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Barack Obama has just made a trip to Eastern Asia from 13 to 19 November, successively to Japan, Singapore, China and South Korea. For some apparent reason, the media focused on the trips to Shanghai and Beijing : the United States are debtors of China, which depends on them for its exports and as said by the White House host in front of Chinese students, the great challenges of our time cannot be met without the engagement of these two countries. This explains why Henry Kissinger, and Zbigniew Brzezinski, recommended the constitution of G2. It was agreed to continue strategic dialog on economic and financial matters, to inform each other about military affairs, to follow the scientific and technical assistance particularly in transport, and to take part in the Copenhagen Summit. It is necessary to say that the United States, being below Kyoto objectives, have managed to endorse part of the responsibilities to emerging countries, among them China, taking on board the extent and urgency of the problem. The questions which annoy include human rights in Tibet, parity of the Yuan- were left on side, which was criticized by republican opposition, forgetting that it is not so simple and that there are other grounds for dispute. These include the exorbitant privilege of the dollar, the origin of the financial crisis, the obstacles drawn up in front of certain Chinese exports or the consequences of military intervention for more than eight years in the "Larger Middle East".

The other stages were not purely protocol. With Tokyo, things are not as easy lately. The new government wishes to revise the leonine agreement concerning redeployment of American bases in Okinawa and re-examine the amazing sum, which it must agree to pay for it. Worse, the archipelago finally seems to realize that it is Asian and, without calling into question alliance with the United States, wants to release itself from a protectorate preventing it from playing an important role in this part of the world. It was easier in Seoul ; insofar as South Korean authorities called into question the sunshine policy pursued with the Democratic Peoples Republic of Korea and intend to conclude a bilateral agreement for free trade. But this raises sharp opposition in both countries and it will be necessary for Washington to agree to direct negotiation with RPDC.

## Which architecture for Asia ?

During this trip, Barack Obama met leaders from countries in North-East Asia, while his visit to Singapore was longer, since it was celebrating the 20th anniversary of APEC, the forum for co-operation between Asia and Pacific, to which nearly all Eastern Asia countries took part. A brief recall is essential here. Since the end of the Second World War, United States endeavored to control and transform the Asian region, what Anglo-Saxon geo politicians call the rim land : counter-revolutionary wars, network of bases, alliances and military pacts. It also included economic integration thanks to the free flow of goods and capital, which APEC was the symbol and at the same time it was to become a privileged instrument concerning it. It is also true that business between Pacific banks increased considerably, that the extraversion of Asian economies was expanded and that relationships within Eastern Asia are partly structured by the chain of production companies established by American, Japanese or South Korean firms.

But unexpected things happened over the last two decades. On the one hand, the ASEAN, gathering the ten States of Southeast Asia and a population equal to that of the European Union, reinforced its internal cohesion and became the hub for international relations in Eastern Asia, by creating the ASEAN+3, framework associating with three North East Asia countries. In addition, the rapid emergence of a huge Chinese economy shifts the center of balance.

A watershed was the 1997-1998 financial crisis, which badly affected Thailand, Indonesia, Malaysia and South Korea : the causes must be found in the recommendations and remedies imposed by the IMF, and also the decisions taken at the time by monetary authorities of the United States. APEC was of no help, bathing in the “consensus of Washington”, and Japan, which could have shown audacity, took pleasure in weak-willed declarations. The lessons from this severe crisis were not forgotten. The Asian States that could do it, constituted colossal reserves of change ; they maintained high competitive parities, encouraged their national champions and doped their sovereign funds. More recently, in regards to the systemic crisis born in the United States, they sought to support domestic demand by public investment and coordinated their monetary policies and financial (swap agreements,

constitution of regional funds of 100 billion dollars, etc), multiplied the bilateral, multilateral or regional agreements known as free exchange, at such point that we now speak about a “noodle bowl” not in conformity with the Doha negotiations cycle.

## Not to remain outside

None of the Eastern economies can do without Western markets. However, the effort of autonomy in bringing together policies and intra-regional regulation is undeniable, even if there is a long way to go and has many contradictions. However, this autonomy poses problems in the United States, which is excluded from the ASEAN+3 and which is gradually marginalized in decision-making, as they do not understand the procedures. It is important to react and rebuild ground lost under two mandates of the 43<sup>rd</sup> president, when the “long war against terrorism” was the beginning and end of all international relations and when the ASEAN summit was not attended by the White House. This subject is addressed and these are recommendations made by the Council on Foreign Relations, the oldest, most reputable and influential of American think tanks, in a report last November with the revealing title : The US in New Asia. Objectives : to accept the existence of Asian associations exclusively when it is impossible to do differently, but to control them, like so easily done in the European Union, and to be accepted in order to reorientate towards the Doha cycle. This is why Washington, for example, has just signed the “agreement for peace and friendship”, which ASEAN proposes. Obama can be proud to be the first president of the United States to have brought ten members with him for his stopover in Singapore.

That must be supplemented by a strong and active military presence in which the United States are supposed to play a maritime part, exploiting internal contradictions of a neighboring continent and controlling it for profit, according to the model established with continental Europe by the United Kingdom, between the end of XVIII<sup>th</sup> century and the Second World War. Obama’s travel clearly fits into this perspective : “the United States is back” in Asia, already proclaimed by Hillary Clinton at the time of his first official tour in an area where they had until now strong support – coincidentally, Japan, South Korea and Singapore -, while looking further into their relationship with China, which is the geographical and historical center of this part of the world. Moreover, and it was not sufficiently noticed, the presidential

trip started in an air base in Alaska, to finish in another air base, in Osan South Korea.

The rhetoric that Barack Obama deploys draws attention, in particular the recourse to personal storytelling. At the time of his recent tour, he insisted that having been born in Hawaii, he is the first native president from the Pacific at the head of this country of the Pacific, which is the United States. This however, is untrue since Richard Nixon, a Californian, already came from these shores. The major problem is that Eastern Asia, bathed by the Pacific Ocean, remains Asian and it is difficult for the United States to also claim it.