

THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTION

FRANCE IN AN AGE OF GEOPOLITICAL UPHEAVAL
A STATESMAN'S FORUM WITH LAURENT FABIUS,
FOREIGN MINISTER OF FRANCE

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P R O C E E D I N G S

MR. TALBOTT: Good afternoon, everybody. It's my pleasure. I'm Strobe Talbott. I have the honor of welcoming all of you to what has become a Brookings tradition, put together by our Foreign Policy program, the Statesman's Forum. And we have a particularly distinguished and important and busy statesman with us today: Laurent Fabius, France's minister of foreign affairs and international development.

It's our very good fortune and we're grateful to him that he would join us amidst a very hectic three-day visit to this side of the Atlantic, including a quick trip to Chicago. His topic is right out of the headlines, "France in an Age of Geopolitical Upheaval." Among the issues that the United States and France are working on together are the Central African Republic, Mali, Syria, Iran, and, of course, Ukraine, which I think it is safe to say represents the most serious challenge to Europe and to the transatlantic community since the Balkan wars of the 1990s.

Minister Fabius' entourage includes a friend and a colleague, Justin Vaïsse, who is an alumnus of The Brookings Institution. He was the senior fellow and director of research in our Center on the U.S. and Europe, and he is now head of the Policy Planning Department of the Quai D'Orsay.

I also want to recognize another very good friend of the institution, Ambassador Delattre, whose cooperation and support have been instrumental in aiding our work on France and the transatlantic relationship through such activities as the annual Raymond Aron Lecture and the Visiting Fellowship Program.

On the stage here is Jeremy Shapiro, a fellow in our Foreign Policy Program and, by the way, a former policy planner at the State Department, who will moderate the discussion after we hear the words of the minister himself.

This program is going to be live webcast. And those of you who Tweet,

you can do so with #fabius.

So with that, Mr. Minister, over to you. (Applause)

MINISTER FABIUS: Thank you, Mr. President, for your very kind introduction. It's a real pleasure for me to be in Washington, one of the few cities that, surprisingly enough, apart from the very successful state visit of the French president, I have not visited on my own since I became minister of foreign affairs two years ago. The reason is obviously not lack of interest. On the contrary, as you know, French-American relationship has reached a high point and our exchanges are extraordinarily intense. The reason I never came here is that John Kerry is never here. (Laughter) And I was able to catch him in his office this morning at the State Department, but he seemed rather surprised. Generally our meetings take place in more exotic places, such as Paris. (Laughter) So it was only time that I repay him the visit.

I'm also happy to be at Brookings, an institution which has blossomed under your leadership and which is very solid. One of the proofs of it is that despite the fact that I've taken Justin beside me, well, Brookings is still -- no? Okay. No, it's still vivid, and I congratulate you for that.

In the late '90s, Phil Gordon, now President Obama's advisor for the Middle East, created the Center on the U.S. and France, which later grew into the Center on the U.S. and Europe. Since then, exchanges with French scholars have been sustained and we will make sure it continues.

Let me start this address by a rather dark but hardly surprising assessment. We live in dangerous times because the pillars of the international order are increasingly being questioned. It is not just that the world has grown more complex and interdependent. Although certainly true, that was a story of the two previous decades. The novelty, as I said, that various taboos of international life are being broken,

making the world more chaotic.

In the Middle East, where there is still no peace between Israeli and Palestinians, the taboo against chemical weapons has been shattered by the Assad regime. Next door, Iran is challenging the nuclear nonproliferation taboo, already broken by North Korea.

Moral taboos are under stress, as well. In Syria, a barbaric regime is using mass crimes and famine to prolong its hold on power. In Africa, the specter of genocide has come back in the Central African Republic or South Sudan. And what about Boko Haram in Nigeria?

In Europe, the taboo of state sovereignty and territorial integrity, a cornerstone of world order, was violated by Russia when it annexed Crimea. It is troubling and dangerous to see Russia, a permanent member of the Security Council, violate its international commitments and ignore its role of guarantor of Ukrainian integrity offered in exchange for Kiev, renouncing nuclear weapons in 1994. That contributes to making the nonproliferation taboo less relevant.

