



**COMMENT BY THE PRESIDENT OF THE FRENCH REPUBLIC
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The best friendships are those that are able to adapt to the issues of the present and prepare the challenges of the future. Because we share this conviction with His Majesty Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahayan, we decided, immediately after my election as President of the French Republic, to open a new chapter in relations between our two countries and to take the strategic partnership that has existed between us since 1997 to a new and even more ambitious level.

In January 2008, during my visit to the United Arab Emirates, we took the historic decision to install a French military base in Abu Dhabi, at the request of the Emirates authorities. I am very happy, and also very moved, to return today to inaugurate this base, which marks a historic milestone in the friendship between our two countries and between our two peoples.

We have been strategic partners for 15 years, linked by the defence accord we signed in 1995. With this permanent base, our commitment alongside you becomes even stronger. This base proves that our country is prepared to commit itself fully, together with you, to the security of the region. It proves that France is prepared to take every risk for its friends. The message is clear: we will stand by you under all circumstances, even the most difficult. It is said that it is in adversity that one recognises one's friends. You should know that you can always count on us if the security of the region were ever to be threatened.

With this first French military base in the Middle East, our country also shows that it intends to be fully engaged in the security and stability of this region, which is crucial to world equilibrium. France has many allies in the region; our presence in Abu Dhabi will enable us to reinforce our strategic partnership with them.

Last but not least, we hope that solid multilateral defence cooperation will develop among our allies in the region. For this reason, we wanted to fully involve Qatar in the recent French-Emirates "Gulf Shield" military exercise. In a region as troubled as yours, it is essential that the countries defending the same values work together to reinforce their common security.

But the exceptional ties that exist between our two countries are not limited to the strategic dimension, important as it is. They are also political, economic and cultural.

The history of our relations proves, if proof be needed, that the soundest friendships are not necessarily gauged by how long they have lasted. France, which was virtually absent from your region thirty years ago, is fully engaged in it today. No one knows that better than you, the United Arab Emirates, who have become one of our leading partners in the Middle East. It took vision and great determination to build such a strong relationship in such a short amount of time and I pay tribute to His Highness Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahayan, the founder of the federation, who did so much to bring our two peoples together. Together with His Highness Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahayan, we are treading the path that he showed.



The strength of our friendship also springs from our commitment to our shared values of tolerance, openness and dialogue. We express these values in our common struggle to achieve a more just globalisation and in our common commitment to peace, especially for the peoples of the region.

Today the United Arab Emirates sets an example for the region and the world. Because you are a beacon of stability in the Middle East, because you are a model of moderation and tolerance in a region often cruelly lacking them, and because you are one of the first artisans of the dialogue of cultures, we stand, and will always stand, with you. France is proud to be your friend.

The United Arab Emirates is also living proof that one can be true to one's culture and one's identity without turning one's back on modernity and those who are different. You are the best response to the extremists and fundamentalists who are bent on imposing on us, by hook or by crook, a suicidal confrontation between Islam and the West. This confrontation must at all costs be avoided and we can only achieve this together, thanks to countries like yours. Therein, also, lies the meaning of our friendship.

At the heart of our relationship, there are also very strong economic ties that have been steadily strengthened over time. The development of these relations owes much to your leaders who, by opting for modernity, openness and diversification, fostered the growth of an extraordinarily dynamic economy. I am delighted that more and more French companies are deciding to be part of its development.

With His Highness Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahayan, we also set new horizons for our cooperation by signing a historic agreement on civilian nuclear energy in January 2008. I have always considered that civilian nuclear energy is the energy of the future and that it should no longer be reserved for only a few Western countries but that instead all countries should have access to it, provided, of course, that they comply with international rules. The agreement we have signed will enable France to assist you in setting up the institutional framework required for the development of a nuclear power sector. And I am delighted that cooperation between French and UAE institutions in charge of the project has already made considerable progress.

There is one last pillar in our friendship that is particularly important to me. I refer of course to our cultural relations, which have just experienced an unprecedented expansion, with the initiation of extraordinarily innovative projects. The Louvre Abu Dhabi and the Sorbonne Abu Dhabi are the two best examples, but many other French institutions have established similar partnerships, primarily in the field of higher education. These projects owe much to the Emirates authorities, who made a commitment to the future and to their dynamic young people by placing education, research and culture at the heart of their policies. These are tangible examples of the dialogue of cultures that our world so greatly needs.

In a world in which challenges abound, our friendship is a treasure, it is a promise for the future. We must do our utmost to sustain and nurture it. You may count on me to work with your leaders to build a common future for our two countries and our two peoples.