



# Ambassador's Activities

2011

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Lecture given by *HE Bernard Emié*  
French Ambassador to the United Kingdom

“Franco-British relations and common agendas”

University of Edinburgh,  
Friday, 30 September 2011

Sir David,

Students and faculty members,

Ladies and gentlemen,

It's a great honour and pleasure for me to be here at this prestigious University of Edinburgh.

When I planned my first official visit to Scotland, I was keen to have an opportunity to meet and talk to the students of this institution. You are fortunate to be studying or teaching in such a prestigious and dynamic university.

I was asked to talk to you about the close relations between France and the United Kingdom and our common agendas in foreign policy.

France and the UK are very similar : in our history, in our diplomatic traditions and in being the only permanent Western European members of the UN Security Council, as well as major NATO and EU partners. We both want to fulfil our ambition to conduct global diplomacy and to remain world players.

Given the limited time we have together today, I have chosen to address what seems to me the hottest foreign policy issue on the common British and French agenda.

It's clear that the number one priority for us both more specifically in the aftermath of our joint success in Lybia is to develop an innovative and ambitious foreign policy that meets the challenges of this tremendous change we call the *Arab Spring* – undoubtedly the greatest revolution since the end of the Cold War. (1)

It is our conviction that we must maintain and reinforce our close cooperation at the United Nations on several other key issues for global peace and security (2)

Another common goal we have may be less obvious to some of you but it is nonetheless essential and has been on our common agenda for much longer than the Arab Spring. It is our defence partnership. The Libyan experience – a consequence of the Arab Spring – acted as an tremendous boost for this defence cooperation (3)

### **I / Understanding and supporting the Arab spring**

**A/ We've got to admit it : this “spring” has been a surprise for us all - as much for French as for British diplomacy.**

I myself have spent most of my Foreign Ministry career either working with Arab countries or posted there. I can assure you the speed and scale of the events were as much of a surprise to me as they were to my Turkish (I was before London posted in Ankara till April) and British colleagues.

No think tank, embassy or expert could have predicted the scale or timing of this Arab Spring.

That is also an important lesson for all of you, in particular those who will go on to be researchers and experts in fields such as political science and international relations. You can never foresee everything, least of all – paradoxically – the most dramatic changes in our societies.

Even though there were early warning signs, that part of the world seemed doomed to remain buried under a lead weight, without the right to freedom or modernity. French officials like ALAIN JUPPE, our Foreign Minister, have publicly stated we gave too much credit to authoritarian regimes who were telling us they were the only way to prevent the Islamist threat. That threat was used as a pretext to justify turning a blind eye on governments which were flouting freedom and curbing their country's development.

After a little hesitation at the beginning, it dawned on both the French and British that we shouldn't be afraid of this Arab Spring. That is why we decided to bring an immediate and concrete response to help these transitions to be successful.

We soon realized this movement was, above all, the result of extraordinary courage on the part of the various Arab populations concerned. France and the UK, who fought side by side 70 years ago, have not forgotten the price of freedom and democracy. We know what it costs in spilt blood and sacrificed lives, when you defy a tyrant.

Yes, this Arab Spring inspires tremendous hope for all of us. But it's a tremendous challenge too. France and Britain share this view.

**B/ It is a major political challenge. We must all play an active role to guarantee the success of the democratic transition.**

By the way, it's important to remember that the phrase "Arab Spring" refers to a multitude of movements, very different in each country. And it's for every people, with their history and unique characteristics, to take their destiny in hand and create their own system. And today, for us, the priority is clear: we must help the countries engaged in deep economic and political reforms to make those reforms a success. Tunisia and Egypt first. Morocco and Jordan as well ; two countries whose wise kings have embarked on real reforms and now Libya, who is finally almost free from Colonel Gaddafi's tyranny.

That's why the French G8 presidency decided to respond accordingly, by launching what we called the Deauville Partnership, during the most recent G8 summit – in May – chaired by Nicolas Sarkozy and at which David Cameron played an active role.

In Deauville, the heads of state and government laid the foundations for this partnership. Then, a few weeks ago, the finance ministers and financial institutions finalized a package strong enough to meet the challenges for the 2011-2013 period. To date, we've managed to mobilize a total of around \$80 billion through the partnership – including \$38 billion from the international financial institutions – and to launch critically important bilateral ventures.

