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On March 26th 2010 at 21h30, the *Cheonan* corvette belonging to the South Korean navy broke into two parts, before sinking one nautical mile (approx.1.9 km) off Yeonpyeong-do, an island located 16km from the coast of the Democratic Peoples Republic of Korea (DPRK, or North Korea) and 160km from the Republic of Korea (or South Korea). This ship, whose name can be translated into “Celestial Peace”, had a crew of 104 men among which 46 were not found inspite of a search undertaken by 24 ships and aircraft from South Korea. During this search, a diver died after having lost consciousness and a cargo ship flying the Kampuchean flag, adding another nine victims, accidentally hit a fishing vessel.

Intuition confirmed

Uncertainty about the cause of shipwreck lasted for several days, before parts of the wreckage were examined. On April 26, the South Korean Defense Minister declared that the *Cheonan* had been torpedoed confirming the initial “intuition” of President Lee Myung Bak. The Seoul government, joined by foreign experts, formed a board of inquiry excluding groups such as China and Russia. On 20 May, it confirmed that the ship was hit by a North Korean torpedo ; model CHT-02D of which, fortunately, elements (propeller, engine and steering section) were collected five days earlier by a trawler. The end of the propulsion section carried in *Hangul*, the national alphabet, the inscription “number 1” (*1beon*).

Precise details were given, whereby two North-Korean submarines had left their base on March 23. Subsequently, one of them from the *Yono* class, disappeared two days later, 30 meters under water, and launched its torpedo on March 26, at 21h22, from a distance of 3km. It returned to its homeport on 28th that same month with the other submarine, after having made a success of a rather beautiful blow for a submarine of 130 tons. It would be advisable to explain the act.

Some saw here the personal decision of a commander ; many others saw a demonstration of paranoia set in the leadership of the DPRK, considered irrational or at least unpredictable. Beyond these speculations, more concrete data was put forward : failure of monetary reform undertaken last year, which did not contribute to the recovery of the national economy,

deterioration in the health of the “dear leader” Kim Jong-Il since summer 2008 and the question concerning his succession. Pyongyangology, i.e. the discipline of trying to guess what happens to the head of North-Korea, does not involve exact science, less still that it could be the case for the kremlinology of yesteryear, but according to the assumption often chosen, the dolphin should be Kim Jong -un, third son of Kim Jong-Il. He is 27 years old, educated in Switzerland and speaks English, French and German. This undertaking would be complex, because the young man has no experience, even if he has received an international education, the transition will have to be curtailed, taking into account the age (68 years) and health of the actual leader, whereas he succeeded his own father, Kim Il Sung, following a lengthy and progressive training. In any event, the Supreme People`s Assembly met in extraordinary session at the beginning of June to carry out a renewal of all central bodies of State. From the decisions published, Western media retained only the nomination of Jang Song Taek as Vice-president of the National Defense Commission, preeminent authority in the country, whose presidency is assumed by Kim Jong Il, who is also his brother-in-law. A kind of regency would therefore be prepared and official announcement that a Work Party congress will meet next September to appoint a new leader confirms this analysis.

However, it remains to establish a link between this and the shipwreck of “Celestial Peace”. Nothing simpler : Kim Jong Il decided to sink the corvette in order to obtain approval of the military hierarchy concerning his son’s promotion and welding around him the whole population. Many “observers” have even managed to reconstitute in detail the phases of decision-making and its implementation.

However, this assumes that the presence of the Cheonan had been located and its activities monitored in a sufficiently precise way so that the pocket submarine could poster and await its prey.

A controversial investigation

Very quickly, questions were asked both inside and outside South Korea, and a controversy was born. There are several types of queries.

They relate particularly to the board of inquiry. Denying any responsibility in the drama, the

DPRK required that the question was treated and cleared up within the framework of its meetings with the United States in Panmunjom, whose job is to ensure compliance with the terms of armistice, under the aegis of UN. That was refused and the Seoul government formed a commission made up of 22 military experts, 25 other experts coming from ten institutes of research in the South Korean army and three civilians recommended by Parliament : a deputy from the opposition, which will separate conclusions from the investigation and will be sanctioned. This learned assembly, quasi exclusively military, received the “support” of 24 foreign experts from the United States, Australia, Canada, United Kingdom and Sweden. Who were they ? What were the criteria and procedures of their recruitment ? Moreover, what precise role did they play ? We cannot say as, apart for Sweden, all these countries had taken active part in the Korean War. Moreover, the 400 page Commission Report was not distributed and conclusions were notified on May 20 with one official statement or to be precise, by two official statements, one of four pages of technical nature and the second, of a page, making North Korea responsible. Surprisingly, while in the first official statement, they speak about “mixed group of civilian-military investigation” with experts from six countries, the five above mentioned and South Korea, the second is the work of a “multinational group of intelligence”, which Sweden was not part of. We understand that Russia sent five marine experts, who worked in an autonomous way and their results will return at the end of July.

The controversy also relates to evidence of North-Korean responsibility. The investigation has in fact consisted in thorough scientific tests relating to the resistance of metals and certain chemicals, which were not completed by the publication of the results. Several elements – declarations from the first days, testimonies, state of victim`s bodies, appearance of sections of the ruined corvette, deformation of the hull or the fact that an explosion should have affected marine life in that area, which was not the case – encourage some to support the thesis of failure. If an explosion did happen, is it certain that it was due to a North-Korean torpedo ? Specialists agree that the pieces recovered and chemical traces found on part of *Cheonan* give problem. Lastly, what do we know about the capabilities of these *Yono* class submarines ? If it is true that the water in the accident zone is not very deep, who authorized the presence only of one pocket submarine, they are also agitated and make the waiting difficult. Moreover, this type of submarine in general has a weak autonomy of diving and it

would have to be certified that it is armed with CHT-O2D torpedoes. The most disconcerting element revealed that the inscription in *hangul* was not engraved in metal, but painted with blue felt and would therefore not have resisted the heat created by the explosion nor to a prolonged immersion. Lastly, given though never contradicted, the presence of North-Korean submarines in the area was detected by any monitoring system, even South Korean or American. However, *Cheonan* was designed and armed to track submarines : weighting 1,200 tons, it had Mark46 torpedoes, twelve major load Mark9 and sonars. To allow the submarine to escape vigilance and military devices from South Korea, it was necessary either that these materials were insufficient or that North Korea has reached an unsuspected control regarding furtivity.

