

DEBATE

Mohamed LAÏCHOUBI

Monsieur Laïchoubi, académicien et ancien ministre algérien. L'intérêt de ces espaces de réflexion, c'est de pouvoir faire le lien entre les différentes réflexions des différents panels. Alors je voudrais très rapidement reprendre ce que vous avez dit, vous avez évoqué l'intérêt de développer des zones dites marginalisées ou parfois des zones périphériques. Quand on regarde ce que certains ont qualifié de système-monde, que l'économiste coréen avait qualifié de triade, on s'aperçoit que ce système-monde avait une asymptote, a eu des limites puisqu'il a laissé des zones totalement marginalisées. Cette idée, cette initiative, est donc nouvelle de ce point de vue-là. Récupérer des périphéries, les remettre dans le monde. Est-ce qu'on pourrait partager la réflexion critique qu'ont les différents panels, notamment ceux de ce matin ? Quand on a évoqué la politique de Trump, certains ont fait part d'attribution en disant « on va attendre que Trump parte, que l'Amérique revienne et certainement nous allons avoir de nouvelles idées, de nouvelles visions ». Lorsqu'hier je m'étais permis modestement de dire que, dans les initiatives, nous devions certainement avoir plus d'audace, est-ce que vous n'avez pas l'impression qu'il y a des espaces et des logiques qui ont atteint des asymptotes et que le monde a intérêt à leur dire qu'il faudrait qu'ils sortent de leur asymptote et que tout le monde se rejoigne, peut-être pour tenter de créer une nouvelle vision avec toutes les réserves, toutes les réflexions que vous avez évoquées, à savoir veiller à ce que ce nouveau système ne soit pas hégémonique, veiller à ce que ce système soit consultatif et qu'il apporte l'intérêt ? Mais c'est clair que pour ces régions, le débat est là, c'est différent. Marginalisées, périphéries, subissant toutes les difficultés, aucune infrastructure, pas de structuration du développement, et on ne leur propose pas, et quelqu'un vient et leur propose tout ça, il est évident que la tentation est là. Alors entre la marginalisation et les nouvelles initiatives, est-ce qu'on ne devrait pas réinterroger nos amis stratèges, dans ces espaces d'opulence de l'époque, pour leur dire « est-ce que vous ne pouvez pas appréhender le monde différemment ? ». Je vous remercie.

Shiv Vikram KHEMKA

The current geopolitics, which seems to be fracturing and going back to the creation of inward-looking blocs, is a hiccup in the arc of history, as Carlos Ghosn said, because globalisation is inevitable. Looking at the leadership role China has taken in going to countries all over the world and building connectivity, the US stepping out of that role and not really taking leadership, and Europe having its own issues at the moment, a new space is being created, and there will be a new global architecture. I am part of the BRICs council and see interesting things happening there. I am part of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation and see interesting things happening there. It is about us as a team.

Repeating what Dr. Bayu said, we are very focused on a very particular elite view of the world. The World Economic Forum data that came out a year or two ago says that 8% of people have 83% of the wealth, and if eight people out of 100 had all the food and drinks for the next three days for our conference, we would have a crisis here. Therefore, we need to step up to the plate as global leaders and realise that what we are trying to do is not just about the zero-sum game of power politics that existed 100, 200 or 500 years ago. It is really important for leadership to grow up and move out of this adolescent stage. We need adults in the room to ask how we get the planet functioning, because it really is one world; with all the connectivity that exists today, everything is in everyone's mobile phone or TV, and we are potentially sitting on a big disaster socially in terms of refugee crises, migration and many other problems compared to what we have today, if we do not deal with the core issues of global economic growth, global economic leadership, political leadership and constructive dialogue.

LEUNG Chun-ying

Regarding the question on multilateralism, I read in a Hong Kong newspaper report this morning about Japanese Prime Minister Abe's visit to Beijing, the first such visit in seven years. The two countries announced six major points of agreement, one of which is the question of the two countries working together in third-party infrastructural projects.



This is multilateralism. It is not about Japanese building projects in China or the Chinese doing it in Japan; it is Japan and China doing it in third countries. That is welcome; it is a new development and really underscores the nature of BRI.

Bayu KRISNAMURTHI

The only certainty in this issue is that the global population is growing, demand for resources is growing, and we need to come up with the solutions, because business as usual will doom us. We will welcome any initiative willing to take the risk and make the effort in solving those problems. China is not always compelling for Indonesia; we have our history with China, but now we can become friends and work together in so many aspects because we see the same threat. The BRI needs to be an instrument to solve that problem.

Jean-Pierre CABESTAN

Despite what has just been said, there seems to be little chance for the BRI to become a multilateral initiative. One of the figures you have not mentioned is that 89% of the infrastructural investments which have been realised in BRI were funded by China and built by Chinese companies. One thing you have not mentioned is the reaction of the US and Europe to the BRI, and that may be one positive indirect impact of it, that both the US and Europe have put some money together to build and finance infrastructure in Africa and elsewhere, so it is a kind of reaction to BRI.

My question is about two issues you have not mentioned very much: profitability and debt. Two weeks ago I was in Djibouti for a conference, but I took advantage of it to observe what the Chinese are doing there. I am sure you are aware of the military base which was built last year. However, none of the projects in which China has been involved is profitable. The train from Djibouti to Addis Ababa is losing money; there are two trains a week. The Diwali multipurpose port is losing money. There is a new free trade zone with no one in it, built by China, and it is losing money as well.