These broken taboos reveal something about our world. They tell us of tectonic shifts happening, even though we don't know yet their full scope. On one side emerging countries are increasingly asserting themselves. Please, don't get me wrong, this is a positive trend and a natural process by which great countries, such as China and India, regain the central place they had for centuries. It would, therefore, be pointless and counterproductive to try and resist this evolution, but it is true that those countries need to share the responsibilities in sustaining the international order. We see a greater contribution by China to African security on the Iranian proliferation issue and we commend India's leadership in peacekeeping operations, but we have not yet reached a point where emerging powers would be full-fledged providers of common goods.

The United States and Europe had been the main purveyors of stability over the past two decades, whether in the Balkans or in Africa, but they have largely turned inwards since the 2008 financial crisis. In your country, war fatigue has made the public reluctant to get dragged in international crises while the euro crisis focused the attention, European leaders, on purely domestic issues. This conjunction created a sort of vacuum in which, to put it briefly, there is no stabilizing power nor any sufficient regulation to address crises.

I'm aware that the long-time promotion by France of a multi-polar world raised suspicion in the past that it was just a way to contest American centrality and international relations. But we have moved beyond those theological debates as we are now all confronted with what I call a zero-polar world. We need to address this situation with pragmatic solutions.

In this context of geopolitical upheaval and, relatively speaking, a power vacuum, France has done its best to adapt and develop a strategy both to address immediate challenges and to contribute, to shape a sustainable world system. Indeed, the risk is to play the fireman and treat international crises as a succession of emergencies without being able to reduce their occurrence or to see the larger picture.

We need to anticipate more and change the conditions in which the future itself will be written. That is why under the leadership of the French president, Mr. Hollande, I have determined four major lines of long-term action for the French diplomacy which can each be summed up in one word: peace, planet, Europe, and growth. Due to time constraints, I won't go into developing each of those axes, but I would like to give some concrete illustrations for each of them.

First peace. France has been on the forefront of international response to crises and challenges over the past two years. We have been side by side with the

EU, our American friends, and NATO allies on a host of issues jointly addressing proliferation challenges in Iran and the Korean Peninsula, crises in the Middle East, or terrorism in Africa. Sometimes France had to take the initiative on its own to cope with emergency situations. That was the case in Mali when al Qaeda-affiliated terrorist groups threatened to march on the capital city. A swift reaction was necessary. And after we helped our million friends, with African support, to re-conquer their own country, we assisted them in organizing successful elections and setting up the process of reconstruction.

In the Central African Republic six months ago, disintegration and large-scale religious tensions were threatening lives, and here again we acted swiftly. In both cases a U.N. peacekeeping operation has been approved to take over French and African efforts. Yet, although we intervened in Africa twice last year, we see each intervention as another collective failure to build robust African capacities. It is for Africans first to take care of Africa's security.

Last December, France committed to supporting the establishment of what we call African Rapid Deployment Capacities. The EU Africa Summit in April echoed this commitment. And this morning, John Kerry and myself examined the ways and means to increase our joint efforts to this end.

Dealing with Africa, and maybe there will be questions there because I understand that there is time for questions, I want to insist on the very important risk represented by Libya. First, peace.

Then the planet. This covers two dimensions. First, global governance of which the U.N. is the pillar. In line with our commitment to international law and multilateralism, we always care to act under the aegis of the United Nations, which remains the key source of international legitimacy. The problem is that the U.N. Security

Council is increasingly paralyzed in the face of mass atrocities. That is why in addition to a necessary reform of the U.N., in order to make it more representative we suggested the adoption of a code of conduct to refrain from using veto when mass crimes are committed. This would be a voluntary and collective agreement by the five permanent members. We are now discussing with partners, starting with the U.S., with a view to raising this issue during the next U.N. General Assembly.

Look, we are not naïve. It will be very, very difficult. But we are not ready to accept U.N. paralysis because if there is U.N. paralysis during a very long time, it will jeopardize the U.N. capability and legitimacy. Our goal is to put this question on the agenda of the 70th anniversary of the U.N. in 2015.