Permanent tension

It does not follow however, for those whom the shipwreck could only be provocation by the United States and/or South Korea in order to increase tension and weigh particularly on the Japanese government planning to revise the agreement concerning American bases in Okinawa. It is certainly true that pleading “the North-Korean maritime threat” and the “ambitions” of China, the Prime Minister Hatoyama Yukio moved retracted this point before resigning, and that his successor, Kan Naoto, immediately reiterated the attachment of his country to a military alliance with the United States. There also remains the precedent “Gulf of Tonkin incident”, which allowed the Johnson administration to vote for a resolution, whose text was ready for years, giving him unlimited power to engage in the escalation in Vietnam and Indo-China. However, while there had been a short military confrontation on August 2, 1964, between American and North Vietnamese fleets, in territorial waters then called the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, the North-Vietnamese attack two days later never in fact took place. The NSA, one of the intelligence agencies in United States, invented this – it was however pulled up and involved in the quasi-unanimous vote from the Congress. The existence of a precedent is not proof in itself and we cannot infer a conspiracy with political exploitation of the shipwreck to put pressure on Japanese authorities.

What experts, such as historian Bruce Cumings and political economist Selig Harrison, write about the Korean question appears definitely more important to us, insofar as the incident,

whatever its cause, is placed in context. Initially, the shipwreck occurred after immediate joint exercises, held annually between 8 -18 March. The format had been reduced a little compared to 2009, which was exceptional, but 10,000 American soldiers based in Republic of Korea and 8,000 others from Japan and United States had taken part with some elements of the South Korean army. These exercises were two fold, “*Foal Eagle*”, known as “against-infiltration” in which the Special Forces hold a determining place, and “*Key Resolve*”, what the Pentagon calls “projection of force” or RSOI for which a 175 pages handbook (FM 100-17-3) exists in the United States army, accessible on the web. One notable fact, the exercises this year also related to the recovery of weapons of massive destruction. If one adds other joint operations and military exercises – for example “*Ulchi Freedom Guardian*” (name of a Korean General from VII^o century) traditionally deployed in August – or those of the South Korean army led under directive of the United States, we are in a situation, considered as completely natural, where the DPRK is permanently the object of military preparations aiming to its destruction. The latter enters the framework of the OPLAN 5027, or plan of operations 5027, updated every year (0527-98, 5027-04), planning a war of destruction for the DPRK. In the past, the exercises “*TEAM spirit*”, which proceeded annually around the Korean peninsula, helped to polish the operational concept “*Air/Land Battle*”, the deployment of which, during the Gulf War allowed Bush Snr to gain success. In addition, according to some, the *Cheonan* could have been victim of “friendly fire”, an accident that would have been camouflaged by North Korean attacks. In any event, ships from the American navy took part in the search, the salvage ship USNS *Salvior*, the *Shiloh* cruiser and the landing ship *Harpers Ferry*. The Western media however hardly spoke about the above-mentioned exercises, nor sought to find out what these ships had done before and during the shipwreck.

They did not mention, and this is the second point, that confrontations are recurring in the Yellow Sea, called Sea of the West by the Koreans : June 9 and 15, 1999, June 28, 2002, November 1, 2004, November 10, 2009, January 27, 2010. One can even speak about battle for some of them : “First Battle” of the Yeonpyeong Island in 1999, to which *Cheonan* had taken part with some rear damage, “Second Battle” of the same name in 2002, followed by Daechong Island in 2009. In other words, the area where the shipwreck of *Cheonan* happened had already seen two important confrontations, that on 29 June 2002 having opposed, according to Western sources’, two patrol craft of the DPRK, 4 patrol craft and two corvettes

of the Republic of Korea, and with as many victims apparently on both sides.

This is not surprising. The armistice ending the Korean War had marked a demilitarized zone along the 38° parallel, but nothing had been decided concerning the maritime space in the west peninsula. A line called the “septentrional limiting line” (NLL) nevertheless was traced on August 30 1953 in unilateral way by the United States and the navy then enjoyed absolute supremacy. Consequently, the maritime line does not form legal part of the armistice clauses ; *second*, it does not prolong the line of the 38° parallel and even strongly deviates from it ; *third* : it integrates *de facto* in the territory of Republic of Korea five islands far closer to the coasts of DPRK than from its own – Baekryeong-do, Daechong-do, Socheong-do, Woo-do and Yeonpyeong-do, near where the shipwreck occurred – and *fourth* : it is not recognized by DPRK. Also added the fact that at this latitude, halieutics resources from the West Sea are abundant, particularly blue crabs, which the high period of fishing occurs between June and September. Skirmishes and clashes between boats are therefore frequent in this season. Finally, the International Convention of the Law of the Sea, adopted since and which the United States still have not ratified, would give reason to the positions of DPRK concerning the limits of its territorial waters and its exclusive economic zone.

A campaign argument

The case of the Cheonan corvette is not trivial, because of the loss of life, just like some of the confrontations preceding it, which did not hold international attention, perhaps because the victims were mainly from North Korea. Both South Korea and the United States were keen to raise the issues.

Firstly, in the local and regional elections on June 2, 2010, the election of Lee Myung Bak to the presidency in August 20, 2007 put an end to a decade of consolidation in the democracy and opening towards DPRK, under the name of (*sunshine policy*) initiated by Kim Dae Jung (1998-2003) and continued by Roh Moo Hyun (2003-2008). The return of the Great National Party (GPN) without doubt reflected the perennial existence of conservative sectors, even reactionaries, in particular among older generations marked by decades of military dictatorships and anticommunist campaigns. It would be erroneous to think that the electorate were not inclined to go to the ballot boxes that day – 62.9% of listed voters, which

is very little for this type of poll -, had been determined according to the relationship with the North. If it had created a new climate between the two parts of the peninsula and had led to significant progress in their relationship, the opening had constantly run up against work to undermine the Bush administration.