France and Britain agree that transition and reforms must be driven by our partner countries in the region. It's their revolution, it's their transition, and of course it's up to them to define its terms and action plans. We don't wish to impose methods or teach any lessons. Neo-colonialism is over. We want to carefully listen to them and see how we can respond to their demands. That's what President Sarkozy emphasized to young Libyans during his recent historic visit to Benghazi with Prime Minister David Cameron.

What we are building is a comprehensive partnership, because it must focus on both economic modernization and political reforms, which must move forward at the same pace – for example, the strengthening of the rule of law. We're talking about programmes to support the training of judges and journalists, and programmes to support electoral processes.

The partnership's work will continue, with all its members remaining actively involved. The Americans have already made a strong commitment to build on this during their G8 presidency in 2012.

## **II / Continuing to work together and be ambitious at multilateral level.**

You may not know that two thirds of UN Security Council resolutions originate from joint Franco-British initiatives. As you know, we've worked well together on Libya at the UN, with Resolutions 1970 and 1973. We've also worked on

behalf of the Libyan people to reclaim Gaddafi's frozen assets, which belong to the Libyans.

But there are other issues we need to address.

**A/ Another regime that has opted for a brutal crackdown is Syria.** Contrary to what some critics say, there are no double standards in our foreign policy: We've constantly demanded an end to the violence, an end to the crackdown and the start of reforms. It is largely thanks to the UK and France that the EU has adopted sanctions (a travel ban for certain individuals implicated in the crackdown, an embargo on oil exports that is starting to bear fruit). We would like the UN Security Council to take similar measures.

As you know, it's much more complicated at the Council than it was for Libya, because the Arab countries aren't unanimous and because some permanent members express strong opposition, but we're continuing to make progress. I can assure you France and the UK are working hand in hand on this issue. We will not give up on the Syrian people.

Largely thanks to our two countries, the European Union has imposed sanctions which, in time, will enable us to achieve results. We're in the process of discussing a new United Nations Security Council resolution condemning – again in the strongest terms – the behaviour of the Syrian regime. This may be frustrating, because I can see the result isn't there and the crackdown is continuing, but we're doing everything in our power to get things moving.

**B/ I'd like to say a few words about the peace process between Israel and the Palestinians, even though this topic alone would deserve a lecture of its own.**

French and British authorities share the same view : namely, that true peace will only be achieved through direct negotiations between the parties, and the international community has a major role to play in creating the conditions to relaunch these negotiations. We have the same understanding of what the endgame should look like : two states, living side by side in peace, with genuine sovereignty for a modern democratic and viable Palestinian state and legitimate guarantees of security for Israel.

At the United Nations last week, President Sarkozy proposed first of all to change our method – quite simply because the current method hasn't succeeded – and adopt a more collective approach bringing together all those who can help break the deadlock in the situation. That is, all the permanent members of the Security Council, the European Union and big European states that are not permanent Security Council members, and the main Arab states involved in the region. Secondly, we must create the conditions for resuming the negotiations. There's no other possible route in order to achieve peace, guarantee Israel's security and finally give the Palestinians what they have a right to a fully-fledged state. Thirdly, these negotiations mustn't go on forever. So France is proposing that precise deadlines be set enabling the progress of the negotiations to be assessed. Finally, President Sarkozy has proposed to work on raising Palestine's status within the United Nations and thus take the first step by recognizing for Palestine the status of non-member, observer state.

France is proposing an approach, she's not proposing a ready-made package. We're going to work on this now with all those who want to work on it : with the Palestinians, and we're continuing our contacts with the Israelis and of course the US. We're also going to work with our European partners and those Arab states that wish to do so.

In recent years, France and Britain have been stepping up their cooperation on the Middle East peace process, an issue which has proven so difficult to solve over the past 60 years. We will keep working together on it at the Security Council.

**C/ Finally, I would like to add that in New York last week, a meeting was held on “preventive diplomacy”** in which both Alain Juppé and William Hague took part. “Preventive diplomacy” is a concept forged in 1992 by UN Secretary-General Boutros Ghali, whereby - rather than waiting for a situation to deteriorate - we take swift action through dialogue and mediation before it is too late.

The idea is quite simple but it is useful to remind ourselves of it, as we too often face the disastrous impact of crises that could have been prevented earlier at a much lower cost. In the debate, Alain Juppé said the Security Council, whose primary responsibility is to maintain international peace and security, should be “the number one player in preventive diplomacy”.

