

DEBAT

Steven ERLANGER

Voyons quelques questions du public maintenant. Ok. S'il vous plaît.

Mohamed LAÏCHOUBI

Merci beaucoup. M. Laïchoubi, je suis déjà intervenu, je me suis présenté. Je voudrais poser une question qui me semble essentielle. Cela a été esquissé mais est-ce qu'on ne devrait pas se préoccuper du fait que Trump est aussi le produit de l'échec des approches précédentes. Et donc il joue ce rôle de rupture. À partir de là, est-ce que l'analyse sur ces échecs et ces approches ne devrait pas être plus approfondie ? Première question. J'aimerais que mes amis panélistes y reviennent. Et au-delà de Trump, quelles seraient les évolutions ? Parce qu'il est en échec par rapport aux approches précédentes, les approches précédentes sont dénoncées, sont inefficaces, j'aimerais un œil, j'aimerais une analyse sur cette question et savoir comment on imagine les nouvelles évolutions à la lumière de cette contradiction, merci.

Steven ERLANGER

Ok, merci. Merci Monsieur.

Hervé MARITON

Hervé Mariton. D'abord en tant qu'Algérois, pour approuver la question de notre ami algérien, qui sur le premier point me paraît très importante : les échecs qui ont conduit à Trump.

But I would put two quick points. First, how is it that Trump still has a very large popular support? Are there that many idiots in the United States or is it that Trump-bashing, as we've heard from part of the panel this morning, has exactly the reverse effect? Second point: Trump has probably the useful policy - and that was part of the final analysis from our moderator - to try and exert some influence towards and in a way against Chinese expansionism today, from its near vicinity, Hong Kong, Taiwan and extended to Africa, indeed here in Morocco and many countries on the planet. So if Trump does not do that, who else? And in a way, a question, maybe to Mr. Védrine and others on the panel: would it be imaginable that other parties on the planet, if not Trump somebody else, some other country takes that sort of responsibility or is the world totally to the idea that there is one type of expansionism that has no answer, no reaction. Maybe a final conclusion: we may express many criticisms towards Trump, it's not my cup of tea but on freedom of speech, human rights, I'd still rather live in the States than in China.

Steven ERLANGER

Ok very good. Could you pass the microphone behind you to your right? Are there any questions on this side? And if I could just ask you, I should have done it before, please identify yourself.

Riad TABET

Riad Tabet du Liban. Ma question : est-ce que l'unilatéralisme américain et la guerre commerciale menée n'affaiblissent pas le dollar comme monnaie d'échange dans le commerce international ?

Steven ERLANGER

Merci Monsieur. Let's take a couple more. Right down in front. And on the aisle there.

Jean-Pierre CABESTAN

I am Jean-Pierre Cabestan from Hong Kong Baptist University. A general remark: it looks like Europeans believe more in Trump's words and less in his actions than the Asians. It looks like the Asians are more cautious and more concentrated on the actions of the Trump administration beyond the words he has uttered. So that's a general remark. Now I have a specific question to Wang Jisi or anyone who is based in the Asia-Pacific region. It is regarding the US-China confrontation. In China in the last few years there were a lot of debates about the US decline. It looks like today this debate has been forgotten because maybe the US have come back to Asia and the Trump

administration in many ways has developed some kind of super rebounding policy towards China and I am happy that Hubert Védrine mentioned the South China Sea because I would like to have Wang Jisi's views and that of other Asian representatives of the panel on the risks of crisis in the South China Sea or in the Taiwan Strait. I think Taiwan was just mentioned very briefly but that's another hot spot we should look at. Now the question is whether there is a chance for such a crisis and the other issue is whether the trade war between China and the US, as you sort of alluded to, is going to put enough pressure on the Chinese leadership to reform and I would like to have your own view on that. It seems to me that it's unlikely but maybe you have another view.

Steven ERLANGER

Thank you very very much.

Jawad KERDOUDI

Jawad Kerdoudi, je suis président de l'Institut marocain des relations internationales et j'ai deux questions pour M. Védrine. J'ai remarqué qu'on a beaucoup parlé de l'Asie, on a beaucoup parlé de l'Europe mais on n'a absolument pas parlé de l'Afrique. Alors ma question à M. Védrine : est-ce que Trump a une politique africaine ou bien est-ce que ça ne l'intéresse absolument pas ? Ça, c'est ma première question. La deuxième concerne le conflit israélo-palestinien. Trump est allé au-delà de tous les présidents précédents en reconnaissant Jérusalem comme capitale d'Israël, en annulant toutes les aides qui étaient données par les Etats-Unis aux Palestiniens et même en annulant la représentation palestinienne à Washington. On parle d'un plan Trump pour le conflit israélo-palestinien et ma question à M. Védrine est la suivante : ce plan existe-t-il réellement et quels seraient ses contours ? Merci.