In fact, although growth had started up again, South Korea suffered terribly from the “Asian crisis” on 1997-1998 and from the shock therapy imposed by the IMF, a situation that President Kim Dae Jung inherited and regulations that he wanted to apply to the letter, with the risk of cutting him from the workers. Reorganization of the production system, delocalization, and risk of unemployment, social disparities, and uncertainties rising from the mixing of economic charts in Eastern Asia, all factors leading to his choice of a “bulldozer” approach set by his extensive business experience. Born from a poor family that like many others had migrated to Japan, the imperial metropolis, and had returned to the country after Japanese defeat, Lee Myung Bak managed to climb the levels within the Hyundai group. Lee Myung Bak turned Hyundai Construction Company into one of the world giants in the BTP thanks to contracts related to the American war in Indo-China. Reconverted into the policy, he was mayor of Seoul in 2002, which he had wanted to manage as chairperson. His presidential program was daring, entitled “Plan 747”, namely to have a 7% annual growth rate in GDP, to reach an income per capita of \$40,000 dollars, to gain eight places to reach 7th ranking in the world economy. With this intention, he not only hoped to give up attempts by predecessors to control activities of the “chaebol”, those great multi-sectoral groups or “click of businesses” (Hyundai, Samsung, LG, Lotte or the famous Daewoo). He also hoped to launch the country in Pharaonic projects to reconstruct the territory, particularly the digging of a large canal connecting Pusan in South-East Seoul to the Northwest.

For this reason, because of his nickname, because of his social origin and his mixing business and politics, with Lee Myung Bak there is something of Tanaka Kakuei, who marked Japanese policy during the `70`s and `80`s, but the comparison stops there, when excess seems to characterize the Korean politician.

Alas, when the elections were over, reality returned, in particular the economic crisis whose financial origins were outside South Korea, but whose consequences struck it in turn. Very

quickly, the ecological damage related to the digging of the canal made Lee Myung Bak give up the project and immediately replace it with an overall development plan of the four main rivers of the country (4RRP), quite as gigantic. Worse still, the will to succeed at all costs with a free trade agreement with the United States involved mass demonstrations, which focused on the liberalization of American beef imports, shortly after the “mad cow” crisis. In short, due to a fall in popularity, the administration of Lee Myung Bak needed to rebuild at the time of the June 2010 elections by holding up the foil of northerner abuse of power and, throughout the campaign ; polls hinted that victory was in sight. It has not been the case. While the GPN had been first in all areas in 2006, thus announcing its victory to the presidential election of 2007, this time it gained only 5 areas and 77 cities, against 8 areas and 90 cities for the Democratic Party, one area and 13 cities for another right wing panel and 3 cities for the Democratic Workers Party. When he was given largely victorious, the outgoing mayor of the GPN ultimately carried it in Seoul only with less than one point variation. It is necessary to say that the promises of Plan 747 could not be held and that the martial accents of the government had not convinced the population ; particularly the youth. Reservations, even criticisms, also accompanied the rupture of economic relations with DPRK, except the Kaesong industrial park.

An international test

The Korean election results did not leave the Obama administration indifferent, but what mattered was to seize this opportunity for international purposes. The behavior of each vis-a-vis the events and results of investigation, would make it possible to determine its responsibility or, more exactly, its willingness to be “recipient” (*stakeholder*) of/world governorship. Traditional allies such as the European Union and its Member States, as well as Japan or Australia, were not lacking but on this question as with others – sanctions against Iran for example -, Russia and China were expected, the latter because it is more directly implied, by geography, history and civilization, in the Korean question.

The term *stakeholder* had been the directing line of a talk given by Robert B. Zoellick on September 21 2005 under the title “*Whither China : from Membership to Responsibility ?*” (“Whither China : from Membership to Responsibility ?”). He was then Secretary of State to

Condoleezza Rice, after having represented the United States in trade negotiations. He left the American administration in 2006 to enter Goldman Sachs, was recalled by George W. Bush to replace the unhappy Paul Wolfowitz as President of the World Bank, position which he still occupies. Delighted by the economic advancement of China, its insertion into globalization and the relationship established between the two countries, Zoellick stressed that the part played by the Asian super-dragon was nothing comparable to the late Soviet Union : the PRC did not build a contre-system to the mode of capitalistic production, it did not work with the establishment of another international community and was not committed to a total confrontation with the United States. It remains then a dragon breaths fire and that China could no longer continue to pursue in an egoistic and opaque way its national objectives. To hold its place in the international arena, it had to assume responsibilities, i.e. to conform to principles and rules of the “international community”, a series of areas being quoted on this subject, the true opening up of its markets, the respect of intellectual property and its unrestrained search for raw material, the fight against proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and war against terrorism, while going through international problems, North Korea in particular.

The problems posed by Zoellick remain and have even been exacerbated by the economic crisis, which the major capitalist economies still have not managed to come out of, whereas China could see growth with double digits. Also the theory that G2 is under constitution is premature, as long as a suitable answer is not given to the question put by the American critic, which is not only addressed to China. However, this answer is not forthcoming as it depends on the direction given to the term “*international community*”, the definition of its underlying principles, a real agreement on how to resolve problems that it encounters and disagreements, which could emerge between its members. So, what role should be given to principles of national sovereignty, to noninterference and equality between States, what content is essential to give to human rights and social development, or, who are responsible in the main questions for environmental protection and global warming ? These questions can be very concrete, for example in connection with the distribution of voting rights within the nondemocratic and yet powerful international authorities, the IMF and World Bank.

