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Steven Erlanger

I hope we will go to the audience after Mr. Védérine. So please, have some questions, think of things you want to ask particular panellists so we do not end up having lots of empty responses to particular questions. Mr Védérine.

Hubert Védérine

This morning, we will be discussing the political consequences of Mr.Trump. They are, in my view, considerable and almost all negative, even though he may achieve a number of economic successes in the short term, at least from the point of view of his electorate. The way the consequences are assessed depends on the time span involved. The response is not the same whether his time in office lasts only until the end of this term, or whether another term follows. Who can say today whether Mr. Trump will end up in jail or be re-elected? And that will change everything about the time span, and thus, the assessment.

Moreover, I do not consider him to be an isolationist. I am well aware that the Liberals and interventionist Neo-Conservatives see him as an isolationist. I believe it is a fallacy. There have been real isolationists in American history, a long time ago. Quite simply, he is someone who wants to have free rein. His is more of a brutal short-term selfishness, indifferent to the consequences of his actions, than any kind of theoretical isolationism. Those who think he is an isolationist may be in for some surprises later on.

I agree with the first statement that there is a consistency, even if it is simplistic and coarse, in everything Mr.Trump says, and in the way he sees power relationships in the world. Beyond that, I will make four remarks.

a. Consequences on the United States itself

Mr. Trump is not at the root of all of America's geopolitical violence, but he exacerbates it on all levels. His behaviour, his words and his way of being President clearly exacerbate the climate of confrontation in the country which, some say, has never been that divided since the Civil War. There are almost, in a sense, figments of hatred in the United States. For the Democratic Party, succeeding in maintaining the support of multiple minorities while managing to engage again with the white middle class electorate at the same time – which we have mentioned today – remains a very complicated challenge. Apparently, the party has not found any moderate Democratic populist capable of overcoming this contradiction. We'll see if it does eventually.

The image of the United States is not poor everywhere in the world. First of all, Mr. Trump is highly appreciated in Israel, Poland, Saudi Arabia and various other countries. The image is generally poor, but also impressive. Even those who find this all appalling are afraid of what might happen. It is an element of strength in the brutal world in which we live.

b. Second remark. What consequences will Mr. Trump leave behind when it comes to the countries with which a tug of war is in progress?

How far will things go with China? I think they can go pretty far, both commercially and economically. I do not rule out the possibility that one day there may be an actual showdown, in particular concerning free movement: i.e., the question of Chinese territorial waters. The antagonism between the two nations' plans is clear. I imagine it will be managed when the time comes, but we are not sure of it. It's not just Mr. Trump. It started before him. It will continue after him. But the first question is: United States/China.

Russia has been mentioned. We don't have the answer to the question. Will Trump manage to impose a brutal realistic relationship with Russia, through deals? Will he be prevented from doing so by the "American back-country State", which is opposed to this policy? We can only wonder.

In the Middle East, I think he is an aggravating factor. Before the Khashoggi affair, his policy consisted of an alliance between himself, Mohammed Ben Salmane's Saudi Arabia and Netanyahu's Israel in order to impose a blockade on Iran – there should be no skirting the term – on the basis of a scandalous conception of international law, but tolerated by everyone for a very long time. Unilateral sanctions were not invented by Trump. He makes them worse, though. He uses them brutally, but did not invent them.

As things currently stand, a President like Trump could take the entire global dollarised, digitised economy hostage, using Swift. His aim is to create a civil war, to overthrow the Iranian regime. According to this theory, the result would be a better regime for the West. All this is very Dr. Strangelove! Did the Khashoggi affair wake up an anti-Saudi lobby in the United States, which has been very powerful since September 11, but relegated to the background because Iranian regime's aim of revenge was even stronger? We don't quite know. On this subject as on the others I have mentioned – except on Russia, potentially – Trump is only an aggravating factor. We don't know to what extent.

c. Trump has a demoralising effect on all allied countries protected by the United States.

This applies to all the allied countries protected by the United States: of course Europe, but also Asia. They are disoriented and helpless. What will this bring about? Does this create new alliances? We might be seeing the first signs of this in Asia. Will this trigger something serious in Europe? The most important statement in Europe since Trump became President is Mrs. Merkel's. She said it last year and repeated it since: "We can no longer truly count on them. We need to get more organised on our own". However, this has not been followed up by any practical action for the time being. Is this a trigger? In the European minds, will this open a new phase marked by the desire to be less dependent on the United States, while remaining allies? Even if it is, it remains hidden. However, this can turn into a kind of fixation, the repercussions of which will be seen in five or ten years. When it comes to the allies, it is a matter of consequences.