Steven ERLANGER

Let us come back; let us try to answer the questions about Asia-Pacific and worries about the South China Sea. Mr. Wang, would you like to start?

WANG Jisi

Yes. Firstly, I am very much in agreement with Michael's point that the US is changing but not changing totally. Some people say that Trump is some kind of aberration in world politics and US politics. I do not totally agree. I think he represents the divisiveness in world politics, and this divisiveness is caused by increased economic inequality among many countries and also the identity politics exacerbated by inequality.

Coming to US-China relations, the relationship is influenced by their domestic politics. Criticisms of China in the US are increasing, not only in the Trump administration but the political community as a whole, so I do not think this is a short-term phenomenon. Trump is surrounded by people who have hostile strong reservations about China. Regarding the South China Sea and the Taiwan question, the two sides do not want to fight a war over Taiwan, but tensions are rising because people in China hold nationalistic sentiments with respect to the US, and people in the US are saying that China is trying to replace US domination in East Asia.

However, in practical terms, the two sides are very cautious in terms of engaging in actual military conflict. The two administrations are talking to each other, and they would be somewhat reluctant to engage in skirmishes, so I am moderately optimistic about the South China Sea and Taiwan, regardless of the rhetoric.

Steven ERLANGER

Can I ask you a slightly difficult question? China has joined much of the world order and has asked everyone to obey the rules, but the decision of the Court about these islands has been totally ignored by China, and I wonder how that fits with the Chinese view that everyone should obey the rules except themselves.

WANG Jisi

China says that it abides by international law and is a contributor to current world order. Their behaviour over the South China Sea and elsewhere has generated some concerns, of course, but the preoccupation of China today is still the domestic economy, so I do not think China will be engaged in any adventures abroad.

Going back to the question about China's reforms, it is expected that the Communist Party will hold another plenum after the Party Congress. People have some expectations of economic reform, and this may happen, but the political situation may remain unchanged. There is still a great deal of effort toward consolidating the power base of the Communist Party.

Ichiro FUJISAKI

Our relations with China are improving, so I have to be rather cautious, but I have two concerns. The first regards the South China Sea and other issues. It is a fait accompli; you do things first and then extend a hand afterwards. That is a little concerning to us. Secondly, ideas like the AIIB or OBOR – One Belt, One Road – are great ones, but there is no discussion of it beforehand. It is, 'I have a great idea; those who want to join, come on-board.' These are the two small concerns I have with Chinese diplomacy.

Michael FULLILOVE

I will respond to the argument that Mr. Trump is confronting an expansionist China. I do not really see it that way; I do not recognise that in his policies. The truth is, he has been very inconsistent on China. During the campaign he was very tough. During the first 18 months in office he coddled China; he did not confront it. You remember the Mara Lago Summit and all the early love affair with Xi Jinping. Now US policy on China has toughened up for sure. The Pence speech was very tough, reminiscent of a Cold War roll-back to China. Why has that changed? Trade is Mr. Trump's red line, and he is angry about that. Secondly, he is pushing on an open door. The truth is that everybody in Washington has toughened on China. Democrats and Republicans are getting sick of Chinese foreign policy, and it is easy for Mr. Trump to make this argument.

There is also a distraction element – while he is being attacked on Russia, he can give a big speech on China and say, 'Look over at China; nothing is happening here.' Mr. Trump will continue to be tough on China's economic approach, but it is not clear to me, coming to the South China Sea, that he will take risks on really hard security issues, because he has not done that to date and he does not care about alliance guarantees. The idea that Donald Trump will take big risks on half-submerged water features in a waterway on the other side of the world seems very unlikely to me.

The point was also made about Trump-bashing, and that is a fair point. Mr. Trump has had successes in his foreign policy. I would make two points. First of all, the scale of the successes are not what he says they are, and he does not care too much about the scale of the successes, so we have to be very careful in interrogating what those successes are. Secondly, I would ask at what price these successes come. Yes, the stronger party in a negotiation can always wring concessions out of the weaker party, but in the longer term that will tend to undercut your reliability, your reputation and your prestige. The genius of the US-led order after the Second World War was what the great American historian John Lewis Gaddis described as 'hegemony by consent'. America achieved hegemony over much of the world by consent, but if you misuse your power, if you are too strong and take every advantage you have, then that consent will go away.

