



# MIGUEL ANGEL MORATINOS

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Let me start by once again thanking Thierry de Montbrial, my good friend, and the organisers for bringing the focus of our discussions back to the Middle East. I am not the one who is saying so. It is not as a moderator that I will defend him today, but this morning Thierry de Montbrial himself, when he introduced the presentation, who referred to the situation of instability in the Middle East. Our dear friend, the president of the CIRC, Peter Maurer, told us that unfortunately the International Red Cross has doubled, tripled its humanitarian action in the region. This should make us think about the seriousness and acuteness of the problem and the challenges of the Middle East. Qatar's Minister of Foreign Affairs delivered a speech in which he noted once again the questions and uncertainty that still reign in the Middle East.

Qatar's Minister of Foreign Affairs also said that the Middle East is the origin of everything, at least of this Western World, of philosophy, thought, religion, science, and even diplomacy. That's right, diplomacy. When we look at the history of diplomacy, we need to go back to Year 2,500 BC, where on Cuneiform tablets, the Kingdom of Ebla, now Syria, with the Kingdom of Hamazi, today Iran, had decided to engage in diplomacy to protect themselves, to trade, to get to know each other and to defend themselves. On these tablets, we have found the major elements, the major instruments of what is now diplomacy.

Today, however, we are not in 2 500 BC. We are not in the Kingdom of Ebla and the Kingdom of Hamazi. We are in 2017. What is our observation? What is our assessment of the situation in the Middle East? Yesterday, I imagine that Itamar Rabinovich experienced a certain satisfaction during the day, a flash back to the past. On November 2, 1917, a hundred years ago Lord Balfour wrote to Lord Rothschild to say that the Kingdom of His Majesty of Great Britain would do its utmost to establish a homeland for the Jewish people in Palestine. One hundred years have passed and Israel has been recognised by many countries, practically the entire international community, but still Islamic and Arab countries have not yet made peace, have not yet reconciled with Israel. And vice versa, there are many European countries, the United States and Israel that have not recognised Palestine. In other words, the problem is still there.

We will discuss this today. Itamar and probably Odeh Aburdene, as a Palestinian American, will likely try to find out why the Israeli-Palestinian problem remains ever-present in Middle East debates.

This Middle East has been around for 100 years since the Balfour Declaration, and it has been 68 years since the agreement between the family of Saud and Roosevelt, known as "*oil for security*". Stuart Eizenstat is the person to ask as to what the position of American power is now? What is the impact of energy in the equation of peace and development in the Middle East? Will we always regard the Middle East as an element of financial and strategic appetite for foreign players and powers, or can we reach a place where we are determined to let people in the Middle East live in peace, stability and security?

One hundred years have passed since Sykes-Picot. There was the European presence. After that, there was bipolarity. There was the *pax americana*. After the war in Iraq, the United States' military intervention in Iraq, all these regions, this area so vital to all of our interests, blew up as though they were one.

Today, we find ourselves with the most fragmented, weakest and most divided Middle East, with total uncertainty. If we asked the audience, what is your scenario in five years' time? What will happen? Is there a peace plan? A peace plan, maybe, for Palestine and Israel? We may know that one a bit, but we forget it. We do not attack it. We marginalise it. But for the rest, what is the stability and security plan for the whole region? Is there a diplomatic plan after taking Raqqa and the defeat of Daesh? Are there not new players who are, of course, in the process of trying to use their influence, whether the Russian Federation, Turkey or Iran? Has the profound change in Arab societies only changed the way we deal with the problems in the Middle East? It is true that the Arab Spring – which we could discuss for an entire session – has been a great element of satisfaction in the Western world. We applauded it. We were pleased. We thought that eventually the Arab world was becoming a democracy, like all of us. We confused democracy with



elections. We put together elections too quickly, without the right preparation, without real capacities and conditions for elections to be able to deliver real results. However, this does not mean that the irreversibility of democratic participation in Arab countries remains a reality, and that people, Arab citizens will no longer feel that they should not participate in their future.

These are all questions that I would obviously like to ask my panellists, all of whom have very impressive paths in their profession, in their experience. Each of them, I believe, will be able to offer a very in-depth view so that, by the end of the debate we can see some new ways forward I do not want to stay pessimistic. That is the easy way out. It is the easiest attitude to take on. However, we could all ask ourselves: do you not believe that people in the Middle East have the right, the aspiration to live in peace and prosperity for once in their lives? How many generations do we need to see go by before we are able to find a collective security system that could give them an element of peace, intelligence and comfort in their country? That is the challenge we should be taking on. Let us try to do that in this debate.