When I am saying the planet, the planet also means very concretely our very survival. We are, all of you know it, on the edge of a climatic abyss. In fact, we have 500 days to avoid a climate chaos. If the current trend continues, the rise of temperatures may not be limited to 3.3 degrees Fahrenheit, 2 degrees Celsius, above pre-industrial levels, but might reach 7 to 9, which means 4 or 5 degrees Celsius, which would be a catastrophe. In this context, the U.N. Conference on Climate Change, which will take place next year in Paris, is an absolute top priority. The goal is to achieve a post-2020 agreement that should include all countries and be legally binding.

This is ambitious, but there are some glimmers of hope. Compared with Copenhagen, climate denial is, at least in Europe, less audible. The latest U.S. report on climate change was a wake-up call. It demonstrates President Obama's personal commitment on this issue. The business community is also somewhat moving.

The shift is not limited to the developed world. China knows it has to act and it is acting. I discussed it in depth with China's leaders and I will be back this week in China for that purpose.

African states are committing to sustainable development strategies. Brazil and South Africa have set ambitious environmental targets. The way to Paris is surely not easy, but it is indispensable and doable. Planet.

Third comes Europe. I'm aware of the interrogations and sometimes skepticism in this country about the future of the EU. It is true that the euro crisis was so serious that at some stage the whole fabric of the EU appeared to be in jeopardy. But by and large, we have overcome this challenge and moved towards a stronger integration. We are now working towards rapidly achieving a banking union and better governance of the euro area.

We are putting forward new initiatives for a common energy policy -- and all the more necessary that we have the Russian-Ukraine crisis -- and for better collective action in support of economic growth, particularly in the industrial sector. Beyond this, the main question is whether Europe genuinely wants to be a power and if its nations are ready to share part of their sovereignty to do so. We the French, with others, we believe that Europe can and must follow this path and we are working to improve our cooperation. Of course, European states will not disappear, but we must strengthen our collective action.

We actively take part in all EU peace operations. We also provide reassurance to fellow EU member states when needed, as when we recently sent jet fighters and civilian planes in Lithuania and Poland, or by supporting Estonia in cyber defense. We are propping up cooperation with Germany. A few weeks ago, I traveled with my friend, Mr. Steinmeier, to Moldova and Georgia in order to demonstrate European commitment in the face of Russian pressure. And a few days ago, we were together with Steinmeier and Sikorski in Kiev, where, for that part, we stopped civil war. Unfortunately, afterwards, there were various events. And we then continued our journey

with Steinmeier to Tunisia to express European support to the political transition in this country.

The Weimar Triangle adds Poland to the French-German engine. In this format we pushed through an agreement in Ukraine in February, which paved the way to changing the situation in Kiev and avoiding at that time the Maidan revolution, a civil war. The first achievement of the European Union is peace in Europe. The Ukraine crisis is a very useful reminder that peace is something that should not be taken for granted even on European soil.

Last but not least, economic growth and renewal. A country that loses economic strengths will sooner or later be weakened on the world scene. Its ability to act and follow through will be questioned while committing to a policy balancing fiscal consolidation with progress measures.

We are right now undertaking structural reforms. We need to invest more, to boost competitiveness, and spend less to reduce our deficits. We are working to give more oxygen to the French economy. That also implies more efficiency on the part of government. We are particularly focusing on supporting French exports and on attracting in France more investments, more business, more tourists, and more students. Since 2012, I have committed myself to these goals. In this spirit, the perimeter of Quai D'Orsay has been recently enlarged to include, which is new, foreign trade and investments as well as tourism.

Before I conclude I would like to briefly mention what I consider to be two preconditions of success in this strategy. First, strengthening the transatlantic relationship is absolute necessity. That is why besides the economic impact, France is committed to searching for a balanced and ambitious TTIP agreement. This is a very complex negotiation and I'm aware of the debates on both sides of the Atlantic, but I think

both sides need to move forward.

Getting the emerging powers on board is a second prerequisite. We often meet with the same difficulty. They consider that the international order is biased in favor of the West. We might disagree, but we have to take into account this perception.

