For of course, France is not the only one to be hit. Terrorism has struck in New York, Boston, San Bernardino and Orlando. It has wreaked havoc in Paris, Nice and Brussels, and in Istanbul, Kabul, Baghdad, Dhaka, Sirte, Tunis, Bamako, Niamey, Tel Aviv, Ouagadougou and Abidjan. This macabre list is, of course, not exhaustive. But it is already long – far too long. We know the paradox: most of the victims of these terrorists – who claim to represent Islam – are Muslims.

This is a global threat, and our response must be just as global: France and Qatar, along with Europe and the Gulf countries have an essential role to play together in this fight.

Faced with the world's disorders, the only response is to join our forces, to show solidarity and to find collective solutions to shared problems. We need to continue our action. To act ceaselessly. To act while remaining loyal to our principles. Never to give up. That is France's conviction.

For that, we need a fully committed American partner that is open to the world, playing its part in cooperation with its allies and in multilateralism. Without that partner, it is illusory to believe we can address the global challenges we all face. I have mentioned the fight against terrorism, but there are many more: climate change, management of migration flows, collective security and sustainable development.

We will be working with the American President-Elect because the United States is a friend of France, and because our cooperation is essential. That is why the President of the French Republic was keen, in the very first hours, to establish dialogue with Donald Trump. To ensure that the doubts that grew from an overly controversial election campaign were quickly dissipated. To foster, despite a number of divergences, solid cooperation with the new administration. There is no time to lose, and I am pleased to say that, during his conversation with François Hollande, Donald Trump showed a clear desire to work with France.

What we have to avoid at any cost is a posture of isolationism, unilateralism, or some break away from what is, at the end of the day, an international rule of law. Nationalism is resurgent everywhere, and could, through gradual and uncontrolled shifts, result in brutal clashes of which history has taught us the dangers and devastating consequences. Europe can testify to that, more than any other continent.

For Europe, which remains – it is important to remember – the world's leading economic power, this uncertainty around the arrival of a new American administration should be an encouragement to take greater control of our own destiny. That is what France wants when it advocates progress in European defence and security policy. That is also its goal when it takes the initiative so that the EU strengthens control of its external borders. Things are in motion, as demonstrated by the recent decisions of the European Foreign and Defence Ministers on the issue of European defence.

Standing together on the international stage, we are not helpless. We are not powerless. The Paris Climate Agreement demonstrates that: when we have to address major universal challenges, we are capable of finding responsible



solutions. COP22, which ended on Friday in Marrakesh under the wise Presidency of Morocco, helped resolutely begin the implementation of this global framework to combat climate change. Above all, it is an opportunity. An opportunity to transform our economies towards a low-carbon model; an opportunity to promote innovation; an opportunity to encourage greater responsibility and solidarity in our societies; and an opportunity to leave a better world to future generations.

This success is an encouragement to take note of the need for solidarity in the response to common challenges. I obviously have in mind the management of migration flows and counter-terrorism, but also development, education, fundamental rights, and the promotion of gender equality.

We have also shown ourselves capable to stop Iran's race to nuclear weapons by joining forces to ensure a balanced agreement was reached. It is essential to implement the commitments made on both sides and to encourage Iran to become a responsible regional player.

The world we live in requires a new perspective. While some talk of a return of the Cold War, I think on the contrary that the time of the superpowers is passed. They can no longer make the world their playground, and they can no longer draw and redraw borders as they like, as they did in the Middle East. The future of our societies will not be decided from outside. We cannot expect a hypothetical Yalta or another Sykes Picot, imposed upon Arab populations and their leaders. Such a method is no longer possible today.

The reality is that France, Europe and the Arab world are closely tied. And this reality has gradually imposed itself: it results from this shared, open space for exchanges crossed back and forth by mankind and in which, despite history's tribulations, a shared destiny has been forged.

This shared destiny is embodied in particular in the relationship which France has always had with the Arab world. This is a long-standing, multiform and complex relationship which cannot be reduced, as some would like, to its mere economic and military aspects. This is a mistaken vision and does not do justice to the depth of our ties or the wealth of our common history.