At the time of her visit to Beijing last May, and then Tokyo, Hillary Clinton invited her listeners

to “take up the serious challenge the shipwreck of the South Korean corvette constitutes” and, since, the American administration continued to insist on the urgency on China to act in this affair as “recipient of the international community”. President Obama came back strongly, speaking about “voluntary blindness” and asking for a “transparent recognition of the facts” during bilateral discussions with President Hu Jintao, at the end of June at the G20 in Toronto. Meanwhile, the tone had turned sour. After sending condolences to the South Korean victims of *Cheonan*, Beijing wished that the investigation was led “in an objective and honest way”, recommending parties “to show calm and reserve”, according to terms’ used on May 28 by Prime Minister Wen Jiabao, the day before the third trilateral meeting between China/Japan/Republic of Korea which was held in Jeju, South Korea. Other questions contributed to the gloomy atmosphere : sales of American weapons to Taiwan, transparency concerning the military program of PRC, continuation of monitoring the Chinese weapons program led by the Pentagon... Consequently, the visit to Beijing of the Defense Secretary Robert Gates did not take place, which means that the military aspect of the Sino-American dialogue is suspended. And, the “meetings at the Shangri la Palace Hotel” in Singapore, which since 2002 brings together Defense Ministers of Asian countries under the aegis of the International Institute of Strategic Studies (IISS), held this year from the 4 to 6 June, failed to turn into a diplomatic incident. President Lee Myung Bak held an eminent place, since he was invited to make the inaugural speech (*keynote speech*) and the issue of *Cheonan* was, in a direct or indirect way, on the agenda. Robert Gates criticized China, showing “expansionism”, particularly in the maritime space called “southernmost China Sea”, and irresponsibility concerning North Korea.

A sword blow in the water

The UN Security Council, called a month before by the Seoul government, decided on July 9 with a declaration from its President and according to terms’ that led the representative of DPRK to speak about “a great diplomatic victory” for its country. To tell the truth, the declaration is ambiguous and initially records the official statement of the “international” investigation, to state that the Council “noted the answers given by interested parties, including the DPRK, which declared that it had nothing to see in the incident”, before concluding in a cryptic manner – “Also the Security Council condemns the attack which led to

the shipwreck of *Cheonan*” -, without quoting any culprit. Of course, Washington as well as Seoul feel they have received approval, although sanctions were taken in South Korea against 25 officers for drinking during service and falsification of data relating to the shipwreck.

It also seems that the attitude of Russia, whose counsel’s restraint were similar to those of Beijing, persuaded the Obama administration that it was unrealistic to seek a condemnation of DPRK.

If one adds the fact that a meeting has just been held in Panmunjom between America and North-Korea, one might have the impression that, as wished by China, one left the rhetoric of “safety” to privilege “stability” and that the six-party talks will resume in the near future. However, it is not certain.

President Lee dreams of greatness

In diplomatic terms, the United States have opted for “*strategic patience*”, although this does not appear to exceed the medium or short term. The collapse of the DPRK was expected since the demise of the socialist camp and dissolution of the Soviet Union, which have, in fact, seriously affected its productive system and, therefore, its mode of social regulation. The stopping of oil supplies by offsetting the loss of export markets not only caused a severe fall in production, they literally disorganized all activities, because of the shortage of fertilizers and electricity. The sudden death of Kim Il Sung and the very long national mourning followed by a series of weather catastrophes only worsened the situation, to the point of a fatal famine whose consequences are still felt. Reasons for which the early 1990s nuclear power agreement between the two sides of the peninsula or between North Korea and the United States have not been applied or their implementation delayed, in waiting for the fall of the regime. It did not occur, but the factors referred to above, in particular the question about succession, renewed hope.

For the resident of the Blue House, seat of the South Korean presidency, things are clear. The “*sunshine policy*” did nothing but ensure survival of the Kim dynasty. Either the DPRK accepts the “*bargaining*” (*great bargain*) that Lee Myung Bak proposes – complete renunciation of

nuclear weapons against assistance to North Korea to reach an annual income per capita of \$3.000 dollars -, or relations between the two will be reduced, with the economic consequences that follow. The six-party talks, which, under the leadership of China, have kept the North, the South, United States, Japan and Russia, are useless, if it is blackmailed by Pyongyang. They must be overcome and the outlook must be that of reunification. Admittedly, example of annexation of the German Democratic Republic by FRG suggests an enormous cost and, probably, a humane catastrophe from the surge of refugees envisaged. Nevertheless, besides the fact that the latter may affect the Northeast of China especially, the DPRK is full of minerals and coal whose exploitation, under the control of the “bulldozer”, should finance the operation. Accordingly, the Bush Jnr administration thought the expenses of the Iraq invasion would be covered by oil incomes. It is sufficient that the death of Kim Jung Il and a quick succession occurs while GPN is in power in the South so that the scenario becomes possible.

There is more. “Plan 747” is only one element of a broader vision consistent, for South Korea, *a fortiori* after annexation of the north, “to leave the periphery of Asia and place itself at the center of the world”. Thanks to the real power of its *chaebol*, to its commercial surpluses (42 billion dollars in 2009), to its high level of education, Lee Myung Bak still wants to make it more elitist, to its investments in R & D, not to mention the quality of its cinema and literature, nor regional audience of its culture popular (*manhwa* for *manga*, *K-pop* for *J-pop*, it owes much to its Japanese neighbor), South Korea can offer an alternative to intimidating China and colorless Japan. Thus, Southeast Asia is courted, especially Vietnam and Central Asia. However Africa seems a new area to seduce, where the majority of the 3,000 South Korean development volunteers will be posted. The Middle East has long been prospected and not only by the BTP groups. One undoubtedly remembers the \$20 billion contracts for nuclear power from the United Arab Emirates secured by South Korean firms, beating Areva and a Japanese-American consortium. Contradictions and difficulties are not lacking. Seoul also had to launch a \$200 billion plan to refinance its companies, the won is subjected to speculative movements, which led the government to establish a form of exchange control, and the “South Korea mark” was not essential yet. In the international ranking of brand recognition (*branding*), the country lies in 33rd position, either a connotation of bad quality remains attached to its products or we regard its companies as Japanese. The

road ahead is long.