It's especially true with China, a Security Council permanent member and nuclear weapon state with a GDP equal to all of the BRICs, Mexico, Turkey, and Indonesia combined. China is a country that necessarily we have to work with, without being naïve, but with an open mind. That is why China is a really top priority of the French diplomacy with a view to increase cooperation within the U.N. and G-20 and also on the ground with concrete initiatives in Africa. Since I'm in office, I've been in China eight times.

We also attach a high priority to strengthening our already dense strategic partnership with our Indian friends.

As a final word let me stress that French-American cooperation is more necessary than ever to build up a sustainable world order for this new century. We need to do more together and to mobilize our partners to do more with us.

I'm at your disposal for any questions. Thank you. (Applause)

MR. SHAPIRO: Okay. Minister, thank you for that wide-ranging and impressive speech. It was sobering, but, at the same time, very progressive and full of ideas, which is what we like here because that's our industry.

We have about 35 or 40 minutes for questions. And because it's, you know, really my only role here, I think I'll start off and ask the first question and then I'll go to the audience. When we do go to the audience, I'd ask when you ask a question, please identify yourself, please actually ask a question, and try to keep it short so other people can get in. And my own pet peeve is that no questions actually start with "don't

you think,” so keep that in mind. (Laughter)

Minister, you started off your speech by mentioning that this is a time when taboos are being broken and that this is threatening world order. And one of the taboos that you mentioned being broken was the chemical weapons taboo. When that came to light in August or September of last year, there seemed to be, in the end, a difference between the U.S. and France. And do you believe that President Obama’s decision not to strike Syria in response to the chemical weapons attack there contributed to this disorder that you’re talking about and that a different decision should have been made?

MINISTER FABIUS: Well, there is little use in rebuilding history. And it would be arrogant and stupid for me to make a judgment about decisions which have been taken and especially decisions which have been taken by friends. This being said, we can try and think about the situation together.

Where were we? You first have to come back to a situation in June 2012. I fully remember that situation because I had just been appointed minister of foreign affairs and I was the newcomer. Well, a bit old, but newcomer. (Laughter) And my first international meeting was in Geneva. And what was the situation in Syria at that time? There were no terrorists. There were no Iranians. There were no Hezbollah. At that time. And when we discussed in Geneva, I fully remember it because I was the new one and, therefore, I was writing down things for all my colleagues, the main discussion during the intercession was where shall we send Mr. Bashar al-Assad? That was the main point, believe it or not.

And there were jokes, one of my colleagues saying, no, no, so far as I’m concerned it’s not possible because of this and that and the other one. Why -- and you, what about you?

Okay, we were in June 2012. But at that time, it was not possible, for various reasons -- and you can think about them -- to intervene. Okay.

A few months later, the situation was quite different. There were a lot of terrorists. Iranians were there. Hezbollah were there. And Mr. Bashar al-Assad was stronger and it has become some sort of international conflict as a matter of fact.

Now about chemical weapons. All of us, we have said that with chemicals weapons it was different. It is a reason why -- well, it's a different international order because they were forbidden, completely forbidden. And France was, I think, the first one not only to notice that chemical weapons have been massively used, but we wanted to make a case stemming from it. And it was not easy because, you know, everybody was knowing that if we discovered that there was a real problem, okay, we have to face it. But we were a bit stubborn and we made examinations, samples, all that stuff. And eventually it was clear for everybody, not only for us but for the international community, thanks to what has been found by Americans, by British, and some other guys, that there has been a use of chemical weapons. Okay.

And it is true now, it's well-known, that we prepared ourselves to strike. For various reasons, the strike did not take place. Our British friends were not able to have the approval of their department and, therefore, they were turned down. And President Obama decided to do differently. And stemming from that, it was not possible.

You must remember that it is precisely at that time in St. Petersburg that President Putin, who a few days ago was saying that there were no chemical weapons in Syria to his knowledge -- it was the same for the Syrian government, no, nothing -- by a very clever maneuver said, okay, there are chemical weapons and I can interfere in order to get rid of them. And then, after a while, it was decided to take a decision to get rid of this, and the Russians appear as being the good ones who have been able to act in such

a way that there will be no longer any chemical weapons. I hope I am not disturbing the truth, but it's really the way I have lived that period of time.