Daesh seeks to portray France as an enemy of the Muslim world. This message obviously seeks to drive a wedge between us. The blind terrorism promoted by this organization and the populist responses it engenders have only one goal: dragging us onto the terrain of a clash of civilizations, in a devastating dichotomy inevitably opposing East and West. France refuses this dichotomy which is as false as it is fatal. We know our common history and are convinced that it is a solid foundation to build on together.

In less than two weeks, the Safeguarding Endangered Cultural Heritage Conference will be held in Abu Dhabi. This is a concrete demonstration of our shared destiny, and proof of our ability to rise to challenges and address the threats of the twenty-first century.



I am convinced that it is possible and necessary to build a relationship of confidence between East and West. That is our shared responsibility. France and the Arab world have a voice to make heard and experience to share. Building on the progress achieved together, it is up to them to resolutely focus their partnership on the future.

I naturally have young people in mind. The Arab world has an exceptional vitality; it has many young people and they aspire to a better future. Our first duty is to trust them and to enable them to achieve their aspirations. In 2011, Arab youth made its voice heard. Its message was clear, and we have not forgotten it. The empowerment of peoples is a considerable source of energy, a strength and a promise for the future.

That is why, along with the Qatari authorities, we have decided to give the Tunisian government our full support. The success of a democratic Tunisia is the best message of hope we can send to the region's young people. This success requires an economic recovery that ensures opportunity, dignity and a future for all.

For it is in these young people that we need to invest: a massive investment in knowledge and culture, the energy transition, and economic diversification and modernization. That is how the Arab world will ensure its future. There is no shortage of examples: the "Vision 2030" projects implemented in Qatar and Saudi Arabia; the model sustainable city in Masdar, in the United Arab Emirates; and the Tanfiz programme in Oman. All these projects – and many more – are dazzling proof that the Arab world and the Gulf, in particular, have plenty of ambition.

France stands beside you and is prepared to contribute to your success. We are prepared to implement our cooperation in the framework of this new approach your countries are developing, with the constant will to create efficient, modern local industry and infrastructure, and to foster the access of young people to the labour market.

Your excellency,

Ladies and gentlemen,

The ambitions of Qatar and the other Gulf states must not cause us to lose sight of the tensions throughout the region. The tragedies shaking Libya, Syria, Yemen and Iraq, the differences between Shiite and Sunni Islam which the radicals on all sides want to make into a real divide: these crises are weakening the Middle East and hindering its development and economic integration.

As a Permanent Member of the Security Council, France is fully committed to this issue and is assuming its responsibilities, with two strong convictions: firstly, that there is no contradiction between fighting terrorism and upholding human rights. Terrorist groups want to do away with borders and impose their totalitarian and destructive regime everywhere. To this universalism of terror, France's response is universalism of human rights and fundamental freedoms. Fighting discrimination and inequality, promoting civil, political and social rights and gender equality, and affirming freedom of conscience and expression are our greatest weapons against the deadly, obscurantist ideology of Daesh, Al-Qaeda, Boko Haram and related groups. This is true in France, Europe, the Arab World and wherever these movements have waged war on us.



The second conviction is that these crises have one common thread: none can be resolved solely by military force; all require a political solution which can only be reached through negotiations.

It is through dialogue, diplomacy and the exchange of ideas that we will emerge from the deadlocks into which the use of force has often led us and it is in this way that we can open up real and credible prospects for peace.

In Syria, we are witnessing the greatest humanitarian disaster of our times. The Syrian people are trapped, on the one hand tortured by a barbaric regime, and on the other cornered by terrorist groups devoid of all scruples and human conscience. Since 2011, over 300,000 people have died in the conflict. Half of the population are now refugees or have been displaced.

These tragic events are taking place on our doorstep. It is a vicious circle which is being deliberately fuelled by support in Damascus to lead Syria to a morbid confrontation between two dead ends: the regime and terrorism. Neither the Assad regime, nor Daesh, nor Al-Nusra observe the most basic principles of international humanitarian law and human rights.

Some argue that, fundamentally, the solution is to choose the lesser of two evils. To hand the task of eliminating Daesh for us over to the Bashar al-Assad regime. We know that nothing could be further from the truth than this harmful approach of exonerating from their crimes the very people who are fuelling terrorist barbarity by their own State-backed barbarity. This is not just a moral mistake, but also a strategic one.

