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My dear Michel, what do you want to tell us?

Michel Foucher

Has diplomacy become an illusion today? I would like to offer a five-point answer, moving from realism to idealism.

International affairs involve a permanent conversation between States.

This conversation is called diplomacy. Very often, misleading words are used in diplomacy. We cheat with language. But we cannot do this all the time and on all subjects because we need to understand and to be understood. When Talleyrand, at the Congress of Vienna, proposed that a reference to "public law" be inserted in the preamble, he was not taking such a time-honored expression lightly. He meant that force is not everything, that it cannot prevail over the existence of established and recognized thrones (and, very specifically, that Prussia does not have the right to gobble up Saxony). William of Humboldt, speaking for Prussia, was not fooled, and he asked, exasperated: "What does public law have to do with this?" To which Talleyrand replied: "It's what got you here". Meaning that alongside force, there are rules which govern the recognition of States as well as participation in diplomacy and the decisions it reaches.

Diplomacy has been a collateral victim of the pandemic and the compartmentalization of the world.

We observe that international relations have hardened. We cannot negotiate remotely or by videoconference. Negotiation is a negotium, an exchange. We must see each other, gauge each other, judge each other. Many leaders have locked themselves in, physically and mentally, in their ideological certainties (Beijing) or their neo-imperial dreams (Moscow, Ankara). A brief assessment of the recent period (over 2-3 years) makes it possible to record progress and failures.

It seems that at the end of 2022 contacts are resuming, which are very significant (visit of Xi Jinping to Riyadh in December 2022). Some advances made: three examples.

- At the bilateral level.

Let us cite, for the region where we are currently, the Abraham Accords of September 2020 between the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait and Israel. This is just the beginning. These

agreements have caused renewed tension between Iran and the Emirates, accompanied by threats made to the East of the Gulf.

But after much discussion, the Emirati Ambassador returned to Tehran last August after a six-year absence. The Kuwaiti Ambassador will follow. It is true that economic and human exchanges have never ceased. *Doux commerce* here is alluring.

We should also mention the maritime border delimitation agreement between Lebanon and Israel, which has a bilateral scope but which resulted from US mediation (led by Amos Hochstein) in the absence of direct discussions between the two countries (October 27 2022).

• At the regional and international level.

The ASEAN meeting in Phnom Penh and the APEC meeting in Bangkok were successfully held, following the G20 in Bali. President Joko Widodo had taken his pilgrim's staff to Kyiv and Moscow to prevent the war in Ukraine from blocking the Bali meeting. The final communiqué turned out to be harder than expected. It took a hundred hours of negotiations in Bangkok to adopt the terms agreed in Bali.

It is true that the countries of Southeast Asia are deeply attached to their sovereignty and territorial integrity, and to peace and stability, which is a guarantee of prosperity. ASEAN has been able to marginalize the Myanmar regime. And Chinese and American presidents spoke "face to face" as they say nowadays to understand their red lines. Xi was able to make Biden understand that China survived the Sino-Soviet break-up and that it would be able to survive US restrictions.

Among the failures, the paralysis of the Security Council is glaring. We know why. The Cambodian Deputy Foreign Minister recently told me of his fear that the UN would suffer the same fate as the League of Nations. The Minsk Group on the South Caucasus was unable to prevent the two successive wars between Armenia and Azerbaijan.

Finally, the Minsk agreements are definitely dead. The meetings held between 2014 and 2021 probably delayed the war, according to the French diplomat in charge of the political committee. They were never implemented.

What is to be done when realism fails? Is idealism a recourse? Can we imagine a situation of peaceful US-China coexistence beyond Kevin Rudd's controlled strategic competition?

Reconciliation is, in my opinion, the best guarantee of security. This has been the European experience since 1945: recall of the so-called reconciliation processes:

- France-Germany (role of Catholic and Protestant churches in Alsace and Baden-Württemberg; encouragement from the US; De Gaulle's commitment to Adenauer less than three months after the Evian agreements which marked the end of the French empire)
- The German-Polish process with the Weimar triangle
- The Polish-Ukrainian (and Polish-Lithuanian) process with *Kultura* magazine and Kwasniewski's commitment to overcoming historical disputes, the massacres of 1942-43 and, above all, curbing Polish territorial revisionism.



With Russia, nothing of the sort happened. The elites never said: never again [war]. They blocked critical examination of the Stalinist past and excluded any bilateral work by historians (Katyn is contested in a revisionist sense). There is a stumbling block. It is due to the elites.

Ukraine is the scene of the fratricidal and deadly revenge of Russia's leaders for the collapse of their empire upon itself, three decades earlier, as if it were an expiatory victim. Unable to analyze the real causes of the collapse of the Russian-Soviet form of their State, they understood even less about the national consolidation of Ukraine and the other peripheral republics, which they thought was only the insidious result of a US plot.

They respond with the diplomatic categories of the 19th century – spheres of influence – and the military tactics of the 20th century – those of total war practiced by Hitler and Stalin. The Ukrainians resist with their unshakeable conviction to defend their nation and the supporters of 2022 use their ingenuity and their mobile phones as a hand weapon. What are the maps and narratives, the battles and scenarios of this war, of this 'duel on a vaster scale'?

In Russia, the overland imperial paradigm persists. Imperial configurations are not merely from overseas. As a corollary, critical examination was negated by the suppression of the Memorial movement in December 2021, which had compiled oral, written and material evidence of the crimes of Stalinism. There is the rewriting of history textbooks in Russia by Vladimir Medinsky, Minister of Culture, who worked for the rehabilitation of Stalin. In March 2022 he was appointed as a negotiator by the Kremlin: Ukraine is facing a man who denies its existence! The Eastern Orthodox Church is divided by a real schism. The Patriarchate of Moscow is turning a deaf ear to offers of dialogue from the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople.

This work is indispensable and much more useful than the expansion of NATO. It will only be possible after a change of regime, which, in the history of Russia, has been the result of military defeats since the Crimean War: in 1905, 1917 and 1989. What happens next?

Thierry de Montbrial

Thank you, Michel. I would like to make a remark before giving the floor to Tidiane Gadio. You used the expression “realism–idealism”. I am an idealist realist, which has nothing to do with cynicism, on the contrary.

The fact that some negotiations hit a dead end does not mean that realism does not work. It means that it does not work for very specific reasons. In the case of Minsk, neither the Ukrainians nor the Russians are ready to make real concessions.

I know that many people find it unpleasant to face the facts about Ukraine today. The war will decide the course of the future. The outcome depends on many factors. If either government falls, the war would end.

I think that neither morality nor moral lectures will determine the war's outcome, especially since, as we have seen during this conference, multiple aspects must be taken into account.

In any case, thank you for your contribution.