d. The most severe consequence

To sum up, the most severe consequence is that Donald Trump's behaviour dissolves inhibitions and breaks down barriers – and not only those of decency and good manners. It's much more serious. There is a kind of disinhibition, especially in the area which Laurent Fabius addressed very eloquently last night at dinner: the question of ecology. It has to do not only with climate, but also biodiversity, oceans, forests, etc. Trump's attitude, saying that none of this exists, and that it is negligible, justifies the worst attitudes in others. In the example given by Laurent Fabius, in the COP 21 case, there was Obama's commitment and then China's change of attitude. This had enabled Hollande and Fabius to orchestrate events in the French style and thereby create the necessary momentum. With the United States exiting, even if California still remains on board, and even if there are many companies and many researchers committed, other parties feel uninhibited, and this has exceedingly serious implications for ecology, and for everything else. However, Trump's behaviour is not isolationist. If everyone were to become isolationist, if everyone were to recoil back into their corners, it would be a lamentable regression, but it would not automatically be dangerous. His behaviour is not isolationist. He is selfish, brutal, potentially interventionist, in his own way. He endorses those who behaved like that in the past, such as Putin or Netanyahu and others. I think he can trigger a ripple effect, a spread of this type of violent attitude, not just verbal.

What kind of world does this leave us after Trump? I repeat: it depends on when the world after Trump begins.

What is the state of the Western world today? In my opinion, it is in a bad shape. For the Western world, it is already very complicated to have to admit that the West no longer holds a monopoly on power. When the Soviet Union came to an end, the Western world went into delirium, believing in an end of History where: "we won, and will impose our conceptions everywhere". Instead, the opposite has happened. History has resumed its course, but we no longer have a monopoly on it. I do not go so far as Kishore Mahbubani, the Singaporean thinker who deems this to be the end of the Western parenthesis (!). I do not refer to an "end of the parenthesis", but indeed an end of the monopoly. Even to that, the United States has trouble adapting. We can see, moreover, in the American presidential elections, that voters are swinging from one extreme to the other, each time. As for the Europeans, they are still in a kind of bubble on these issues. The upshot: the Western world is even less well positioned today, after Trump, than it was before to realistically acknowledge the new situation in the world and defend its vital interests and values.



In reality, faced with Trump, we need to get past all of these issues and ask: what will the others do? Will there be a somewhat coordinated, or at least convergent, response? It is not enough to give sermons on multilateralism. Action must be taken to make international cooperation work. I am convinced that the United States will one day return, not to the theory of multilateralism, but to the practice of international cooperation, once it has seen the relative failure of the "every man for himself" motto during Mr. Trump's term, on the Chinese question and other issues. They will come back to it, in their own way, by deciding to direct it. But that's not just yet. I believe the main question is: how will all those who are worried, shocked and helpless organise during the period between now and the time when the United States will once again become a partner in international cooperation?

Steven ERLANGER

There is a debate in Europe about how symptomatic Trump is of an altered American role in the world, or whether he is something temporary, a kind of interlude. And my impression, wandering around Europe, is that it is still "tétanisé" by Trump, still paralyzed by Trump. It really does not know how to respond and it is certainly not responding in any coordinated fashion. So that is what I wanted to ask you. Is it your sense this is changing? Are people beginning to coordinate their responses? And in this debate about whether Trump is an interlude or symptomatic of a structural change in American life, what do you think?

Hubert VÉDRINE

If Europeans assume Trump is a parenthesis, there will be no reaction. Our policy would consist of burying our heads in the sand. "We'll just wait. This is just a bad dream. It will stop eventually". If they are convinced that it will last longer, however, this belief can set something off. Up until now, Europeans have been horror-stricken at the thought of having to leave behind the situation established after World War II: American protection with constant protestations from the United States that pay too much; Europeans discontent with the terms of the protection and doubtful ever since the long-standing yet worrisome *flexible response* theory was put forward, already introducing a doubt. Yet it continued. If we think that Trump is a lasting phenomenon and that, even after him, he will still represent something profound about America, then a constructive response could come about; if that happened, we would have to get organised differently. That is why I quoted Mrs. Merkel: Germany is central to this. The ideal answer would be a combination of what Mrs. Merkel says: "We need to get better organised on our own" and an old classic French foreign policy formula: "We are friends with the Americans. We are allied with the United States but we are not aligned". In general, the United States does not like this because it considers that allies have to be aligned. If there were a shift, it would be in this direction. Are there any signs of this in Europe? Frankly, very weak ones. There are a few small signs, that can, perhaps, be transformed. This is what Emmanuel Macron wants.