RYU Jin Roy

When Kim Jong-un was firing those missiles, China, instead of calming down the North Koreans, punish South Korea when they installed that anti-missile system, and it is for our own protection, it is a defence mechanism. China penalised South Korea for installing this system to defend ourselves, and we have been bullied by China for 5 000 years. It is in the DNA of the Chinese to bully and threaten you, so I would rather have some kind of US presence to try and prevent some kind of adventurism from China.

Hubert VÉDRINE

Je réponds très vite aux deux questions de notre ami marocain et je ferai une remarque globale pour terminer.

Concernant l'Afrique, Trump n'a pas de politique africaine globale, mais personne n'en a. Il peut avoir des politiques en Afrique sur tel ou tel point particulier pouvant l'intéresser. Ce n'était pas le cas pour le moment et ce n'était pas majeur dans l'échange que nous avons.



Deuxièmement, le plan sur Israël/Palestine est un plan Bantoustan. C'est tout. Il constate que le Likoud a gagné, que les pays arabes de la région ont d'autres soucis, que plus personne ne soutient la politique à deux états, sauf les Européens et, notamment, la France avec un certain courage verbal. Ils abuseront de cette situation pour dire : « c'est à prendre ou à laisser », à mon avis.

Globalement, je voulais dire que les Occidentaux ne retrouveront pas la maîtrise globale du système mondial. Il n'y a pas de système mondial. Il y a ce que Gutierrez appelle le chaos. Les Occidentaux n'y arriveront pas. Les Etats-Unis n'y arriveront pas, même avec la brutalité de Trump. En plus, les Occidentaux ne sont pas d'accord entre eux sur ces questions. Je pense que la Chine n'y arrivera pas non plus. D'ailleurs, je ne pense pas que ce soit son projet. Même si c'était son nouveau projet, elle n'y arriverait pas parce qu'il y aura des systèmes de *containment* (endiguement) par rapport à la Chine, confus, mais malgré tout. En général, les émergents n'ont pas d'unité entre eux. Regardez l'Inde et la Chine, par exemple. Nous sommes dans un système chaotique. Chaotique ne veut pas dire la guerre, mais chaotique durable, instable. Ce qui fait que, à mon avis, un rendez-vous est devant nous entre les puissances installées depuis deux ou trois siècles, qui sont quand même relativement sur la défensive et les puissances montantes. Elles sont montantes dans le désordre.

Il existe un rendez-vous. Soit cela aura lieu au travers de dizaines de batailles dangereuses et pénibles sur tous les terrains (politiques, monétaires, militaires, etc.) ; soit, à un moment donné, s'organisera une sorte de discussion générale qui n'a pas eu lieu après la fin de l'Union soviétique, qui n'avait pas très bien eu lieu après la fin de la Première Guerre mondiale, plutôt bien après la fin de la Seconde Guerre mondiale, mais qui n'a pas eu lieu. Ma seule idée simple est que ce rendez-vous n'est pas derrière nous. Il ne s'agit pas simplement de faire en sorte que les pays récalcitrants, contestataires, s'intègrent au système déjà organisé, magnifique. Le rendez-vous est devant nous. Cela pose des questions très, très compliquées aux puissances qui étaient les puissances dominantes d'avant. C'est plus compliqué que pour les autres.

Steven ERLANGER

One of the things Mr. Vedrine just said has always intrigued me; we have traditional powers and rising powers, and there is clearly a change. Where does Russia see itself in this? Does it see itself as part of the future or hanging onto the past?

Igor YURGENS

By the course of events, our politics were reactive, because we do not represent the power and potential, economic and military, of the Soviet Union, but we still thought of ourselves as the adversary of the US in this bipolar competition. The Ukrainian crisis, the Syrian crisis, were the reaction to this. It is obvious that we cannot at the moment take this burden upon ourselves alone, but we are organising a counter-containment of the US by China and Russia, so at the moment we can be allies of China.

Hypothetically, if something goes very well beyond Putin, we can go back to the western world, but at the moment, until 2024 at least, it will not happen.

