

RENAUD GIRARD

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Bertrand COLLOMB

Après vous, je vais donner la parole à Renaud Girard, grand reporter au *Figaro*, qui va, peut-être un peu dans la ligne de ce que vous venez de dire, nous dire les erreurs qui ont été faites par les occidentaux au cours des dernières années.

Renaud GIRARD

In matters of world policy, I have always been amazed by the strategic errors that we, the Western democracies, are capable of committing. Given their education and philosophical background, it is reasonable to think that Western leaders would take only rational, carefully considered decisions. They do not.

I put the strategic errors we Westerners commit into five categories. The first is what I call blind deregulation. The second is not practicing what we preach. The third is deserting the diplomatic field too quickly. The fourth is putting emotion before reason in the ultimate foreign policy decision, going to war. The fifth is giving up on dissuasion, which undermines our credibility. I will quickly run through these errors. I am starting my chronometer to keep within the eight-minute limit.

Blind deregulation. In the West, we have often wrecked systems that took us many years to build. There is nothing wrong with revolution or tearing down a system, but the mistake we make is not knowing what comes next, not having anything to replace it with. Take a very straightforward example. On 15 August 1971, the United States, through Nixon's decision on the dollar, toppled the Bretton Woods system, which they had built, without having the slightest idea what international monetary system would replace it. The outcome is that today we still have a rather messy system where the world's second-leading economic power and leading manufacturing power, China, does not play by the same rules as its trading partners. As you know, China does not let its currency float, while its partners do.

Here is the second strategic error Westerners often commit. For various foreign or domestic policy motives, we break the rules we have thought so much about and worked so hard to forge. A good example is the 3% that the French, who always think they are the smartest people in the world, set as the budget deficit's upper limit, a rule they were the first to break. Breaking a rule we freely set ourselves is harmful. It actually impedes progress. Today, breaking the 3% rule keeps Europe from moving forward on the budgetary, tax and social standardisation necessary for the euro zone's survival.

The third strategic error is disdain for details in following through, which I call deserting the diplomatic field. Diplomats are capable of reaching landmark agreements but are too impatient or lazy to follow through on them. Here is an example. On 21 February 2014, the German, French and Polish foreign affairs ministers managed to broker an extraordinary deal, reached very quickly in a day and a half of talks in Kiev, between the pro-Russian President and the three opposition leaders, who shook hands in front of cameras from around the world. It was an extraordinary success that stopped the bloodbath in Kiev. But the ministers departed on Friday night. Ours had already left for China a bit earlier. They deserted the diplomatic field. They disregarded the lesson of the great Kissinger who, after the Yom Kippur War, stayed in the Middle East for over three weeks to make sure the ceasefire agreement would be observed. We neglected that lesson. We neglected basic diplomacy. After brokering the Ukrainian deal, the French and Germans



should have rung up Vladimir Putin saying, “We are in Kiev, we are in the neighbourhood, why do not you invite us over for dinner?” I think he would have. If we had said to Putin, “Listen, Vladimir, Sebastopol will always be yours, Ukraine will never join NATO — we, the French and Germans, vetoed that at the Bucharest summit, remember?”; if we’d told him, “Of course Russian will always be the second official language in eastern Ukraine,” I think he would have taken the deal. Now we have got a war that has taken 5,000 lives, and it is extremely hard to restore peace through the Normandy format.

The fourth strategic error is putting emotion before reason when mulling over the decisions to start our recent wars. Of course, I want to talk about humanitarian wars. They will always exist. Before 1914, they were called humanitarian interventions. I think our leaders should answer three questions before giving military operations a green light. I want go to Libya, Syria or Iraq to overthrow a dictator: what do I replace him with? As long as I have not found a replacement solution, I will not do it. The second condition, invoked at the United Nations, is the duty to protect civilians: can I guarantee that the civilian population will be better off after my military intervention than it was before? Third question: I am not carrying out this military operation with my money but with the taxpayers’ money, in Libya’s case with the French and English people’s money. Am I looking out for the medium- and long-term interests of my nation, the country I serve? The Libyan intervention clearly did not safeguard France’s medium- to long-term interests.

The fifth strategic error Westerners often commit, I think, is abandoning dissuasion. We do that at our own risk. It undermines our credibility. Here is an example: I think Barack Obama was wrong to say he would “put boots on the ground” against the Islamic State. I believe in the classic theory of dissuasion, in hiding your intentions and keeping the enemy guessing about what you are up to.

My conclusion is this. I think the Western democracies have allowed domestic policy considerations to have a bearing on their foreign policy too often. When domestic policy, which is necessarily short-term because there are elections, dictates the outlines of foreign policy, which is necessarily long-term, it is always a recipe for disaster.

Thank you.

Bertrand COLLOMB

Thank you.