Now where are we today? First, so far as chemical weapons are concerned, 92 percent -- 92 percent -- of the chemical weapons have been destroyed or put abroad. Okay, that's good. That remains 8 percent, and, hopefully, they will be destroyed, but right now the Syrians say, well, it's not possible to take them because of (inaudible).

We have hints showing that maybe -- and rather probably -- everything has not been declared and the production facilities have not been destroyed. And recently, we have at least 14 incidents which show that chemical agents have been used. Minor ones through chlorine, which is very difficult to test, but it is very likely. And our tests are ongoing, and I think that our British and American friends are doing the same.

It's another reason why France had decided a few days ago to put the case in the International Criminal Court, the general case, because we think that with this sort of crimes there cannot be an impunity. And we shall see what the tests will present. Well, once more it's difficult to prove it was occurring, but it means, surely, that Syria, in spite of all that has taken place before, has used in the recent past once more, through barrels which were sent from helicopters, these weapons.

Now, where do we go from there? It's not a question of using again to strike because you see the difficulties. But once more, there's no possible impunity.

My personal belief -- and once more, I don't want to rebuild history -- is that insofar as Mr. Bashar al-Assad's regime is concerned, and insofar as the possibilities given to Russians to go ahead, this decision or not decision has been important. That's the way, in a very diplomatic mood, I would put it.

MR. SHAPIRO: Thank you. I've learned something about diplomacy.

(Laughter)

Let's go to the --

MINISTER FABIUS: I'm not a diplomat by career. (Laughter)

MR. SHAPIRO: You've taken to it very well. (Laughter)

Let's go to the audience to ask some questions. Why don't we start with our traditional and Gary. I think we have a microphone that will come.

MR. MITCHELL: Thanks very much, Minister. I'm Garrett Mitchell and I write The Mitchell Report.

And I want to ask you if you are willing to comment on us, America, but in this context. One of your countrymen who became one of our citizens, Jacques Barzun, used to say that there are two measures of intelligence: one is the capacity to see yourself as others see you and the second part of it is the capacity to see others as they see themselves. And the question I have is over the long time, and I don't just mean since you've been serving as the minister of foreign affairs, but over the long time that you and your colleagues have been thinking about this, without being issue-specific or incident-specific or administration-specific, in these two measures how does America do in the conduct of foreign policy? Where is it strong and where could it use some remedial reading?

MR. SHAPIRO: Another diplomatic test.

MINISTER FABIUS: Do you know the story of this guy who had five minutes to deal with a subject the universe and the other problems. (Laughter) And he said, well, I have only five minutes, therefore I will deal with the universe and I will set apart the other problems. (Laughter) Well, okay, I'm in the same situation.

Well, I think -- I don't know who has said what you said, but it is surely very intelligent. And what could I say? I don't know if my answer will answer your

question, but, once more, it's not my role to judge anybody. It's so difficult already to be coherent with yourself that with other guys, huh. But what I think is one of the problems that all of us we are facing, because the U.S. are so important that things which happen in the U.S. are interesting for all of us so far as foreign policy is concerned, you have some sort of paradox. Some people would say a contradiction.

On the one hand, you have here war fatigue. People are fed up with Afghanistan, Iraq, and so on. And my understanding is that if you ask public opinion what about the priority? Is it homework? Is it abroad? The answer will be, okay, we ask to our leaders to be first focused on internal matters. That's on the one hand.

But on the other hand, when it comes to the implementation of this approach, the same people say, oh, it's awful. Why are we not as powerful as before? Why are we not able to solve the Israeli-Palestinian crisis, the Syrian crisis, (inaudible) that's there? And there is a contradiction between the two and many people feel that contradiction more generally.

And, you know, I like America. It is true that when you were intervening everywhere, and sometimes in a very debatable way, people were saying ho. And when you are not intervening, people say ho. (Laughter) And it's the reason why it's an easy job to be president here or secretary of state. And, you know, contradiction is part and parcel of human nature and my guess is that Americans belong to human nature and Frenchmen as well. (Laughter) Okay, therefore, you have these contradictions.