Steven ERLANGER

Maybe it is a joke, but some people suggest that Putin is doing to the US what Nixon did to the Soviet Union by moving toward China.

Igor YURGENS

It is something like this. He is a very good player, and tactically we have made a lot of successes. We are back in the Middle East and can bargain with our Palestinian-Arab-Turkish-Iranian connections. We can be a player and can pretend to be back at the top table, but the weaknesses are the economy, demography and other things, and in the long run we cannot play this role anymore.

James LOWENSTEIN

I am a retired American diplomat, so of course I worry about the image of the US. To what degree do you think Europeans and Asians separate their reactions to President Trump from their opinion of the US?

Kerry HALFERTY HARDY

I wonder, as someone who has a foot on either side of the Atlantic, if we might not also look at Trump as someone who puts his finger on the divisions, and, looking at the losers in the transition to a knowledge economy, the people in the north of England who voted for Brexit, the people, perhaps, in the French countryside, that he is not simply an American phenomenon, perhaps in an internal or domestic policy sense.

Jean-Claude GRUFFAT, Managing Director Galileo Global Associates New York I have two comments. Firstly, beyond the trade war or so-called trade difficulties between China and the US, it seems that the real issue has more to do with reciprocal market access. What we have seen lately is attempts in the US to block some investments by Chinese companies, particularly in certain sensitive sectors, and it is harder for Chinese companies to invest abroad, whereas at the same time the Chinese authorities probably do not want to spend that much money outside the country because the issues are more on the domestic side. This is one aspect.

Secondly, Hervé Mariton mentioned Trump-bashing, and a lot of people do not like Trump for a variety of reasons, which I perfectly understand. I would like to make two remarks. Firstly, he has been elected. He is the President. Secondly, he has been elected by the Americans. Everybody has a view on who should be the President of the US, but be aware of something, that only the Americans can vote.

Tatsuo MASUDA

I have a question for the former Minister, Mr. Védrine. Looking at history, more than 50% of global GDP in 1980 was produced by two countries, China and India, and history may repeat itself. Many people predict that by 2050 China will be the largest country in the world, by far, in terms of military, economic and political power. Do you think that this trend could be interrupted by something that happens between China and the US?

Steven ERLANGER

Let us have quick responses to the questions about America's image abroad and Mr. Trump.

Michael FULLILOVE

Polling data give us the answer to that. Most Western countries are distinguishing between their view of the US and their view of Mr. Trump, and in the Australian case, for example, seven out of 10 Australians still believe that the alliance is important to our security, but only 30% of Australians respect Mr. Trump. I worry, though, in the long term; thinking of the murder of Mr. Khashoggi and the disappearance of the Chinese Interpol chief, these are the kinds of questions that in the past we would have relied on, expected, the President of the US to take a lead on. Now that does not happen. What does it mean that someone like Erdogan of Turkey is a greater advocate of press freedom and of getting to the truth of Mr. Khashoggi's murder than the President of the US?

Finally, what if Mr. Trump is re-elected? It is one thing for us to suspend disbelief when America elects him once. However, what if he is re-elected?

Rozlyn ENGEL

I am not in a great position to talk about his image abroad, though I can talk about his image in the US.

Steven ERLANGER

We will hear a lot about that in mid-November. Igor, what does Trump look like?

Igor YURGENS

We have an inferiority complex vis-à-vis the Americans, but we have a superiority complex as well, so it is total cognitive dissonance. The rich people in Russia would run to the US, buy properties and enjoy life, but coming back

they would bash Trump, Americans and all of that, so it is very situational. For example, if on 11 November in Paris, by some miracle, Putin strikes a deal with Trump, then six days later, 67% of public opinion in Russia, being brainwashed by television, would say that Russia is strongly for Trump.

Steven ERLANGER

I am afraid that both our populations are the same in that sense.

WANG Jisi

It is difficult to separate Trump from the US, in the sense that his administration is trying to drive Chinese presence from the US – Chinese students and Chinese business – so that hurts the US image in China. Basically, the US enjoys a lot of popularity in China, especially among younger intellectuals and students, but if they are denied access to US universities, they will have to go somewhere else – Australia, Great Britain and elsewhere. Therefore, it depends on whether that kind of policy will continue.

Ichiro FUJISAKI

Because Japan's relations with the US have been so close and so strong up till now, we were able to distinguish between the two, Trump and the US. I hope this will last for a long time.

Steven ERLANGER

My thanks to this panel for a really interesting discussion.