

RELATIONS UNITED STATES/NORTH KOREA

ASSESSMENT AND PERSPECTIVES

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SUMMARY

In a post-September 11th era, and as a consequence of the US policy vis-à-vis the rogue states, especially the case of Iraq, North Korea adopted a more radical position, and provoked a new nuclear crisis in order to negotiate with the world n#1 power a compromise regarding energy supplies. The relations quickly turned dramatically to the advantage of Pyongyang, before the apparent schizophrenia of the Bush administration, hesitating between a diplomatic exit, and an approach that excludes any compromise. Since the beginning of the crisis, the North-Korean authorities have been successfully imposing their conditions as a priority in the agenda of the multilateral talks involving, besides Pyongyang and Washington, the regional actors.

Consequently to the diverging elements, and the origins of the current crisis, three scenarios emerge regarding the future of the relations between Pyongyang and Washington :

- 1) the parties come to a common agreement and the complete elimination of North-Korean nuclear facilities ;
- 2) Pyongyang refuses any compromise ;
- 3) a status quo favoured by the regional actors, especially Japan and South Korea, is accepted by all parties.

The Washington-Pyongyang relations are a perfect example of an opposition between a dissymmetric strategy adopted by the US and the asymmetric capabilities of North Korea. With the introduction of the “Axis of Evil” concept, President Bush’s intention was to express the new US foreign policy towards the proliferate states, which proposes the use of military force. As a response to this new paradigm, North Korea uses its weaknesses, both economical and humanitarian, as a threat, and claims having disproportional military capabilities.

In the past 50 years, the main objective of North-Korean foreign policy has been to negotiate directly with the US, without necessarily involving the regional powers in the talks, especially South Korea. In a economically failed state, where 25% of the population receives the help of the world nutrition program, “*the only solid industry is the blackmail*”. By threatening the region of a nuclear and ballistic crisis, weapons forbidden by the Arms Control treaties, Pyongyang expects the US to accept a non aggression treaty. Washington has always refused such an agreement, arguing that any Korean peninsula security compromise needs the implication of the regional actors, and a dialogue between the two Korea.

The US attitude towards North Korea, which can be considered as a “non assumed intransigence”, is the main responsible for the failure in the relations between Washington and Pyongyang. Indeed, the most important mistake George W. Bush made was neither to consider Pyongyang as an enemy, or a member of the axis of evil, North Korea being certainly the most hostile regime to Washington. This is more by refusing to admit an obvious difference between the cases of North Korea and Iraq, or Iran, and the responses to address, that the US president made a mistake that can be considered as the beginning of the current crisis.