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## Michel FOUCHER

Among the cross-cutting topics mentioned in several sessions of this Doha Conference, I have noted that of borders and that of regional orders.

### i) The return of borders is a reality and a symptom.

**Reality** related to the requirements of security and control needed for the exercise of sovereignty. Borders are becoming visible again, in those places where they had been removed from everyday practices in a situation of intense mobility, mainly in North America and in Europe. During a period of threats, it is appropriate to strengthen the exercise of basic sovereign functions and let it be known to opinion makers. The border is a political stage and its evocation has become an obligatory feature of all election campaigns in the western democracies.

Threats and pressures therefore on the borders but also a growing attraction for countries with advanced economies, protective of rights, such as the European Union. Globalisation from the bottom is one of increasingly sharing information about the state of the world. Digital technology is a powerful mobility vehicle even in non-crisis situations; it allows comparisons to be made. We need to live with this mobility of attraction.

I would add that if we had had the courage or the foresight to define the boundaries of the European Union, an obstacle to exercising an external policy would have been removed because we would have known where the outside begins. But the "without borders" ideology ruled this out.

**This reaffirmation of borders is also a symptom, at several levels.**

**A cultural, political and even anthropological symptom**, of a malaise not in civilisation according Sigmund Freud but globalisation. This can continue only if the reality of national political constructions is taken into account, in particular at the symbolic level. All human communities need to make a distinction between the inside and the outside. If this boundary is blurred by movements and messages standardised by the hegemony of an exclusively economic interpretation of the world, it is not surprising that identity issues are necessarily drawn into political deliberations, not always in the best of terms, since identity is not a regression to an imagined past (it was better before) but it is first and foremost a projection of the future that a society gives to itself. We have **wanted too much to reduce government to governance.**

**A geopolitical symptom** of a desire to change the status quo more or less everywhere. In Eastern Europe, brutally in Ukraine, surreptitiously in the Crimea, more subtly but even more enduringly in East Asia, in particular in the



South China Sea, an issue spoken about widely in several sessions. We should at least talk about this Sino-US game of go and ask whether an American policy of “*containment*” would be able to succeed a second time. I doubt it. But some powers in the ascendancy are looking for their place in the sun and a stable regional environment, i.e. under control. It is legitimate. Others are engaging on a revisionist path of re-establishing areas of influence.

A way out of a crisis is sometimes dealt within in the form of **partitioning**. This was the case in the Balkans and in the Sudan, with the outcome that we all know. It is a temptation that is found in some circles in the Middle East. The risks of a division of Syria have been mentioned here, according to a Ukrainian scenario.

Jean-Marc Ayrault stated on Monday morning, and I quote, that “*calling into question the borders of the Middle East is a dangerous game*”. It is under way in the north of Iraq and Syria, with the Kurds, even if the disunity of Kurdish factions restricts its scope. Scenarios of a reconfiguration of the Middle East have been circulating, particularly this year, 100 years after the Sykes-Picot agreements which, it must be remembered, were not applied. Of this agreement, on the sharing of influence and not of borders, there only remains in reality just 700 km of boundary lines stemming directly from the agreement of 1916: the Syria-Jordan border and the southern half of the Iraq-Syria border. Franco-British rivalry produced only 1,050 km of boundary lines, i.e. only 7% of the length of the borders of the Middle East.

In the Middle East, the border policy is not a Western invention. The richness of the Arabic, Turkish and Persian vocabulary is testimony to this fact. And the boundary between Iran on the one hand and Turkey and Iraq on the other hand dates from the peace of Zuhab of May 1639; it has not moved since then, except in the extreme south, with the Algiers agreements of 1975.

## ii) The search for regional orders: the case of the Middle East

**In the geopolitical syntax of the Middle East**, politics comes first. The call by rival political forces for external support is constant and as frequent as the interference by the great powers, at least since the beginning of the 19th century. There has been always been a search for outside sponsors and protectors, first in the region and then in Europe and the rest of the world.

When Nehru extolled to Nasser the merits of parliamentary pluralism, he retorted that dictatorships or an authoritarian regime limited outside interference and preserved the State’s room for manoeuvre. Moreover, in mixed societies, national construction is carried out with the risk of domination by a minority group and, in the event of a revolt by the excluded majority, ethnic cleansing with its series of mass murders. And conversely, when the majority group rules without sharing. This was the story of Lebanon and today of Syria, a player that has become an issue, and Iraq. **These are “blood lands” like the Balkans or Anatolia were yesterday**. Historians have amply demonstrated this characteristic of the drawn-out end of the Ottoman Empire, where terrorist type actions were invented long before the killings of nihilistic inspiration in Europe.

**How can this situation be resolved?** We have discussed at this conference a Doha Process, an eastern attempt to replicate the Helsinki Process. Why not? With whom? We also have discussed the need to come up with an internal vision of the region and no longer an imported one. Who will do it?

The future American president has hung over the conference, negatively, due to his lack of predictable vision of these subjects. But who can believe that a “deal” between Moscow and Washington would pacify these blood lands? It seems to me that the priority should be to encourage negotiations between the real regional players: Iran, which is asserting itself and will not go back its commitment to Shiite revenge and Saudi Arabia in the first place, which must deal with the growing perception of insecurity and vulnerability. Ryad and Tehran must talk and come to an agreement on the outline of a **regional order**, reducing interference in the internal affairs of the States. But as the Persian saying

goes, “it takes two hands to applaud”. Then bring in Turkey, Israel and other countries of the Gulf. The UNSC could guarantee the agreements obtained but not impose them. An ambitious project for the diplomatic delegations.

And at the internal level, not to think that the solution could come from permanent partitions – it is not a question of redrawing international borders around homogeneous cores - but coming up with decentralised schemes in Syria (with guarantees of security) and a kind of confederation in Iraq, which protects the minorities and gives them a place in the central power and redistribution.

To conclude, I believe that, under the appearance of a step backwards, geopolitical issues are asserting themselves that are both recurrent (intermingled conflicts which are unending because they are internationalised civil wars) and new: the difference with the past is that, in the absence of an international order of a new type, the solution to the crises in the Middle East depends firstly on the interest of the regional powers to arrive at something close to a regional order, either by sharing influence, on the basis of the existing realities, or in the best case scenario, through a collective security scheme. A huge programme. All the more reason to work towards it!