

**KOIZUMI EN COREE DU NORD
UN RISQUE POLITIQUE PAYANT**
par Jean-Claude Courdy

En se rendant à Pyongyang le 17 septembre dernier pour y rencontrer KIM JONG IL, le Premier Ministre Japonais a relancé l'importance géopolitique de la deuxième puissance économique mondiale malgré le blocage du dialogue entre les deux pays

Trois heures d'entretien entre le Premier Ministre Japonais et le chef de l'Etat Nord Coréen ont suffi le 17 septembre dernier, à confirmer que la Corée du Nord, à bout de souffle dans son bunker, venait de choisir l'ouverture au camp occidental, non sous forme d'une soumission à un diktat militaire américain, mais plus subtilement et dans la voie tracée par la Chine, sous les aspects d'un troc avec un partenaire qu'on ne s'attendait pas à retrouver en première ligne. Deux mois plus tard, à la mi novembre, on apprenait que les négociations étaient suspendues sine die

Déjà, les faucons américains et sud-coréens ainsi que les nationalistes et autres ultra japonais ont fait entendre les voix de la dérision à propos d'un régime communiste agressif et menteur qui n'a jamais tenu ses promesses. De plus, dans le milieu politiques, tant au Japon qu'à l'étranger et particulièrement aux Etats-Unis, le doute planait sur la capacité d'un Premier Ministre Japonais à réussir là où avait prévalu jusqu'ici, le scepticisme de Washington et le peu de résultats concrets obtenus par le gouvernement sud-coréen de Kim Dae Jong dans ses tentatives de rapprochement avec le Nord.

Koizumi n'a certes pas débloqué l'impasse politique créée par G. W. Bush

Au moment du changement d'administration, la Maison Blanche avait planifié pour le Président Clinton, un voyage à Pyongyang qui aurait pu devenir le pendant du voyage historique de Nixon à Pékin en 1972. L'arrivée de W. G. Bush au pouvoir et l'inclusion de la Corée du Nord dans "l'axe du mal" avaient éloigné toute perspective de retour de Pyongyang au sein d'une communauté internationale réconciliée après la chute du mur de Berlin.

L'option Bush de ne pas traiter avec les régimes en place dans les pays de "l'axe du mal", mais plutôt de les renverser militairement pour les remplacer par des régimes dits "amis", a été rejetée de fait en Asie par les deux grands alliés de Washington, la Corée du Sud et le Japon. C'est avec suspicion que la Maison Blanche avait vu les efforts du Président Kim Dae Jong pour établir un dialogue constructif avec le régime communiste du Nord, dialogue qui a cependant abouti, après bien des vicissitudes à l'ouverture d'un portail d'accès sur la ligne de la zone démilitarisée, le long du 38ème parallèle. Cette timide percée, amorce d'une future liaison ferroviaire entre le sud capitaliste et le nord communiste, est surveillée, côté sud, par deux divisions de l'U.S. army, en place depuis l'armistice coréen de 1953.

Or, les résultats obtenus par le Premier Japonais à Pyongyang, s'ils n'ont pas reçu l'accueil qu'ils méritent de la part des alliés américains et sud-coréens, n'en demeurent pas moins exceptionnels dans la mesure où ils créent une alternative politique crédible à une épreuve de force à l'issue incertaine.

Une aventure solitaire circonstancielle

La position régionale de l'archipel nippon n'est pas étrangère aux initiatives prises par le Premier Ministre Koizumi dans le domaine international. L'analyse par les experts japonais d'une problématique dominée par la crainte de voir Pékin accroître son influence régionale, a conduit le gouvernement nippon à s'engouffrer dans le créneau Nord Coréen, sans préavis, devant ainsi toute initiative potentielle du gouvernement chinois.

Un autre facteur qui a pu précipiter la décision de Tokyo, réside dans la situation économique atone de l'archipel. Il est probable en effet, que la question coréenne ait fourni à Junichiro Koizumi une occasion de détourner l'attention des citoyens japonais, de l'incapacité où se trouve son gouvernement à enrayer la spirale déflationniste de l'économie.

Plus précisément, trois facteurs ont accompagné la décision du Kabutocho de brusquer l'événement:

- **La pression intérieure:** Par le canal de la presse et l'action des associations de familles de victimes, la question des jeunes japonais kidnappés il y a onze ans par des agents nord coréens est devenue un problème national.

- **Les difficultés du gouvernement sud-coréen** et en particulier celles du Président Kim Dae Jung dont la famille s'est trouvée au centre d'une affaire de corruption, ont suscité la méfiance de Washington et l'affaiblissement du président qui remet son mandat en jeu à la fin de l'année 2002.