### **III / Strengthening our defence cooperation : the Libyan experience.**

**Libya brought France and the UK together to strengthen their relations and, more than ever before, adopt a common defence agenda.**

You may know that the joint Franco-British declaration of 2 November 2010 after our last bilateral summit, during which we concluded two major Defense treaties, stated, *“We do not see situations arising in which the vital interests of either nation could be threatened without the vital interests of the other also being threatened.”* That gives an idea of how the general context, our shared understanding and our political proximity encouraged the huge step forward represented by our joint operations in Libya.

Today I'm addressing you in the wake of our success in Libya. The victory of the democratic forces in Libya is not yet complete, but we can hope it's imminent. It's a success France and the United Kingdom will share – with the Libyans, of course, who carried out the bulk of the effort on the ground.

Indeed, we can say without exaggeration that our two countries, together, were leaders of the NATO lead coalition in this crisis, despite a lot of pessimism around us.

The joint visit to Tripoli and Benghazi by President Nicolas Sarkozy and Prime Minister David Cameron on 15 September – the first visit by heads of state and government since the fall of Colonel Gaddafi's regime – is a magnificent symbol of the way we took the initiative together, at every stage of this crisis.

To protect the Libyan people of Benghazi from brutal repression, we shouldered our responsibilities and presented Resolutions 1970 and 1973 to the United Nations Security Council. In the NATO framework and with international legitimacy, our two countries then organized and conducted a major operation for the international community and the promotion of our values. Since the beginning of the NATO operation (31 March 2011) a total of 21,662 sorties, including 8,140 strike sorties, have been conducted. France and the UK alone have taken charge of the majority of these.

That is not just words: we put lives on the line to protect Libyan civilian populations and implement UN resolutions.

Conducting this operation for the Libyan people will have been a tremendous boost to Franco-British cooperation. That, along with the rejoicing of the people liberated in Tripoli and many other cities, is probably the best reward for our efforts.

The Libyan experience has enabled our armed forces to work side by side (sometimes on the very same aircraft carrier) and to discover further and appreciate our respective capabilities and expertise. We've consulted each other on a permanent basis, at every military level. We've probably cooperated more in operational terms in these last six months than in five years previously.

You have to realize that through the initiative of France and the UK, we Europeans demonstrated for the first time that we were capable of intervening decisively, with our allies, in a conflict on our doorstep. That is remarkable progress, compared with the wars in Bosnia and Kosovo in the 90's.

Finally, Libya showed the urgent nature of reinforcing Europe's military capabilities. For a long time France and the UK had tried to do so by means of concrete projects. Libya only strengthened our determination. Europe will have no defence worthy of the name without robust military capabilities and structures and real industrial and technological policies. Franco-British cooperation is at the forefront of developments in European defence, and it can trigger a positive dynamic in Europe. It's in all our interests to ensure concrete progress is made in this field, undogmatically and without excluding anyone.

You are probably unaware of this, but our two countries alone represent almost half of total European defence budgets and two thirds of defence R&D budgets. Our two countries also provide half the forces deployed in operations abroad.

In Libya, we demonstrated we were stronger together – and we'd scarcely even begun this work of convergence. In the future, when we've successfully concluded this work and put the Joint Combined Expeditionary Force that we have planned fully in place, we'll be even stronger and more able to react in the event of an international security crisis.

## **Conclusion**

Ladies and gentlemen,

Today France and the United Kingdom face the same challenge. It may seem far from Edinburgh, but I assure you this challenge is on our doorstep : on the southern shore of the Mediterranean. If we fail, we'll all have to bear the consequences.

The UK and France share the same values of democracy, freedom and justice. We were among their first champions.

We believe that people who pursue these values in the Arab world – just like anywhere else – should be allowed to do so, and that they should be supported if necessary.

As I told you at the beginning, France and the United Kingdom are very close, and I mean that in both senses. We have comparable potential and ambition and we are constantly strengthening our relations.

If we want to be equal to the tasks we face on the UN Security Council but also in NATO and on Europe's Common Security and Defence Policy, we must maintain our military potential and sufficient forces to defend ourselves and others when required by Security Council resolutions, as we did in Libya. Both our countries clearly understand that we can only do so by joining forces.

Indeed, our success in Libya shows the great consistency of our closer cooperation. We're looking at the long term, and the next Franco-British summit in the coming months should once again focus broadly on defence issues. It's a strategic priority for our two countries. The initial reservations of some, in both Paris and London, have disappeared, and this really is a genuine partnership on all levels. That's why I have full confidence in the future of our cooperation, and in this renewed alliance between our countries.

