



Official visit to Egypt Statements by M. Jacques Chirac, President of the Republic, during his joint press conference with Mr Hosni Mubarak, President of Egypt

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THE PRESIDENT I like to begin by expressing my gratitude to President Mubarak for the welcome he has given me, one I particularly appreciate.

My visit falls within the framework of the contacts between us that go back a long way, are ongoing, friendly and trusting. As I believe you know, I personally attach very great value to the experience and wisdom of President Mubarak, regarding everything to do with this region in the broad sense of the term in particular, and more generally, regarding world problems.

So what's the background to this visit? First of all, I wish to stress French support for Egypt, who plays an essential role in the stability and peace of this region. We have not only a shared vision of the world, but also of the relations between peoples, a vision founded on the need for dialogue and mutual respect.

Egypt faces major developmental challenges, given the size of its population and growth. It has courageously chosen modernity and openness, a choice that is reflected in particular by the present exceptional growth of the Egyptian economy.

We talked about stronger cooperation, in education as well as in the economic sphere about education with particular reference to tomorrow's inauguration of the French University in Egypt. President Hosni Mubarak and I launched this idea together four years ago. The aim is to further the opportunities for young Egyptians to be open to the world, particularly the world of advanced, spearhead technology especially communications and information, but also the environment, financial services and tourism. We are pleased with the success of this French University in Egypt.

The second area of discussion concerned the economy. Egypt, as we all know, has begun important reforms to adapt and modernize her economy and France naturally supports these efforts which clearly are now crowned with success.



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Our trade links are developing very considerably. France today is the third supplier and second foreign investor in Egypt. Tomorrow, as the President has told you, we are launching the Presidential Business Council, which brings together both Egyptian and French heads of major as well as small and medium-sized enterprises to give new impetus to the trade which, I repeat, has been developing particularly significantly for some time.

We have signed an agreement that will enable the French Development Agency to be active in Egypt, which again will facilitate and extend our scope for economic action.

As the President mentioned, we talked about regional issues and once again noted the fact that we take practically the same line, I would say, on all the crises, difficulties and problems facing the countries in the region. And I was keen to pay tribute again to the essential role played by Egypt on the international stage and in the Middle East in particular.

On the subject of the Middle East, we spoke of the hope of seeing a resumption of the negotiations. And as far as Iraq is concerned, as the President has said, we talked about the need to assure the unity and integrity of that great country. For Syria and Lebanon, I recalled the fact that Lebanon needed to regain her full sovereignty and that the assassination of Rafiq Hariri, the former prime minister, needed to be fully elucidated. We support the international commission of inquiry and the setting-up of the international tribunal that has been decided between Lebanon and the United Nations.

With regard to Iran, as you know, this country has signed the Non-Proliferation Treaty. It has not truly respected its commitments. France and Egypt are working in the same spirit of dialogue. The President recalled a moment ago that, at Egypt's initiative, the IAEA had approved the idea of a Middle East zone free of weapons of mass destruction. And France supported President Mubarak's proposal on this subject.

On Sudan, we welcomed the adoption of UNSCR 1663 according to which the African Union Mission in Darfur would be transferred to UN peacekeeping forces.

These are the main points we raised, and they are unreservedly points of convergence between our two countries, between our two peoples, concerning both the peace and stability of this region and the world, the economic development of Egypt and relations between France and Egypt.

Q. A question for both presidents. For you, M. Chirac: is Iran, a future nuclear power, who has decided to support Hamas, as well as Hezbollah and Islamic Jihad, threatening to destabilize the whole of the Middle East, not only Israel, but also Egypt, Jordan and Lebanon, the ally of the West?

THE PRESIDENT Fortunately, it has not yet come to that. Today, it is a question of exploring the possibilities offered by diplomatic channels for avoiding a destabilization that could be very serious in the Middle East and



probably beyond. This action is being led by the international community and it does not, as we all know, call into question Iranian access to civilian nuclear technology. On the contrary, it should first enable the IAEA to play its role properly and secondly enable the security and stability of the region to be assured. I believe that this is truly in the interests of the whole world.

