

CIDOB'S Conversations with ...



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MIGUEL ÁNGEL MORATINOS
Spain's Former Minister of Foreign Affairs and
Cooperation (2004-2010)

Will a New Beijing Consensus Replace the Old Washington One?

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Now living in Doha, where he works as an adviser to the Qatar National Food Security Program and is responsible for the launching of the Global Dry Land Alliance, Miguel Ángel Moratinos observes global geopolitics and particularly the Mediterranean –his true passion– with the same keen interest he has displayed throughout his career as a high-ranking diplomat, but, perhaps, from a slightly different perspective. As a retired professional diplomat, he sounds as if he finds liberation from the diplomatic corset to be a blessing. Instead of becoming an MP in the Spanish parliament and dragging himself through local politics, Mr Moratinos much prefers to become global himself by campaigning in favour of a noble world cause, food security, an issue that is becoming one of the hot topics of the global agenda. His well-known political vocation is best served in this way.

He sees President Obama's reelection with hope –this he believes he shares with a majority of citizens in the world— and, at the same time, with a sense of urgency: the reelected President cannot miss (again) the opportunity to show the world how U.S. leadership can deliver the goods: economic development, growth, and democracy –hence, human security. Obama, he says, has all the capacities needed to steer the course of U.S. foreign policy: “If he takes the decisions that need to be taken, he will be one of the greatest U.S. presidents. If he does not, he will go down in history as, yes, the first African-American president, but as one who was unable to project the amount of hope his election attracted.”

Many questions arose when he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2009 and now the time has come to show he deserves it. Obama's historic task is none other, according to Mr Moratinos, than to place the U.S. firmly in the new role a multipolar world requires. The steamroller mode will not do any more: a new type of leadership is needed. In consequence, there is hope indeed after his re-election, but also a strong demand for change from partners who want to feel proud about giving their support to the U.S.

Mr Moratinos points out that the Middle East was practically the one and only foreign policy issue mentioned in Obama's speech at the UN General Assembly in September 2012 (as well as the main subject discussed in the Boca Raton election debate devoted to foreign policy with Governor Romney) –thus, apparently, the U.S. administration's major concern in foreign affairs. At the UN, before an audience of 193 countries, Obama devoted time to the Benghazi murders, to Iraq, Iran, the Arab Spring. He did not mention the EU or Mexico –he actually talked about the Middle East.

So, Mr Moratinos argues, if the U.S. is genuinely concerned about the Arab-Spring tsunami, it should –the sooner, the better– fully recognize the Palestinian state. There is an original sin here: the legitimate rights of a people are being denied, while nobody in 1948 opposed David Ben Gurion's presentation of the state of Israel to the UN General Assembly. He says: "If we all agree on the two-state formula, then the U.S. should have grabbed this opportunity to restart conversations: we (the U.S. and the EU) recognize Palestine, you resume talks –and, by doing so, pave the way towards recognition of Israel by the Muslim world. That is the deal, and the U.S. should be leading it."

Mr Moratinos believes Palestine continues to be the cornerstone and the center of gravity –hence, instability– of the whole region and beyond. Arab Springs may happen and democratic governments can get elected, but if Palestine is not recognized as a genuine state, the instability affecting the entire region will persist and risks will expand. The new, most recent Gaza crisis (late November 2012) only comes to prove it. If the U.S. fails to do so, it will lose main-street support in Arab countries (where people have had and continue to have doubts about U.S. intentions). A related question has to do with the legitimacy of the new political elites in the Arab world, which the U.S. supports as part of the democratic processes set in motion by the Arab Springs: "In the present circumstances", Moratinos says, "the U.S. should establish the level of democratic guarantees that would enable the affected populations to envision their future with greater hope. Now is the time to stake his claim on the day after the change". Backing what he calls the "new independences" will be key to the immediate future of the Arab world.

The question is: will the second Obama administration turn its attention to foreign policy matters or will domestic issues prevail? Moratinos points out that the distinction between the two is a near fallacy already, but that it is bound to grow into a full one because of some far-reaching strategic changes that will come about in the mid-term: the discovery of huge oil reserves in Alaska plus shale gas technologies means that the U.S. will be increasingly self-sufficient and become, eventually, an exporter. Consequently, the Middle East will become geo-strategically less important, and the logic of the Seven Sisters cartel will be over.

The U.S. economy, however, needs markets and zones of influence in the world, and this entails how the U.S. will position itself on world matters. It will continue to have an essential role in world security matters, to be the "indispensable power". But it is crucial to know who will determine U.S. foreign policy: Congress or the White House. (This could depend, for example, on how much Obama needs the Jewish lobby to avoid the fiscal cliff.) There is an essential conceptual change on the way, which Moratinos encapsulates as follows: "Since 9/11, the world is no longer under the U.S. and the U.S. has to adapt (and is adapting) to this fact. But the re-thinking process under way can go either in the old isolationist direction or in the direction of opening up to the world".

As for Spain, the relationship is good: the U.S. feels secure and perfectly at ease with its useful ally –the problem (for Spain) being that, if no circumstances arise that require special attention, the U.S. simply takes Spain for granted. Nevertheless, Moratinos thinks it is a bit disappointing that no American President has

visited Spain for nearly ten years now, not even after the recent renewal of the bilateral defence treaties: "It is time for the U.S. to pay a little attention to one of its faithful allies", he says, "if only as a matter of courtesy".

And Spain could help with Latin America: the problems the U.S. has encountered there come from the fact that U.S. administrations in recent years have lacked a global Latin American policy. Spain can contribute its historical experience and cultural perspective to help the U.S. revert its image of being at a loss as to what to do with its Southern neighbors (which is the image of the U.S. that lingers on after regional summits and state visits).

Asia Pacific, with a high concentration of emerging markets experiencing rapid growth, is the number one priority today: we could simply not understand Obama's second mandate without China and the relations between the two countries, which are fundamental for both and for the world, too. The 21st century world, however, is global and in a global world it is wrong to prioritize one part over the others. Obama's new foreign policy theory under the "shift to Asia" concept is an error: you miss interdependence altogether, Mr Moratinos argues. If the U.S. is serious about continuing to lead, it must design a new relation with the different actors involved. New associations, such as the South American Pacific Alliance, are being conceived as communities and are based on principles of equality (unity on an equal footing), where each member has the same prominence and the same capacity of influence. The important thing, Moratinos affirms, is content: "We need a new agenda in which all community members can feel involved. At summits, we must talk in a community tone."

As for the EU (is it really the essential ally?), the U.S. (like Britain) has never quite understood what it is or stands for: on the one hand it considers that the Union's performance is not (yet) up to expectations and, on the other, it suspects the EU will/could eventually become a competitor. This perception has to change, according to Moratinos, because the West cannot help but set itself common goals and devise common strategies. Europe is no longer the world's center of gravity: today, treaties are not signed in Paris or Vienna; we travel to Doha to negotiate peace or to attend a climate change summit. The West must forget its past arrogance and wake up to reality, or it will become increasingly irrelevant. The traditional western attitude of "double standards" must come to an end. It has to change its behavior so as to be able to defend on the world stage a set of values (democracy, rule of law, human rights) it took a lot of time and effort and very hard work to put in place.

Half-jokingly, Moratinos puts forward some food for thought: "The neoliberal world is now about to agree on a Beijing Consensus (to replace the old Washington Consensus). Now, do you think the Chinese political system is a suitable welfare and open model for the 21st century? Either we defend democracy, or globalization will do away with the centuries-old fight for democratic rights."

Yes, but how? The answer, Moratinos suggests, is to change our representative model and the manner and pace of our decision-making. Or else.