



SHEIKH MOHAMMED BIN ABDULRAHMAN BIN JASSIM AL-THANI

Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of the State of Qatar

Thierry de Montbrial

I will give the Deputy Prime Minister the floor. He will deal with two related issues about the Middle East. The first is to describe the mess, and the second is how to get out of the mess. Your Excellency Mr. Deputy Prime Minister, I am very happy to give you the floor. I remind many of our participants here that he was also the guest of honour at a similar lunch two years ago in Marrakech. The floor is yours.

Sheikh Mohammed Bin Abdulrahman Bin Jassim Al-Thani

Good afternoon to everybody. Mr. Thierry de Montbrial, the Executive Chairman of the French Institute of International Relations and founder and Chairman of the WPC, first of all I would like to thank you for inviting me here today. Ladies and gentlemen, distinguished guests, it is an honour to be speaking at the WPC once again. It is always a pleasure to share my thoughts with you all and to exchange ideas. I had a chance to look at the agenda, and I believe that the sessions and panels cover a wide range of critical topics from globalisation to cyber-security.

Personally, I believe in the mission of this conference, which is to promote a world that is more open, more prosperous and fairer and to explore non-aggressive ways of how states connect with each other at all levels, while respecting the culture and fundamental interests of each nation.

Allow me, in that respect, to shed light on a topic missing from the agenda and ask a critical question of collective security. How do we in the MENA region transition from managing crises to seeking comprehensive solutions? We were in New York a few weeks ago, and His Highness the Emir spoke to the UN General Assembly on the many challenges we face in the MENA region – crises, conflicts, transnational threats, diplomatic tensions and violent interventions. We have witnessed failure after failure of regional and multilateral organisations in solving conflicts, in addition to the failure or refusal to hold perpetrators accountable.

Although the Middle East is a region of turmoil, we in Qatar view it as a critical region with global importance. It is the global intersection of air, sea and land, and even the birth of faith. We come, in fact, from a dynamic energy hub, a pillar of international financial networks, and a crossroads for human migration. Unfortunately, we also come from a region that is largely divided, with scattered conflict areas and a lack of trust and coordination.

We ask time and time again why conflicts in the Middle East are a resistance to both regional and global diplomacy, and why some states are allowed to resort to a diplomacy of denial, rejecting diplomacy as a legitimate mode of international action. We have witnessed first hand how this strategy is highly destabilising and creates great uncertainty. Although this strategy is usually used by terrorist networks, warlords and militias, we have seen the trend of diplomacy of denial among some states in the region, who wage war, blockade and disrespect regional and international mechanisms.

I recall His Highness the Emir's remarks at the UN General Assembly that a regional security system is crucial to preserve the security of the Middle East in general and the Gulf region in particular. During the Munich Security Conference, the Emir called for collective action and to put differences aside. Similarly, in my last participation in the WPC, I called for an enforcing mechanism to end conflicts. I am here today to reiterate that call and to give a perspective on the importance of a regional security pact in the Middle East. The Middle East desperately needs a sustainable security framework to ensure long-term peace and stability. The chain of events in our region demonstrated the practical utility of a coherent approach to collective regional security. What we need in the Middle East is a collective binding mechanism based on agreed principles of security and a set of rules for governance, respect for sovereignty and equality among its members.



This means that all countries need to agree on a baseline of non-interference in the domestic and foreign affairs of states, and more importantly, not to use ethnic or confessional diversity or minorities as scapegoats for interference. We have to build nations of citizens, hoping these initial steps will provide incentives and pave the way for regional peace and prosperity. Expanding the scope of the agreement is also important, so that it is not only limited to security issues but also includes cooperation and dialogue with economic and political dimensions, to build trust and confidence among members.

The unbalanced policy in the region and aggressive miscalculations have been impractical over the past months and years. We have witnessed unprecedented tensions arising from miscalculations. The idea of playing one against the other in a balance of power scenario is dangerous and puts Qatar and the whole region in a volatile situation, and instead of applying maximum pressure or exclusion, there is a greater prospect in collaboration and working together to contain threats within a regional collective security scheme.

Without doubt, achieving stability in Middle East is more likely if there is a foundation of stability in those countries which need support from friendly states. Through a stable foundation, we can work hand in hand with those nations to advance trade, regional development, good governance and the productive use of energy resources. The solution we are calling for is wider regional security in the Middle East, an agreement on basic security principles and rules of governance to allow for peace and prosperity. Despite the gravity of geopolitical tension, we still believe in this today.

Thierry de Montbrial

Thank you very much for this precise intervention. You outlined a number of principles which make a lot of sense, but of course, for countries to respect a set of principles and rules of the game, they have to agree beforehand on the rules themselves and on their will to respect the rules. Do you see any chance in the foreseeable future for the major powers in the region, such as Turkey, Iran and Saudi Arabia, to move in the direction you have indicated? Are there any signs that they could play that game, or is it not more realistic to believe that a kind of war, direct or indirect, will continue until some sort of balance of power is reached? What is the role of external powers such as the US, Russia and others? That is my simple question!

Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim Al-Thani

Thank you, Thierry, for this broad question. First of all, I believe that it is the only way forward. We are not talking about multiple choices or options so that the countries could choose what the way forward could look like. The biggest question now is about the time; the overall environment in the region is very tense, and we see that the gateway to diplomacy is narrowing. However, what we are calling for is that all those countries, instead of trying to project their power in order to change the balance in the region and then resort to diplomacy, it is better to start now, because these miscalculations might lead us to a long cycle of chaos that the region cannot afford.

We appreciate the role of the international community. We appreciate the role of the big powers, if they are going to contribute constructively to this and we will not be a field of competition for them. We strongly believe that what is happening in the region needs to be led from the region, and it needs to be a region-led solution. What we see right now is just increasing tension and exchange of attacks against each other, whether these are military attacks or specific operations that are hurting the whole region.

We believe that, since tensions are now quite high, it might also represent an opportunity if those big countries will play a constructive role by encouraging all the parties to engage in a regional dialogue rather than helping them to divide the situation more and more in the region. It is a very delicate moment for all of us, and it needs a lot of leadership from the big countries to lead a regional-led process.

Thierry de Montbrial

You mentioned the leadership of big countries. Do you see any leader among the big countries nowadays?

Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim Al-Thani



Which countries do you mean specifically? I am talking about my region. I am not talking about the big players, the international community or the P5, as they call them. We see that unfortunately there is a vacuum of leadership in the region, and this is a fact that we are witnessing right now. A lot of miscalculated decisions have taken place, and if we had this strong leadership in the region, this would not happen. We have seen all the ongoing conflicts in the region and have not see any action coming from the region.

For example, just one example of failed regional cooperation is the Arab League. We had four Arab capitals that were and are still being bombed every day, and they did not move an inch, but when Turkey started its operations in Northern Syria, they called all the Arabs to condemn this. We are not in a position to judge whether what has been done is right or wrong. What has happened with all these capitals that have been bombed by outside forces? Israel is bombing in Lebanon, Syria and Iraq. The Arab League did not move. We have Arab countries bombing other Arab countries, and the Arab League has not moved. We have a lot of issues where the regional cooperation framework that we have is not effective.