Now, if I'm right it means that, well, the wording zero-polar world is a bit too much because there are poles, but it is true that there is no boss. Otherwise, would it be possible that a Syrian crisis will remain? Be possible that you would have ongoing crises in different parts of the world? No. And, therefore, you have -- I hope that we shall go step by step to an organized multi-polar world. But today we are in between and it's

difficult for the American leaders and difficult for the other countries because there are empty places. And if you leave empty places, people take advantage of that and especially in non-democratic powers.

You raised the question about a strike and so on. Let's remember, so far as the British are concerned they asked their Parliament what was the right solution? And the Parliament turned them down. Okay. President Obama said, well, it's not a decision that I must take by myself. I have to consult. Okay. That's purely -- that's perfectly democratic. But on the other side, in the regimes which have not these sort of problems, either a dictatorship or autocratic, no, the leaders say this or that, and okay.

And, you know, it's a tricky situation because in international affairs you have two series of people: the first one being obliged to refer to a lot of people and the second one being able to decide suddenly it's a difficult situation. If you add to that the fact that during years and years, and maybe centuries, diplomatic policy has been supported by the possible use of force and use of force has been supported by the possible sacrifice of lives, but today some people imagine that you can have diplomatic action without the possibility of force or use of force without the sacrifice of lives, you know, between the different systems, the balance is not quite equal. And we Frenchmen, while not -- not at all -- the strongest power in the world, but we are lucky enough to have a strong institutional system and to be ready to commit ourselves and the life of our guys. And the reason why, surprisingly enough, in the recent period of time we have some sort of influence, not being arrogant, but some sort of international influence because what we say, we do it whatever the costs.

Well, it's maybe not the exact answer to your question, but thank you for giving me the opportunity to develop these elements which to me are important.

MR. SHAPIRO: Thank you. Over here standing up.

MR. KUTELIA: Thank you very much. Batu Kutelia of the McCain Institute. I'm from Georgia.

So, Mr. Minister, what is the current state of ongoing French military ships sailing to Russia, which is supposed to be deployed in Crimea? And have you discussed this issue with your counterpart while you are here in Washington? Thank you very much.

MINISTER FABIUS: I don't know for what strange reason, but things have been alluded to through the press, but not when I was directly there. It's a joke.
(Laughter)

No, what is the situation? I said both dialogue and firmness. Dialogue and firmness. We want to have dialogue. Why? Because who here is proposing to go to war with Russia? Nobody, fortunately, because it has some meaning. On the other hand, we cannot accept what the Russians have done, annexing Crimea, without reacting. Because if you accept that, it means there are no longer any frontiers, no longer any international rules, and that everything is possible.

You have two extreme elements. On the one hand, you must react. On the other one, there are limits to reaction because we are not going to war. And in between you have diplomacy and sanctions, okay, if you are serious.

Diplomacy, we are having dialogue with all sorts of people. I'm dialoguing with Lavrov, with Ukrainian people, with Germans, Americans, everybody. And President Hollande is doing the same with his counterpart. And we are trying, we hope that it will be the outcome, we hope that there will be a presidential election because when you have this sort of crisis, the way out is to have an election and to ask people what is your choice. Okay.

By the way, you must emphasize the enormous contradiction from the

Russian side. On the one hand, they say, well, the election in Syria, it's good. Everybody knows who will be the winner. There cannot be any candidate for the opposition and it is war. But on the other hand, election in Ukraine, oh, you have 23 candidates, more than half of them are for the South or for East. Nobody knows who will be the winner and it's supposed to be democratic. Try to explain that.

But anyway, I come back to sanctions. So far as Europe is concerned, we have taken already two degrees of sanctions. Okay. And we are unanimous on that. It's not easy because sanctions, there are always pros and cons. It's a sacrifice. Otherwise, it's not a sanction. Look, the idea is to sanction the Russians, not to sanction the Europeans -- no, the Americans. And we have taken these two degrees.

We've said that if the election is -- I won't say correct -- okay, it will be a betterment. If there are obstacles preventing the election from taking place, we shall react and possibly by a new sanction. A new sanction can be finance, it can be energy, it can be defense. So far as the French contract is concerned, it has been signed in 2011, three years ago. It is implemented. It is paid more than half and the (inaudible) here. And according to the law, today there's no possibility of saying no. But we shall examine, because of the final decision, in October. Because of the administrative process we can have a decision in October. We shall see what will be the situation and the legal framework at that time.