Q. President Mubarak thinks that the suspension of aid to the Palestinian Authority is a sort of punishment for the Palestinian people and at odds with a respect for the will of the people. Will France's position on this remain the same as that of the European Union, or will it change, considering that Mr Mahmoud Abbas is soon to visit Paris?

THE PRESIDENT There have been elections in the region. There is no question of contesting them. That being so, the problem is that Hamas is listed as an international terrorist organization, notably by the European Union. It so happens that the European Union supplies the bulk of the material aid to the Palestinians and to the Palestinian State. So I understand that the European Union has been asking questions.

My personal view and this is the feeling of President Mubarak is that it would be both unjust and politically clumsy to make the Palestinian population pay the price people want it to pay by stopping the aid.

I am therefore in favour of maintaining aid, for humanitarian reasons and for reasons of justice. On the other hand, there are probably procedures which need to be implemented and this is one of the subjects I propose to raise with Mr Mahmoud Abbas in Paris in a few days' time: that is to say, how can we ensure that aid is distributed to the benefit of all Palestinians and under conditions that respect the rules of democracy. That is France's position: maintain aid, under conditions to be determined with the head of the Palestinian State.

Q. My question concerns Syria. Today, we have the impression that the international community is blocked, because there is no progress with Syria on the demands of the international community over Lebanon. Did you talk about this, what was the outcome? President Mubarak, will you take the initiative to talk to the Syrians? How do you view the report of Terje Roed-Larsen which was published today?

THE PRESIDENT You know that France has enjoyed a very close relationship with Lebanon for a very long time. We felt it very deeply seeing Lebanon in the political situation she has experienced for some time.

France hopes that Lebanon will regain her complete autonomy and independence, in a democratic environment that is part of her tradition, that matches her tradition, and with no outside interference. France has nothing against Syria, she simply wishes Syria to cease any interference in Lebanon. Interference is not acceptable to the international community, nor to France in particular.



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I would add that we hope that the problems between the two countries will be resolved, that these two countries will recognize each other, that there will be an undisputed border, and especially an undisputed demarcation line. As you know, we want UNSCR 1559 to be respected, it is an important factor in the intervention of the international community in the Lebanese problem. We obviously support the international commission of inquiry.

I would like to take this opportunity to say, although it is not on exactly the same point, that the report filed by Mr Roed Larsen today is a positive report and, as is always the case with Mr Roed Larsen, it bears the stamp of a good grasp of the issues and a certain wisdom.

We would like the international tribunal, which has been approved in principle by almost all the international community, to be established as soon as possible, and things to get back to normal as quickly as possible, respecting the integrity and independence of Lebanon.

Q. The idea of a dialogue between civilizations came up against a stumbling block with the problem of the cartoons, when we saw demonstrations on the streets of European and Arab capitals. Today, everyone talks about a dialogue between civilizations, about understanding other cultures, but no one has done anything to put this idea into practice. How can we make this initiative to establish a better dialogue between East and West more tangible?

THE PRESIDENT There is no stability or peace without mutual respect. The essential point is to ensure that individuals and peoples respect each other, respect each other's civilizations and cultures and have positive, not negative exchanges. That has been President Mubarak's view for a long time, it is also mine.

You mentioned the problem of the cartoons, I said what I thought at the time: we are deeply committed because it is our political system that is at stake to respect for the freedom of the press, but freedom always has a limit, and that limit comes when it attacks others; freedom of expression must be exercised with the necessary moderation if we are to avoid hurting others. In this particular case, there were indisputably excesses, which I did in fact denounce.

Q. On the subject of the situation in Israel and Palestine, could you give us your feelings about the attitude of Hamas, which recently approved the attack in Tel Aviv?

THE PRESIDENT I will say this: those who took the responsibility of arming a boy in that way, in order to cause death, are totally irresponsible people and I can only condemn them totally.

MR HOSNI MUBARAK I would like to add a word to what President Chirac has just said: the best way of avoiding these acts of violence is for the two parties to sit around the negotiating table. The Palestinian government must recognize the



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agreements concluded with the Palestinian Authority in the past so that Palestinians and Israelis can sit around a negotiating table. If matters were to continue as they are now, they would become more complicated and even more difficult to resolve.

THE PRESIDENT I fully agree with the view just expressed by President Mubarak.

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