

## However utopian, president's virage has merits

Thursday, June 03, 2010

Robert Fossaert

Whether still marked by colonial traits, whether they proceed "au contraire" from simplistic democratizing wishes, or whether they provoke religious revivals, the intervention of foreign armies in these regions cannot establish a "legitimate violence" that gives backbone to the nation-state. Thence the impasse of "democratizing" wars – as in Iraq.

I have often noted and I repeat that the democratization imposed on the vanquished of World War II has succeeded brilliantly only in countries where the nation-state already existed (Germany and Italy, many parts of Austro-Hungary) or in those like Japan which were already well engaged on the way. After the collapse of "socialism" in its generally Soviet type, states have found in Europe a direction already taken – which wasn't the case south of the Balkans – and have established in Asia a violence legitimized differently, through significant material and cultural victories (China, Korea, etc.).

In conjunction with the major part of Latin America and some African fragments, all these regions bring together a strong half of the world population. This allows for ambitious dreams, but is not sufficient to guarantee a happy general evolution. Obama's virage (bend, turn), if it succeeds in fulfilling its hopes, would considerably enrich the results already acquired, because it would render more purposeful the most powerful state today, with good chances to engage a cooperative competition with the superpower of tomorrow: China.

To summarize the hypotheses that I have suggested on Obama's virage, which the National Strategic doctrine excerpted on this page confirms: following a reasoning that combines the observation of the world as it becomes with an appreciation of the reorientations of American policy that the new president has adumbrated, it may be useful to bring my conclusions together under a single list:

(1) In contrast with the Bush era, the Obama presidency appears to be full of promises, even if these promises remain to date more intentional than they are effective. Until now, he has been more of a preacher than a leader, and has advocated more than he has achieved.

(2) Nevertheless the contrast with the previous administration is so clear that the most adequate word to summarize his two first years in the White House is that of a virage. Obama seems to put the US on a new trajectory, which could be more beneficial. Beneficial to whom exactly?

(3) At the level of the United States, Obama disturbs, which is probably a good sign. If he can deflect institutional obstacles (Supreme Court and Congress), if he reduces the occasional cacophony of the (United) States, and especially if he can limit and control the multiple "states within the states" (lobbies and related institutional clients), by helping reconvert generals, admirals and other superfluous superior cadres, his strategy has a chance to lead to a better future.

4) If he succeeds otherwise in cooperating without too many frictions or slip-ups with China, Japan, India, Europe and Russia, in descending order, and with several 'emerging' countries, followed by some of Middle Eastern states (without an exceptional status for Israel), his road will be beneficial, notwithstanding the many inevitable accidents and obstacles.

(5) If, to reduce these accidents, the professor of law that Obama was knows how to help found the UN system anew and succeeds in its decentralization at the level of the large regions of the world, starting with the Security Council, his virage will mark the first steps of a major pacifying road: that of a globalization which is progressive and detailed enough for the establishment of a legitimate monopoly of violence that operates beyond nation-states.

(6) By progressively putting in place such wide-ranging reforms, his road could lead to better global coordination of economies, to a fuller control of financial uncertainties, to a sustained attention to the material and cultural needs of the most needy populations, and to a more focused attention to weather, geological and other imponderables in a planet on the way, finally, to civilization.

However utopian this vision might appear to the short-sighted, Obama's virage as seen from a deliberately exaggerated point of view, has merits that justify the effort. This effort seeks to shed light on the fact that the collective future of human societies, in a globalizing world, depends, and will increasingly depend, on a complete inversion of the relations between law and war. War seems to be a natural affliction of human societies, which have never been able to leave it behind. Law which has feebly and sporadically flourished on a bellicose planet has nonetheless created happiness in specific areas and eras of civilization. At the level of decades, despite the horrors of an ending 20th century, and a young 21st century, the law/war ratio has nonetheless improved. Obama's virage might deliver one of the means to improve it further.

*Robert Fossaert* is the author of *La Société*, an eight-volume study of human societies published between 1978 and 1996, in addition to numerous other books. The present article is part of work in progress, with *Chibli Mallat*, on law and war.