The economic ambitions of President Lee must support the accession of his country to the statute of power, or more exactly of faithful lieutenant to the United States in that area and beyond, or still differently say Asia UK. This was the role that American strategists wanted to play in Japan (*Nye-Armitage report*) and that the former Prime Minister Koizumi Junichirô had accepted readily, but public opinion and the constitution of the archipelago continued to block this process. This is not the case in Seoul. Whereas his two predecessors had unquestionably approached China, at the same time the Association of Southeast Asia Nations (ASEAN), Lee Myung Bak intends as quickly as possible to create a free trade zone (KORUS-FTA) with the United States, which is being prepared for years. In addition, even military integration is a fact since the 1940s, with the presence of 30,000 men by the Pentagon, the South Korean government wants to speed up reform to allow its army forces to intervene under American command and to obtain the equipment to do so. The navy is currently expanding and a naval base is being built in the island of Jeju, which opens on the East China Sea. The 2011 defense budget, in preparation, will increase by 6% compared to the current year.

The *Cheonan* crisis will be used to reconsider a decision taken at the request of President Roh MOO Hyun who wanted to put an end to the feared submission of his country to the United States, namely the fact that South Korean forces are placed under American command on all occasions. Thus the South Korean troops who perpetrated a massacre of civilians in Kwangju, exactly thirty years ago, could only have been moved on the spot with the agreement of the American command, which still maintains a strong resentment with parts of the population. This supervision has been abandoned during peacetime and arrangements made so that the same applies in times of war. Lee Myung Bak gave up there or, more precisely, agreed to postpone enforcement until 2015.

Compliance went still further. President Roh established a Commission on Truth and Reconciliation in December 2005 in order to shed light on the atrocities made during the Korean War. It was recognized that the army and Seoul police force had proceeded to the massacre of civilians – around 200,000 victims – suspected of being communist, at the beginning of the summer in 1950, when North-Korean forces were moving rapidly south.

Thirteen of the 150 supposed mass graves were opened and 2,000 corpses exhumed. Research is now closed. In addition, declassified documents showed the appearance of more than 200 incidents during which the American forces deliberately bombarded or burned with napalm whole groups of refugees in which it was feared agents from the North had infiltrated. According to careful estimates, these murders would have been between 60,000 and 110,000 dead. Research was stopped and the Commission ceased its activity *de facto*, in order “not to harm the relationship between South Korea and the United States”.

A total alliance

American authorities greeted the democratization of South Korea, where they had not entered for large step thing, but the decade of opening up to the North and clearing up the past, some partial the latter it had been, just as the expressed will to seek more autonomy in foreign relations in the country, led the Bush Jnr. administration to behave in a particularly coarse and hostile way towards Kim Dae Jung, nevertheless recognized victim of the military dictatorships and Nobel Peace Prize, then Roh Moo Hyun, who was seen as a human rights lawyer. With the entry of Lee Myung Bak to the Blue House, the United States found a man with their suitability and it is not the arrival of a new tenant at the White House that will change anything, quite the contrary.

A turnaround is essential, time necessary to carry out analysis of reports from two American think tanks, written before the business of *Cheonan*. The first was produced by Center for a New American Security, founded in February 2007 to devote itself to questions of defense and which can be regarded as very close to the Obama administration, although it counts among its ranks certain number of republicans, a string of military and most of the theorists of the “irregular wars” (John Nagl, David Kilcullen, Andrew Exum, Thomas E. Ricks), which to tell the truth are found in the current security policy. It had as founders Michele Flournoy, Under Secretary of Defense for Policy, which means that it works out the defense policy for the decade to come, and, what interests us more directly, Kurt M. Campbell, today Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs, having been one of the engineers of the reports in question.

At the risk of being diagrammatic, one will summarize the analysis of the CNAS. In Eastern

Asia, which includes Southeast Asia and that of southeast, the economic rise of China creates a dynamics in which all countries are involved to differing degree, in one form or another. No one escapes from it, including those who for a long time held the status of “industrialized countries” (Japan, South Korea, Taiwan and Singapore). A regional integration of economies is in hand, even these countries taken together ; find their principal outlets in North America and the European Union. Recovery of domestic demand as a response to the crisis, in particular from China, should strengthen this trend. The United States is not excluded from this process, their FTN being strongly located in the area, but American authorities are likely to find themselves marginalized in the decision-making, since they no longer take the initiative or give the *tempo*. The same applies to political and diplomatic plans. The ASEAN arrived, for a number of reasons that would take too long to list here, to constitute itself as a hub connecting it to China, South Korea and Japan (ASEAN+3), as in India, Australia and New Zealand (ASEAN+6). Admittedly, the device of alliances, pacts, military bases and instruments of power which the United States structured throughout the world remains intact, but the on-extension(*overstretch*) of means and men across the planet, excessive focusing on the “long war against terrorism”, the stagnation of dubious conflicts, even the cost of military expenditure, make it increasingly difficult to maintain this American supremacy in Eastern Asia. Meanwhile, China continues the modernization of its armed forces, its equipment and positions. Not that it tries to create around it an unfavorable camp - it is not the Soviet Union and nothing indicates that it would find volunteers -, but by the *software power* of its economy, its diplomacy, culture and model of development, it could attract countries from the area, to strengthen any ambitions of autonomy of some of the allies, to neutralize the *hardware power* of the United States, or at the very least to reduce its options.

Things being what they are, and without giving up any of their own *software power*, it is mainly through security instruments that United States can hope to stop the process and regain control in this part of the world. That implies to re-examine alliances. Let us point out, it had not had there of during Asian conflicting systems of alliances that freezes the situation in Europe during the “cold war”. The game was more fluid in a continent engaged in its release from the colonial yoke, more complex in space, more variable in time, and definitely dissymmetrical, the United States is only able to weave a network of bilateral alliances. With

the resemblance of the relationship established by ASEAN, but with military content, the US constituted the hub and their trustworthy partners (Japan, Taiwan, South Korea, the Philippines and Thailand) were connected to them by a string (spokes) of alliances. In spite of attempts – SEATO, dreams of an organisation of North-East Asia Treaty, it has never been possible to join these areas in a coordinated unit, except the ANZUS associating Australia and New Zealand to the USA but covers primarily only the South-Pacific.