We must ensure that we do not make this mistake. France has proposed solutions in line with the framework set by the Security Council decisions. The resolution which we put forward to bring an end to the torture in Aleppo was blocked only by the Russian veto. It is now time for each party to face its responsibilities.

We must do more to maintain an alternative to Bashar al-Assad's bloody regime. France will continue to work hard so that the people of Syria can finally live in peace. It will continue to speak the truth to its allies, and resist the temptation to give up and look the other way.

It is also essential to restore peace in Iraq. Winning back Mosul and then Raqqa from the hands of Daesh will, I hope, soon rid this pseudo-State of its regional stronghold, from where it has spread the poison of its obscurantism and murderous folly to Iraq, Syria and as far as Europe. But this victory must be followed by a broader reconciliation.

The divides which have been stirred up in the Middle East have no ideological or religious basis and have been instrumentalized. Many people, both inside and outside the region, are lured by generalizations and simplifications. But fear is a bad counsellor. Our work must focus on rebuilding the ties between communities. We believe that in Iraq, it means something to be Iraqi, in Syria to be Syrian, in Qatar to be Qatari. Rethinking borders is a dangerous game: what alternative does it offer to Arab citizens, except the erosion of social links, the promotion of approaches based on identity, ethnicity and religion, all of which are simplistic, destructive and ultimately lead to all-out war?

The territories which have been liberated from Daesh must be examples of peaceful coexistence and governance which respects diversity. Because I am certain that Muslims, Christians, Jews and ethnic and religious minorities, whoever they may be, can live together in peace in the Middle East, as they have done in the past. In managing the



post-Daesh situation we must address the root of the problem by draining the breeding ground in which this barbarity was able to thrive.

I have not forgotten the Yemeni conflict, which has so far left over 7,000 dead and 37,000 injured. Twenty-one million people are in need of medical assistance, while 3 million require immediate food aid. Recent developments on the ground have been of great concern to France. It condemns the attacks against the Saudi territory, which are threatening regional stability. As the violence continues and the humanitarian situation worsens, the parties must agree on how to end this crisis as a matter of urgency. They must immediately cease their attacks against civilians and other States. Only a political solution, that proposed by the United Nations, can bring an end to the conflict.

Regional stability, peace and security also depend on the fair and lasting settlement of Israeli-Palestinian conflict. As we know, the current situation is an illusion. The situation on the ground is deteriorating by the day. The continued settlement activities and lack of any political prospects are reducing the hopes of both peoples. They are fuelling frustrations which are being exploited by those who, in both camps, want to scrap the two-State solution. We do not want to resign ourselves to this. We will thus maintain our efforts and the initiatives which we launched on 3 June last. Our assessment remains unchanged, as does our goal: to organize an international conference enabling a message of peace to be sent, to reiterate our joint commitment to the two-State solution and to show what it would bring to both Israelis and Palestinians. Our approach is not unilateral. Its purpose is not to interfere. It is, on the contrary, shared, clear and determined. This is an essential issue primarily for Israel and Palestine, but also for the entire region and beyond.

Your excellency,

Ladies and gentlemen,

The masterpieces of Islamic civilization, from Córdoba to Samarkand, these masterpieces which we can admire here today at the Museum of Islamic Art in Doha, fully demonstrate the Arab World's contribution to humanity. What is striking is that these masterpieces are familiar to us. They are appealing and moving to us Europeans, as they are also part of our history. They are the symbol of this shared destiny to which I have just referred.

The current events in Syria, Iraq, Yemen and Libya, these upheavals which are shaking the Middle East, are without doubt the biggest challenge we have ever faced in our long shared history.

Both the future of this region and of Europe will naturally depend on how we respond to these unprecedented crises. But the challenge far exceeds our borders: it affects the entire international community as it tests our responsibility and our ability to act together.



For the prophets of doom, for those who believe force is the only answer, France holds another unshakeable conviction: the Middle East situation is not inevitable. War is not unavoidable, nor is the instrumentalization of conflicts by those seeking to make this region their battlefield. Our responsibility is to strive to show that a path to peace does exist, by countering the forces of oppression and destruction with those of dialogue, negotiation and reconciliation.