Djibouti has a debt of USD 1.4 billion to China, and the GDP is USD 1.8 billion. Djibouti does not have the money to pay back that debt to China. What will happen? Maybe China will take over the Diwali multipurpose port, maybe another country will save it, but these two questions need to be addressed, because countries like Djibouti are in a difficult situation in terms of paying back the debt and making the projects profitable. One of the drivers of the BRI, at least in this part of Africa, seems to be much more geopolitical than economic.

LEUNG Chun-ying

Regarding the question of profitability, the Hong Kong experience and the Chinese experience is that we do not look at the financial return alone. Financial return is important, as some projects have to be bankable, but we also look at economic and social benefits. Looking only at the financial bottom line, the Hong Kong underground would never have been built, the high-speed rail system in mainland China would never have been built, and so on. That is one point.

China is sharing its own experience with other countries in the world. China raises a lot of debt to fund its own infrastructure projects within countries, so we are not preaching without practising. China is sharing its experiences with other countries.

You also mentioned debt. It is the same argument. These infrastructure projects are important, and one should not just look at them as if they were purely commercial and privately funded projects.

Astanah ABDUL AZIZ

I was quite pleased to hear some level of understanding on Malaysia's position on the issue, both from yourself as well as Mr. Leung. Mr. Leung, you have certainly captured the Malaysian position very well vis-à-vis the Prime Minister's decision in recent weeks about the infrastructure projects in Malaysia. The Prime Minister at no point suggested that it was China's fault in coming up with these projects at cost to Malaysia, etc. The Prime Minister was very clear that the problem Malaysia is facing with those couple of projects vis-à-vis China, as well as the project we have seen suspended with Singapore, was very much the fault of the previous government in Malaysia, which had entered into those projects, perhaps, not in the wisest fashion. I just wanted to make that clear, and you captured it very well.



Shiv, I agreed with the initial parts of what you said vis-à-vis Malaysia, except regarding the visit of the Prime Minister to China. During the joint press conference he had with Premier Li, you suggested that he had referred to a new form of colonialism with reference to China. However, if you were to revisit that interview, his statement was in response to Premier Li asking him for his view of the trade war between China and the US at that point. He would not, as a Prime Minister, want to make an opinion so directly on an ongoing issue, so his response about new forms of colonialism, etc., was actually in response to that question rather than the deals being suspended with China.

Hailemariam DESALEGN

The BRI is one of the best initiatives we have ever seen in the global setting to address the infrastructure deficit in Africa. The main impediment to investment in Africa is the huge infrastructure deficit that has to be addressed. One of the ways that China has supported Africa is in building this infrastructure. The issue of the railway between Ethiopia, Addis Ababa and Djibouti was one of the BRI initiatives, and when it comes to this question, no country has built profitable infrastructure in commercial terms; none of the railways in Europe has been profitable. Therefore, we have to understand that this is an initiative that helps in terms of support and competitiveness through the life of those projects.

One issue that China has to address, for us in East Africa, is that these contracts have been made on a commercial basis, and usually this kind of infrastructure should be built on a concessional basis. China has to look into these kinds of issues, especially for developing countries. The debt sustainability issue is a critical one at this time, and that also has to be emphasised. Therefore, it is a good initiative, but there are issues that have to be addressed in the course of evaluating the successes.

Bayu KRISNAMURTHI

Learning from Indonesia, it is fundamental to make your own plan for infrastructure development, and after that, look for friends to support you. However, if you depend only on the initiative, you will sometimes find yourself in trouble, including trying to gauge the profitability and sustainability of your financial management. That is a very basic point, and with that in mind, we will welcome BRI.

Ronnie C. CHAN

Just to conclude, I am a short guy. I am 1.6 metres. I walk into a room and nobody notices. Who cares? However, if my name is Shaq O'Neal or LeBron James, I walk into a room and everybody will notice. Like it or not, China is not Ronnie Chan; China is Shaq O'Neal or LeBron James, and when he walks into anywhere, it matters. The world will just have to learn to live with the fact that we are there, besides the US, the EU, India and other big boys on the block, and without it the world will be a terrible one.

Going back to the question the gentleman asked, he said that we need some courageous moves. The BRI is quite courageous. The second word you used is self-centredness. Everybody, as Dr. Bayu said, had better know how to care for his own interests. Any country or individual who does not know how to care for its own interests will be in trouble. We are not talking about small guys – every nation is a big guy and better know how to take care of itself so it will not be taken advantage of by anybody, be it the US in the past or China today.

Finally, what kind of mechanism should be there to guide the future of the BRI? It is a very good question. Whatever China says, the US and some Europeans will not believe it. So be it; they will just have to learn to live with facts. For example, the West is in a room full of mirrors, and they put a straw man there so that everywhere they turn they see the straw man and scare the heck out of themselves. America, and some of the rest of the world, is having that problem. There is an echo chamber, a lot of mirrors, one straw man, scaring the heck out of themselves. Perhaps it is necessary to have a heart attack. China has historically always tried to work with its neighbours, and perhaps it will be a positive force for peace and prosperity in the world rather than what you are afraid of.

Regarding what was said about the South China Sea in the last session, I was just amazed that no one knew the facts. Do you know about the Cairo Declaration of 1943? All the land that Japan had taken was to be given back to its original owners. To whom did they give back the whole of the South China Sea? They gave it back to China, escorted by the Seventh Fleet of the US Navy. America knows this, and now they are saying that it is doing this just because



China is a Shaq O'Neal or LeBron James. Perhaps China is not that big of a guy; perhaps it is somewhere between Shaq O'Neal and Ronnie Chan. We have to learn to live with each other. I want to thank Thierry for putting this conference together. It is very useful to interact and discuss so that we can, hopefully, get to know each other better.