Among other reasons, it had proven pointless to integrate Japan and because of resistances from its population and the memories that its last misdeeds had left, several important States (India, Indonesia, Burma, and Kampuchea) had chosen non-alignment. Thereafter, the Sino-Soviet split and the implosion of the USSR made these attempts useless. In fact, coordination is done via PACOM, the American command in the Pacific. The allies remain to some extent passive, their role geographically circumscribed and the relationship between them does not have a military dimension.

What the CNAS proposes is, if not the resumption of these projects, at least to arrive at a quasi institutional coordination of bilateral alliances to North-East Asia, pressing primarily on South Korea, which is not forced by constitutional interdicts and which now seems to be much more reliable than Japan. One would not start from zero, since the plan of operations for the Korean peninsula necessarily involves American forces based in the archipelago, and since successive Japanese governments recognized *in petto* that the safety of their country passes by South Korea. Both providing to the United States, international hubs, however that exercises associate from now on, according to various formats, armies from the three countries. These elements remain as a watermark or enter a much broader unit, which drowns them to some extent. Thus the RIMPAC exercises, the most important naval exercises in the world.

The CNAS makes a series of recommendations so that the American system in the peninsula is re-examined, the format and posture of the South Korean forces transformed to exceed only the local area and to be useful within a regional framework, even beyond, based on the Australian model. Here also, one does not start from zero, since the repositioning of the American bases in South Korea has been engaged since Donald Rumsfeld was Defense Secretary. Better still, according to CNAS, the relationship between US/South Korea must be

enhanced, expanded and amplified, to become global : security of the seas, fight against piracy near Somalia, terrorism, weapons of mass destruction, development aid, nuclear power cooperation and, priority decision, the signing of free trade agreements. On all these points, there is total agreement with the ambitions of President Lee Myung Bak.

To tell the truth, the think-*tank* did nothing but theorizes and justify what the Obama administration is achieving. Following the visit paid by Lee Myung Bak to Washington on June 16, 2009, a document entitled “*joint Vision for the alliance of the United States of America and the Republic of Korea*” had been adopted, which plans to make bilateral relationship a “total partnership”. Although it was showing scorn with regards to the Japanese Prime Minister Hatoyama Yukio, President Obama doubled his regards towards his South Korean counterpart : Seoul will host the G20 next November and, in 2012, the second conference on nuclear safety, to which the White House holds so much. Lastly, Barack Hussein Obama undertook to adopt the free trade agreement, which may be too advanced.

The Korean question

The second report comes from Center for Foreign Relations, which is the most prestigious think-*tank* in the United States. As its title indicates, the document sticks primarily to the solution of what is commonly called the “Korean question” by reducing it to the North-Korean nuclear power. The objective first is to avoid any proliferation, horizontal, i.e. in direction of other countries, or vertical, development of long-range ballistic missiles and new nuclear tests.

For this purpose, the United States will have to inform Pyongyang of any transfer of nuclear materials, which would involve an immediate counterpart, to take care of the strict and universal application of resolution 1874 in order to control North-Korean exports, to negotiate with the DPRK a permanent moratorium on its missile tests. Beyond non-proliferation, a strategy will have to be implemented with the aim of total denuclearization and verified in five years, a strategy whose precondition is total cohesion between US, Japan and South Korea. The election of Lee Myung Bak allows for this. The same cohesion policy will help to prepare for the collapse of the DPRK, which the United States will discuss with China, before widening this discussion in a dialog including South Korea. In parallel, Washington will

continue its promotion of human rights in DPRK through pressures exerted by some NGOs and by informing the inhabitants of this country about realities of the outside world.

These recommendations call for some comment. Initially, they aim at welding the US/Japan/South Korea trio in order to weigh onto the six-party talks or to even circumvent them. Any dialog with the DPRK must carry on about its abandonment of nuclear weapons and ballistic means, the only “carrot” promised being the opening of an American liaison office in Pyongyang, this is insufficient for the DPRK. There is basic agreement with the “*large bargain*” presented by Seoul.

Secondly, no account is held on the position of the DPRK and the reading of the document, this rigidity appears to be the principal goal to contribute to the collapse of North Korea. It is agreed that to negotiate with the DPRK is no easy matter and that there is concern over the regime, the system and the situation prevailing in the country. However, the “Korean question” is not reduced to nuclear power, it *firstly* carries on division of the peninsula, historically imposed from outside, and *secondly* on the surrounding of the DPRK or the feeling that it may be threatened. Based on these two parameters, North Korea formulated a series of principles and proposals, known and constant. Being about its safety and peace in the peninsula, an agreement must be found with the United States, from which unquestionably comes the principal threat. Abandonment of the first and reduction of the second are marketable and go through the signing of a peace treaty formally ending the war of 1950-1953, guaranteeing the safety of the DPRK and leading to reduction of armaments in the peninsula. As for the division of the country, only the governments and people of the two States, without interference from anyone can surmount it. Several agreements were concluded in the distant past, on nuclear power (Master agreement of 1994, conclusions of six-party talks) or concerning inter-Korean relations (declarations of 1972 and 1991, Joint Declaration of June 15, 2000 and Declaration of Peace of October 4, 2007). The objective should be to apply these and one cannot explain the refusal of successive US governments to consider, even for a moment, the signing of a peace treaty in due form by waiting or hoping for the collapse of the North. In other words, what prevail are the problems of “change of mode” (regime *changes*).