But look, if the question is, is France firm or not firm, I suggest not to play (inaudible) this game. In the case of Syria, well, who is firm? In the case of Iraq, who is firm? In the case of Africa, who is firm? All of us, we have to be firm. We have to be just and to be firm, but no lessons.

MR. SHAPIRO: Thank you. So just to follow up a little bit on that, to move forward to this third level of sanctions does it have to be a shared sacrifice? Do

you need to deal with your European partners to make sure that if you suffer on the defense industry that the British suffer roughly equally on the finance industry, et cetera?

MINISTER FABIUS: Well, the ideal would be to have balanced efforts. It's not that easy. Why?

Take the domain of energy, which probably is the most important one. What is the situation of the different countries? Out of 28 European countries, you have 6 countries which are depending 100 percent on Russian gas and you have 7 other countries depending on more than 50 percent, which means that you have 13 countries at least which are depending on Russian gas more than 50 percent. Obviously, we are in May, we are not in winter, but you can imagine for these countries -- it's not the case of France because of nuclear and what, okay, but you can imagine what it means really.

Take the instance of finance. Okay, it's very important and it could be useful and efficient. So you say, okay, Mr. This and That, you have interest in some countries you can imagine, European countries. Okay, we stop that.

Are they ready to do that? And what about U.S.? U.S. is honestly wanting to do things, but what is also the effort that everybody is ready to do.

My conclusion is that we have to study that together, not -- which is always sort of a human tendency to be ready, to make efforts provided; the other one, and to have, you know, really intelligent anticipation. Because in our behavior towards Russians, and traditionally France is a good friend of Russia for historical, for geographical reasons, but one of the reproaches which can be made is that we are not anticipating things. We are reacting to things and we must anticipate, just imagine what could be a different group. Afterwards, probably diplomacy is about it, as well. And it is necessary to be united because otherwise it's difficult. And it is in this period that we must go ahead.

Insofar as Ukraine is concerned, our view is that you don't have to compel Ukraine to choose either EU or Russia. As a matter of fact, Ukraine can have both a good relationship with the both of them. And today, it seems difficult to organize. We are not naïve, once more, but we have to try and explain to everybody what is the interest. And take the instance of Russia. Is it really the interest of Russia to be able to pay for Crimea, for Ukraine? Look at the economic situation of Russia today. Look at these investments. What are they producing? Gas? Oil? Weapons? But it depends on what is the rate of these different elements. Therefore, we have -- and it's probably the task of all of us thinkers, so-called thinkers, not to react too directly, but to think about things.

But I insist on this question of unity. And it is the same -- you didn't raise the question, but, however, it's very present because the negotiations resume today.

You didn't ask me about Iran. Iran, it's a big one, but they're the same. Till now, we are united. And I must say that till now, the possible conflicts we have with Russia, china, they didn't have any influence on the positions which are taken. That's surprising, but that's very important. And we are together, I mean, the six of us: the five permanent members plus Germany. And we shall have a very tough moment because, you know, the problem is, obviously, as you know, very complex.

But provided that we remain firm and that we remain united, we can get it and Iran, as well. And it has, obviously, cross consequences because all that is interrelated.

MR. SHAPIRO: Okay. Right here on the aisle.

MR. KIRISAN: Thank you. Dmitry Kirisan of Itar-Tass.

From your point of view, sir, is another round of talks between Russia, EU, U.S., and the Ukraine is necessary at this point? Might it be useful to help resolve

the crisis in Ukraine?

MINISTER FABIUS: You have two possibilities of conversation: within Ukraine and between Ukraine, Russia, U.S., EU. Generally speaking, I'm always in favor of dialogue because it can help and, in those circumstances, it can avoid misunderstandings. Now it's not easy because it depends on the days, but today or yesterday the Russians said no, it's not necessary to have a large meeting. It's more useful to have a meeting between the Ukrainian government and the so-called pro Russians. But at the same time, the Ukrainian government refused (inaudible).

