



Speech by H.E. Amre Moussa
Secretary General of the League of Arab States
At The Second International Roundtable on:
“Constructing Peace, Deconstructing Terror”

26/6/2005, Brussels

Mr. Chairman
Distinguished guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen:

I would first of all like to express my thanks to the "*Alliance of Liberals & Democrats for Europe in the European Parliament*" and the "*Strategic Foresight Group*" as well as the "*Freidrich Naumann Stiftung*" for organizing this *Second International Rountable on "Constructing Peace, Deconstructing Terror"*. Thank you again for allowing me to address such a distinguished gathering.

At the beginning I would like to affirm that we all are in the same boat: East & West, North & South, Muslims, Christians and all others. What we need is to build a new international order that would steer our ship through the first decade of the 21st century and beyond. We would want the new century to be different than the 20th which saw two world wars and numerous other major conflicts , some of which are still with us until today.

It is our responsibility therefore to prove it (primarily to ourselves) that human nature is not bent on constant search for enemies...nor on making war with them thus keeping our world always on edge. True, this would help some economies temporarily flourish but it would certainly affect the prospects for a peaceful century. The way I see things developing gives a strong impression that we may be repeating the patterns of 20th century politics and pitfalls. Instead of communism there is Islam...Instead of East & West ideological confrontation, there is the clash of civilizations...Instead of conventional world wars there is a world war against terrorism, whatever that means.

Again, it is our responsibility, and that of groups with foresight...to enhance calls for political wisdom so as to reach an international order based on a world wide consensus and to avoid policies aiming at consecrating the clash of civilizations under the mask of war against terrorism.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me now turn to the "Theme Paper" entitled "Constructing Peace, Deconstructing Terror" and I hasten to state the following two observations.

First: Constructing Peace does not depend on deconstructing terror alone. This would be too simplistic. To construct peace you need to cogently deal with poverty and failing social and economic order in vast regions and in many countries. A whole continent like Africa wouldn't agree at all that terrorism is the father of all ills. Africa would not be alone in this. Ask Asians, ask Eurasians, ask Latin Americans ...the answer would be the same.

Furthermore, the Muslim world will not readily agree with this title. There is wide spread feelings of frustration and despair... justice continues to be denied deliberately...The Arab Israeli conflict , Palestine, the situation in Iraq, the nuclear situation in the Middle East, are all cases in point. When I use the term justice, I don't necessarily use it in any religious context or base it on any religious philosophy. I refer to justice as constructed by international law and the basic principles enshrined in the U.N. charter. All of which are formulated by Western minds and based on western philosophy. Our major complaint is that those principles of international law - not the principles of Islamic Sharia - are being flouted and deliberately by-passed and selectively applied and therefore justice is denied.

There is big confusion here. Not only the confusion the "Theme Paper" talks about; namely the relationship between freedom and justice and whether they are counterpoised. There is also confusion in what justice means, so let us agree that it means what is provided for within the confines of international law.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I submit that we need to have a real and frank dialogue to construct peace. We therefore need an agenda that is not dictated by terrorists, vested interests or extreme ideologies. A dialogue based on mutual respect.... A dialogue based on the principle that all cultures are equal dignity....reflecting the fact that each culture can contribute its part of truth, wisdom and beauty.

Having said that, I come to my second point... I wish to reflect on some of the salient assertions outlined in the "Theme Paper":

First, that the definition of terrorism as acts committed against innocent civilians and non-combatants has become widely accepted. Both the UN High-Level Panel on Threats, Challenges, and Change and UN Secretary General in his report "In Larger Freedom" have adopted that definition of terror.

Second, it is regrettable that indeed as the paper stated several governments tend to curb civil liberties and some tend to use terror as an excuse to justify authoritarianism.

Third, the paper succinctly refutes associations between terrorism and religion, especially in the light of the fact stated in the report that less than one-fourth of "groups engaged in terror" , as the paper called them, act in the name of Islamic ideology. One does therefore wonder how and why this association between Islam and terrorism came to be.

Fourth, further more the paper identified that only 8 out of the 175 groups are opposed to foreign occupation. Here I would make a reservation on the insinuation that groups opposed to foreign occupation are terrorist groups. While some of them do indeed engage in acts of terrorism (ie. against innocent civilians or non-combatants), resisting foreign military occupation cannot and should not be automatically considered as such. I here have in mind what we witness in the Palestinian and other Arab territories under Israeli military occupation.

Fifth, the current debate on terrorism is excessively focused on declared objectives but ignoring underlying motives, and that soft power responses should be seriously considered. I agree with that.

Sixth, I should also like to express my agreement with the statement that the conduct of international relations in dealing with terrorism should focus on its root causes in order to develop appropriate and effective policies.

Seventh, action against terrorism should not be a foreign policy tool of few powers. Terrorism is a global problem and needs common global standards and agreed policies. I believe this is true. The United Nations Security Council and the General Assembly remain the bodies that should determine such policies.

Finally- constructing peace requires transformation of global security, ie. converting a context of despair into a context of hope. This is the basic issue raised by the report before us. Yet , how do we go about realizing it? Allow me to formulate some suggestions in this regard.

To promote a context of hope, we need a sound process of reform and just solutions to the major political problems, especially those threatening regional and international peace and security, and lastly sound economic and social development plans.

As far as our region, the Middle East, is concerned the process of reform is underway... the wheel of change is in motion. It is my personal opinion that the area will witness a fundamental transformation within the next five years. This has already been reflected by the document adopted by the 2004 Tunis Summit on development, modernization and change. The document dealt with the process of democratization in the Arab world, covering basic human and women's rights, fundamental freedoms, transparency, and education. A progress report on its implementation was presented by me to this year's Algiers' Summit. It included an evaluation of actions taken in each Arab country in this regard. A number of steps have been taken such as electoral reforms, access of women to parliaments, establishment of councils for human rights...etc

What should be stressed here is that these reforms were neither decreed by powers abroad nor were they gifts presented by governments...they were rather the result of the desire and will of peoples for change. And the Middle East, with its vast natural and human resources is capable of moving into the 21st century.

Although reform is a must and a priority item, it can not be fully realized without the resolution of the Palestinian question and putting an end to the Middle East conflict. Anger and despair will not disappear until a viable Palestinian state is established. To this end, I would like to remind you of the Arab Peace Initiative proposed by His Royal Highness Crown Prince Abdallah and unanimously adopted by the Beirut Summit in 2002. This peace initiative proposed an end to the Arab Israeli conflict, normalization of diplomatic relations with Israel in return of Israel's withdrawal from Palestinian and other Arab occupied territories... security has to be guaranteed for Israel and Arab countries as well. Unfortunately we have not received a response until now...Many of us in the Arab world believe we currently have no partner for peace in Israel

Justice has to be established ...We can not and will not remain idle and let the conflict with Israel continue to empoison the present and the future. The roadmap is presently the only available solution.

We hope that we will report more progress the next time we meet.

Thank you