Third element, the only role for China and Russia would be to endorse decisions of the trio

US/Japan/Republic of Korea, which would abandon the framework of six-party talks and take away its meaning. More fundamentally, even the apparent misunderstanding of the Chinese attitude that United States awaits puts pressure on the DPRK and brings it to agreement. In addition to the geographical vicinity, the very long history and kinship, and weapons established between Chinese and Korean Communists during the war against Japanese release, then during the war of 1950-1953, added to the fact that there is an important Korean minority in the North-East of China, all things leading Beijing to show itself to be attentive and understanding concerning Pyongyang, why can we not admit that the positions of the latter are likely to receive approval of the other ? Because its regime is intolerable, because its leaders are paranoiac or because it is a “dog without a lead”, the DPRK can only be wrong. While being lenient in its connection and bringing economic aid and food to it, China is suspicious and most hostile in its opposition to relations established by the PRC with Sudan, Iran, Burma and other “outposts of tyranny” denounced previously by Condoleezza Rice.

In other words, and we return to the problem of Zoellick, China does not behave as *stakeholder in the international community*, basically because its regime is dictatorial. Even more astonishing, the geopolitical considerations that American strategists are using, and not without reasons, seem to be withheld from their Chinese counterparts. However, the Korean peninsula is the strategic pivot of Asia in the Northeast because it forms a bridge between the continent and the Japanese archipelago and constitutes a bolt between the Sea of Japan and the East China Sea. This was a crucial issue at the turn of the XIX^e and XX^e centuries and is precisely why president Roh Moo Yun wanted, *a contrario*, to transform it into a platform of communications and a hub of economic and cultural relations in this part of the world. To prepare for example a reunification with the North, without wondering about a permanent American military presence in the peninsula and even on the reasons for an American military device existing in Japan, hardly appears acceptable by China. However, no reference is made in either report and their recommendations go the opposite way. In addition, we are entitled to ask whether the “question of North-Korean nuclear power” is not used as pretext to continue a form of “damming up” (*containment*) of China in this part of the world and, as indicated above, to tarnish its international reputation. The concept of “damming up” has not disappeared, although its formulation tends to be brought up to date in *hedging*, which means

to prepare future risks, in the manner of the supposed *hedge funds* of securing investors against all kinds of financial risks. During this time, the PRC continues to bring economic aid and food to the DPRK, while its companies invest there and acquire positions. Latest example to date, the news services gave a report on the lease for ten years of two quays in the port of Rajin, which opens on the Sea of Japan and where a free zone was to be created, one by China and the other by Russia. However the infrastructure links from this site with the borders of the two neighbors are in the process of modernization.

The recourse to gunboats

Washington and Seoul clearly saw in the shipwreck of *Cheonan* the opportunity to place China in difficulty and to advance their theses concerning the “Korean question”. For this purpose, the two capitals did not spare their efforts to find themselves taking the opposite course of the Security Council on July 9. A dilemma faces them now : to return to the six party talks as Pyongyang and Beijing wish, but with the risk of turning around in circles since the articulation between the renunciation of nuclear power by DPRK and the safety insurances to be given will not be required.

Worse, United States and South Korea did not limit their action in the diplomatic field and wanted to give it a military dimension while warning, on May 27, that they would organize a series of ten exercises, starting with joint army maneuvers to be held during June in the China Sea, i.e. in the maritime space situated between the Western coasts from the peninsula and China. Participation of the nuclear aircraft carrier *George Washington* whose homeport since September 2008 is Yokosuka in Japan, was announced, in company of its group combat (*task force*). The boat is *class Nimitz*, it moves 88,000 tons, carries between 78 and 90 aircraft, and numbers 3,200 marine staff and 2.480 marines staff, and is one of 11 giant aircraft carriers of the US Navy. The authorities, the media and Chinese Internet users criticized what they considered as being a provocation, expressed their deep concern and, for the latter, their very virulent indignation. Hesitations then arouse, which the Security Council declaration highlighted. The dates of the operation were moved back, one announced that they would be held in the south of the peninsula, then in the East, in the “Sea of Japan”, which annoyed Seoul because, like Pyongyang, they use the term “Eastern sea”. The

Secretaries of State and Defense, Hillary Rodham Clinton and Robert Michael Gates, went to the South Korean capital to commemorate the 50th birthday of the official release from the war in Korea, to visit the line of demarcation, to discuss on July 21 with their counterparts Yu Myung Hwan and Kim Tae Young (“*talks 2+2*”), to write a joint declaration which does not say a word about six-party talks and to confirm operations. Under the code name of “Invincible Spirit” they will take place at the end of July-beginning of August to be channeled through the exercises Ulchi Freedom at the same time in the Eastern Sea, where the “George Washington” and four destroyers will be staying, and a less imposing group staying in the West Sea. They will have an anti submarine dimension with four F22 Raptor, the latest American aircraft fighters.

Voices immediately rose in the United States about retreat and the fear that it announced a gradual contraction of American presence in East Asia. Returning to Hanoi for the ASEAN Forum, in which the DPRK took part, Hillary Clinton evoked again the shipwreck of *Cheonan* and the danger for world peace that North Korea would represent, but met with listeners as circumspect as the majority of the members of the Security Council.

Leaving the deadlock

United States and South Korea are confronted with the unexpected consequences of their tactical initiatives and with their own contradictions. From these last, we will discuss only the economic and political aspects. Having truly only started at the beginning of 1990, the relationship between the Republic of Korea and China has made impressive strides. The value of exchanges has multiplied more than 30 times between 2002 and 2008, to account for 7.2% of all exchanges in the PRC and 22.1% of South Korea. China became the first trading partner of South Korea and a preferred destination of investments abroad. Nearly 600,000 Chinese, mostly from the Korean minority, live south of the parallel 38°, and about as many South Koreans live in PRC. A strategic partnership of co-operation was launched in 2008 and the meetings between experts and leaders, multiple and varied, also relate to sciences, technology and culture. There are numerous occasions to continue dialog within other frameworks such as the trilateral meetings between China/Japan/South Korea, UN sessions, G20 or the ASEAN+3. It goes from there of course in the same way between China and the

United States and both countries have decided to raise their “economic dialog”, initiated in 2006 at the time of the Bush administration in a “strategic and economic dialog” (S&E-D), whose grand opening was celebrated on March 1, 2010. At the time of his official voyage to Beijing last November, President Obama had noticed that the fate of the world could not be decided between the US and the PRC, but that none of the major problems of our time can be solved without their participation and co-operation. One also knows the commercial and financial interdependence existing between the two economies.