Well, I think we must endlessly make our best, because we are not far away from civil war -- not far away -- to try and have a real dialogue. Look, it doesn't mean that we don't have to be firm. No. There's no contradiction between speaking and being very firm. We must try the two of them and it's what we are doing right now, officially or not officially. Because at the end of the day, we have to come back to some reasonable, more reasonable, situation. And I don't want to establish comparison which would be ridiculous.

So far as the reason of people is concerned, you can be reasonably optimistic, but then happen incidents; incidents, tangents. When you have so many people fighting against each other, being passionate, you cannot avoid to have incidents. And throughout history, and you know history as well as I do, you have a lot of situations where things are out of control and it's not because we are in 2014 that things are always under control, and it is precisely what I'm afraid of. Suddenly, a situation where nobody is able to control things because there is something of a national pride, because there are provocators, because this, and because that, and then the incident comes and then it's a larger catastrophe. And I don't know if there is something like an improvement throughout history, but we have to have a better control of the situation and dialogue

helps. Dialogue helps.

MR. SHAPIRO: Okay, I think the minister has to catch a plane, so we have just time for one more question. Why don't we take the woman toward the back there?

MS. KERN: Thank you. Laura Kern with CNN. I actually have a follow-up to your first answer.

In an interview earlier today Syria's deputy foreign minister denied that the Assad government had used chlorine against its citizens in the previous weeks. I'm curious what your reaction to that denial is. And then also if, in fact, as you said is probable, the Assad government is not declaring all of its chemical weapons, what actions is the international community prepared to take?

MINISTER FABIUS: The denial of the truce is the most favorite posture of these gentlemen. We begin to be accustomed to it, denial of any crime, denial of any chemical weapon used, denial of this, denial of that. And we could say, if it was not so tragic, that for this regime the denial is the general way of approving things.

And once more, there are elements which show that everything has not been declared. The director general of OIAC has made an inquiry about the recent possible use of chemical weapons. What can be the reaction if it is demonstrated it's clearly gained the commitment, an international commitment, of the regime? And, therefore, when you violate international laws, you are exposed to sanctions. But once more, it poses the very vast question of U.N. efficiency that we shall not sort out within two minutes, but which is --

MR. SHAPIRO: You can have three, if you want.

MINISTER FABIUS: But we know that Brookings will solve it and, therefore, it's okay. (Laughter) Or maybe you have already solved it.

No, it's -- you know, if what I've said about the zero-polar world, a fact that there was no such power or alliance of powers which were able to impose or to propose a solution, it poses the problem of the U.N. and the solution of many other crises, and this problem is posed to all of us. And it's true for Syria, but it's true for many other issues.

I have to conclude now. I will not elaborate a complex conclusion, only two things concerning present or future important issues.

The first one is Libya. Let's pay attention to Libya. Libya is a vast territory. Unfortunately, without any state, any government. There's a lot of weapons; a sort of hub for terrorism. And because of its geographic situation it can menace the Sahel, the Mediterranean Sea, black Africa as well, Tunisia, Egypt, and, therefore, we have to be active. The ways in order to be active can be discussed with the authorities themselves, obviously, but have this in mind, Libya.

The second one is Iran. It's quite different. We shall resume the negotiation today. Normally, we have till the 26th, 28th? Twentieth of July to find a solution. We know it can be postponed, but once more France has the experience of that during the first negotiation. We have to be of good faith civil nuclear energy, yes; atomic bomb, no; to draw all the consequences of that, but, once more, to remain firm on the elements.

There is no place for some sort of romanticism in this. It's too serious. It's a very serious matter. We hope it's possible. We don't know. We know it will be difficult. We know that, anyway, if we find an agreement, it will be at the end of it because that's the way it goes. It's very important that we remain united. Maybe it's possible, I don't know, but we have to stick to our basic principles. Because the danger of nuclear dissemination is so high that we cannot put anything at risk.

Thank you very much. (Applause)

MR. SHAPIRO: If we could give the minister a couple of minutes to get out of the door. We have a little bit of a blockage, so please just remain in your seats while we leave. Thank you.

MINISTER FABIUS: Thank you.

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