Speech of His Highness
Sheikh Tamim Bin Hamad Al-Thani
Amir of the State of Qatar

AT

The Munich Security Conference

16-18 February, 2018
Munich
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It gives me great pleasure to address this distinguished audience. Germany is an especially appropriate venue for a meeting to discuss the present-day global order, and the threats to it. A nation that stands for the values of freedom and the rule of law, Germany is also a major pillar for the European Union, seen by many as a bastion of coexistence and trans-national cooperation.

While all of us are aware of the challenges facing the European Union, we in the Middle East—and I’m sure this is true elsewhere—see the EU as proving that peaceful coexistence and collective prosperity are possible in the aftermath of horrific conflicts.

As a body, the EU demonstrates that a union can establish shared security based on mutual interests, even amongst people who tore themselves apart in war.

Like it or not, Brexit is an example of a peaceful resolution of differences. No diplomatic ties were cut, and no blood was shed.

There is a lesson here for us in the Arab region. The European Union provides a framework for regional governance, and the peaceful arbitration of disputes. This framework is sorely needed in the Middle East.

Today, many governments and international powers act with impunity, without regard for human rights. The lack of accountability for good governance is
widespread. It's no wonder that people are losing hope…individuals who would otherwise have stood trial for war crimes against their own people are possible candidates in presidential elections!

An audience such as yourselves must be able to see why many people, even entire nations, are losing faith in international accountability. They think—arguably right—that many of the global mechanisms for conflict resolution, and the maintenance of rights have been paralyzed and sidelined.

My region provides many examples: Palestinians since the Nakba, seventy years ago; the situation in Syria, Libya, Somalia, Afghanistan and Yemen.

The suffering of people in my region may appear distant to an audience in Munich, but the waves of refugees make these injustices a European concern.

And the darkness of terrorism now casts a shadow on the entire world.

Suffering and injustice pave the way for terrorism to flourish. Evil actors will twist religious dogmas to poison the minds of desperate people. Extremist religious doctrines pose an undeniable challenge to all of us.

They exist in every culture, and the Islam has no monopoly on them. It is clear that we are obliged to combat religious extremism. But, having said that, attributing violent terrorism to extremist ideologies is too simplistic. It does not explain why violent extremism has become a major threat in my region, while extremist ideologies can be found anywhere.
The patterned failure of states in my region, to provide basic needs to its people, paves the way for extremism. So often, the very states which neglect basic needs also block every possible pathway for peaceful reform.

Huge sections of the population in many Arab countries have been marginalized, giving oppressive regimes the chance to use sectarianism as a tool to dominate multi-faith societies.

To this, we must add the growing sense, that the youth in my region hold: that the world is defined by hypocrisy and injustice.

To many in the Middle East, there is a feeling that the “universality” of human rights of post-War order always rang hollow.

This is one of the most glaring consequences of failure to resolve regional conflicts and address grievances: people lose faith in their government, and have no way to peacefully affect change.

Today as we speak, ISIS is militarily defeated in Iraq and will soon be defeated in Syria; but the real battle, laying the foundations for peaceful coexistence, has yet to begin. We must turn our attention to the ending circumstances which afforded ISIS a continuous stream of willing recruits in the first place.

These circumstances are complicated.

In the Arab region, a group of leaders rising to power after independence had promised to deliver freedom, social justice and Arab unity to their people.
Instead of fulfilling those promises, the Arab state has degenerated to become one in which the people have to choose between, “security” in a basic physical sense, and on the other hand, their dignity, freedom, and aspirations for social justice. Instead of wise leadership facilitating gradual reform, regimes corner people into fighting for their dignity.

The carnage which followed the counter-revolutions, after the Arab uprisings of 2011, has shown all of us what end results of this stark choice is.

The people called out for dignity, and they were answered with violent silencing.

This cycle needs to end. This gathering together here in Munich needs to bear fruit. We need to walk away with a clear picture of how to end conflict, and provide basic rights and security to our people.

After noting that eight of the 10 most lethal conflicts are rooted in the wider Middle East, this year's Munich Security Report attributed these conflicts to a definite set of factors:

- Lack of Social and Economic Progress
- Growing Sectarian Divisions
- Regional Rivalries, and
- Shifting Engagement from External Powers.
I would also add two factors:

- Recklessness, and
- No framework for providing shared security.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is no secret that during the most recent GCC crisis, my own country was able to experience some of the factors in full-force. It has been a futile crisis manufactured by our neighbors, some of whom are major regional players, once believed to be stabilizing factors on the world stage.

That is no longer the case.

The adventurous policies have undermined regional security and the economic outlook for the GCC as a strategic bloc.

Had regional relations been guided by a set of solid governance and the rule of law, we would not have seen nations with limited resources being blackmailed into bartering their foreign policies for external aid. Other nations, who also needed financial aid, refused the offer, and stood for their values.

Had regional relations been guided by a set of solid governance principles and rule of law, we would not have seen the exploitation of wealth, power or geographical constraints to satisfy the thirst for power.
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Even with the regional turmoil, Qatar remains one of the most peaceful countries in the world.

Despite the obstacles imposed upon us, including a full land, air and sea blockade beginning 5th of June of last year, Qatar secured new trade routes, accelerated economic diversity, and bonded together in unity.

Qatar emerged stronger.

We have continued to trade with the wider world. We have not missed a single shipment of liquefied natural gas during this time. This is vital to the rest of the world, as we are the world’s second-largest exporter of natural gas and our exports ensure the stability of global energy supplies.

By diffusing the impact of the illegal and aggressive measures imposed on our people, Qatar preserved its sovereignty. This failed blockade shows how small states can use diplomacy and strategic economic planning to weather the storms of aggression from larger, ambitious neighbors.

Those aggressive actors wish to use small states as pawns within their power games and sectarian conflicts. It is vital to the interests of the people of the Middle East to guarantee the independence and sovereignty of states like Qatar, which refuses to be forced to take sides in the stand-off between two entrenched camps.
Preserving the sovereignty and the independent decision-making of countries like Qatar ensures accelerated development...development like free media and free speech that the “blockading countries” insist we surrender.

In front of this distinguished audience,

I believe that it is time for wider regional security in the Middle East. It is time, for all nations of the region to forget the past --- including us --- and agree on basic security principles and rules of governance, and at least a minimum level of security to allow for peace and prosperity.

All nations in the Middle East, small and large, need to agree on a baseline of co-existence, backed by binding arbitration mechanisms, and enforced by the collective body of the region.

We can mirror the efforts of the European Union's ability to find common ground to rebuild and prosper. Shifting from feuds to cooperation will require that we each be held accountable, like:

allowing the flow of humanitarian aid to pass across borders, allowing safe and free passage for families, providing access to religious sites to all faiths, preventing the desecration of historic and religious sites, and respecting common trade routes.

This should not be a pipedream. Too much is at risk. The Middle East is at the brink…it is time to bring it back. All of us here, especially those who enjoy more power and wealth, have a responsibility to solve the conflict.
The Middle East will need help, from the larger international community to succeed in such a mission.

I ask all nations in the Middle East to accept an invitation to participate in such a holistic security agreement.

I urge all nations to continue putting diplomatic pressure on my region to get this done.

We must start with a regional security agreement before the Middle East can put the turmoil in the past.

With the greater good in mind, we remain hopeful for a future where true security, both for the state and for the individual, is established for all nations.