These two bilateral relationships have imbalances, dissensions and disagreements, but the movement appears irreversible, unless history repeats itself, we will be found one day in the situation of Europe in the last third of the XIX^e century, with the emergence of German power and the conflicts that were associated with the Franco-Prussian War. This is a major issue, which can be treated differently, because one international system exists from now on with its principles and procedures. Also one cannot help thinking that to make the “Korean question” a standard in international relations, and worse, the opportunity for a showdown, the United States sharpens existing disagreements on this issue with China and the increased effects. Two aspects can be raised on this subject. Because they take place in the sea close to China, whereas the reciprocal one would be regarded as a serious attack to world peace, and because the reasons do not fail to justify reinforcement of the PRC Taiwan navy, safety of the maritime axes on which the Chinese economy partly depends, “ the Malacca dilemma” -, the naval forces maneuvers around the peninsula can only encourage Beijing to force the pace, which is exactly what the American strategists wish to avoid. The second aspect relates to the “dilemma of Malacca”, which also affects Japan and South Korea and which one can define as : the “Asian Mediterranean”. These are namely maritime spaces extending between the continent and the archipelago chain, which closes them in the south and east and does not have a passage towards the Indian Ocean. Therefore the resources of the Middle East and Africa, not to mention relations with Southern Asia and Europe, transit through the strait of Malacca whose hostile control by a third power would have immense consequences.

This dilemma underlies disagreements and tensions between Coastal states in connection with the archipelagoes wrongly named, “southernmost China Sea”. To be involved in the question, as the United States tends to condemn China, can appear skilful and Hillary Clinton

at the time of the ASEAN Forum in Hanoi last 22 July, insisted heavily, with more success it should be recognized than with *Cheonan*. She was able to present her country as guarantor of the code of good conduct signed in 2002 by ASEAN and China, which the latter ignore permanently.

The dream of power by President Lee Myung Bak does not just come in clear contradiction with the level and density of established relations now between South Korea and China. In its content, the “Korean question” so far unresolved, the place of this country, modest by its dimensions but not without dignity or virtues in the contemporary world. The cause most often used to explain the persistence of the issue would have been the refusal of “modernity” at the time when Westerners and the Japanese began to be interested in the peninsula. Consequently, the peninsula ends up falling under the domination of the archipelago and, at the end of the Second World War, was found divided against its will. One could instead focus on internal conflicts of Korean society at the time and divisions between pro Chinese, pro Russian and pro-Japanese factions, as if national safety passed by the choice of a guard. Or, the great strategy of Lee Myung Bak in reviving contradictions between the South and the North, and seeking a place under the shadow of American power ; Much more relevant was the “*sunshine policy*”, which remains in fact the only likely one to overcome the suspicions and bruises of the past, to join the two populations, to overcome the division of the nation and to allow Korea to hold a special place in the concert of nations. If one also wants to take into account the authoritarianism of Lee Myung Bak, of the Presbyterian zeal that he displays and businesses tarnishing him, no one can certify that the political authority of GPN, divided, will profit from these boastings. On the contrary, it could well be that the results of the local and regional elections are an extension and confirmations in future consultations.

To consider what must prevail is “to save face”, and one risks, in the words of the popular expression, going right to the wall. Hillary Clinton announced new sanctions against the DPRK on financial transactions, according to the model of those taken at one time by the Bush administration, while North Korea is already the most sanctioned country in the world. To follow the South Korean press (“*Chosun Ilbo*” of March 18, 2010), Kurt Campbell said on 3 February, at a meeting in closed session held in Seoul, which according to indications’ – a medical expert was part of Bill Clinton at the time of a surprise visit the former president

made to Pyongyang, August 4, 2009 -, Kim Jong Il would have nothing more than three years to live and that it was necessary to prepare. This question needs attention. If, as developments of recent months imply, the Obama administration is betting on the collapse of the Democratic Peoples Republic of Korea to exploit an opportunity, it is playing with fire and could burn.

The quoted sources are accessible on the Internet. The sites devoted to Korea were consulted, among which those of the Association of France-Korea friendship and Nautilus Institute. The daily newspaper on line “Asia Times online”, whose range of contributors is broad, and “Asia-Pacific Journal” offer invaluable information and analyzes.

*PS : This note was completed on July 20. Since then, the South Korean press gave indications in connection with the conclusions of the Russian investigation, which refute several important points of the official thesis. Sailing in not very deep water, the corvette would have run up against the bottom. Several blades of its two propellers would have been caught with nets, which damaged them, making it difficult to control the vessel, which would then have touched the antenna of a mine. There was an external explosion, but this was not the work of a torpedo. The parts that were fished out are perhaps North-Korean origin, but their appearance suggests that they had been immersed for at least six months. In any event, the inscription with the blue felt is incorrect. That obviously did not prevent joint operations from being held, to be immediately relayed by anti war exercises led by the South Korean fleet in the precise zone where *Cheonan* sank.*

*I.e. in the vicinity immediate near the North Korean coasts. The joint exercises *Ulchi Freedom Guardian* began with the participation of 56,000 Koreans from the south, 30,000 Americans and the *George Washington*, which would have, this time, to enter China Sea waters. Meanwhile, it went to Danang in order to celebrating the 15th birthday of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the United States and Vietnam. The destroyer John McCain joined it there (class *Arleigh Burke*), whose homeport is also Yokosuka in Japan. This vessel was then baptized in honor of the grandfather and father of the current senator of Arizona. Both were admirals. The second ordered even the PACOM during the American war in Indo-China and, for this reason, had the supreme responsibility for the bombardments of which had been argued for*

so many years. This game may take some time, with the sole purpose of complicating things.