- **Les réticences de George W. Bush** à engager un dialogue sérieux avec Pyongyang pour des raisons de doctrine ont amené Tokyo à se souvenir que trente ans auparavant, en 1972, Washington avait opéré un renversement spectaculaire de sa politique à l'égard de la Chine sans prévenir l'allié japonais, directement concerné.

Le voyage du Premier Ministre japonais à Pyongyang a contribué à la réduction d'une menace militaire en Asie du Nord. Mais cette évolution significative qui va à l'encontre de la doctrine de guerre préventive défendue par le Président Bush renforce l'opposition à des moyens de régler les conflits qui ne sont désormais approuvée ni par l'Europe ni par l'Asie. Malgré un échec apparent, la diplomatie japonaise n'a pas dit son dernier mot.

Jean-Claude Courdy

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Prime Minister Koizumi Visits North Korea

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Third Time Since World War II for Japanese Prime Minister to Visit Unrecognized Country

On September 17 Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi became the first Japanese prime minister ever to visit the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (North Korea). Prime Minister Koizumi met with Kim Jong-II, the leader of North Korea who holds the titles of general secretary of the Korean Workers' Party and chairman of the National Defense Commission, and the two held a summit in the capital of Pyongyang.

This marks the third occasion since the end of World War II that a Japanese prime minister has traveled to a nation with which Japan does not have diplomatic relations. Previously, Prime Minister Ichiro Hatoyama visited the Soviet Union in 1956, and Prime Minister Kakuei Tanaka went to the People's Republic of China in 1972.

The main sticking point for the Japanese side has been the issue of North Korean abductions of Japanese citizens.

The Japanese government had recognized eight such cases involving 11 victims. Prior to the summit, the North Korean side provided information confirming that eight abductees had died in North Korea and five were still alive. In addition, Chairman Kim Jong-II fully admitted the abductions, expressed regret, and apologized. Following this, the two leaders agreed to resume talks aimed at normalizing diplomatic relations between the two countries in October and signed the Japan-DPRK Pyongyang Declaration. If normalization talks are restarted, Japan and North Korea would appear to be on track toward improved relations. But some predict that negotiations will be prolonged due to such factors as the growing demand in Japan for a full investigation of the abduction incidents. At the same time, other major countries and international organizations concerned were generally positive about the Japan-North Korea summit and the fact that negotiations to normalize diplomatic relations will be restarted. Shock at the Reported Death of Eight Abductees, **Prime Minister Koizumi had decided on the visit to North Korea in order to restart the diplomatic normalization talks between the two countries that had been stalled since October 2000.** Going into the summit, solution of the abduction issue was his top priority. The North Korean side, meanwhile, revealed information on the abductees in talks prior to the summit: Of the 11 victims of the eight known abduction incidents, six are reportedly dead, including Megumi Yokota and Keiko Arimoto, and four are alive. The North Korean side also revealed information on cases that have not been recognized by the Japanese government as abductions, stating that an additional three Japanese nationals had been abducted, two of whom have died and one of whom is still alive. At the meeting held in the morning, Prime Minister Koizumi said to Chairman Kim Jong-II, "This is a tremendous shock. I must strongly protest, and I demand that proper steps be taken so that this never happens again." Prime Minister Koizumi demanded that investigation into the matter continue and that the survivors be allowed to return to Japan.

During the afternoon meeting Chairman Kim Jong-II explained the abductions, stating, "During the 1970s and early 1980s there were some elements in a special agency that turned toward rash acts and heroism. The reasons for this were to advance study of the Japanese language within that agency and to use the identities of others to enter South Korea [Republic of Korea]." Admitting the involvement of state organs, he apologized, saying, "This will never happen again. The people responsible have been punished, and I would like to apologize straightforwardly for this tragedy." The North Korean side promised to prevent further abductions. Japan Puts Forth Plan for Financial Cooperation; North Korea Pledges to Continue Freeze on Missile Tests During the summit Prime Minister Koizumi also raised the issue of suspicious ships in Japanese waters believed to be of North Korean origin, stating, "This is a serious issue that directly affects the security of our country." He demanded an end to further incursions. In response, Chairman Kim Jong-II said, "Those were training exercises carried out by special-forces units on their own initiative. They will not happen again."

Commenting on the results of the summit, both leaders declared them to be "meaningful," and they agreed to resume talks on the normalization of diplomatic ties in October. Later, the two leaders signed and announced the Japan-DPRK Pyongyang Declaration. In addition to reopening normalization talks, the declaration states that the Japanese side expresses deep remorse and heartfelt apology with regard to the great damage and suffering imposed on the Korean people during Japan's colonial rule. It also declares that, following normalization, Japan will provide economic cooperation to North Korea, including grant aids, long-term low-interest loans, and humanitarian assistance. The declaration confirms that, in order to arrive at a comprehensive solution to the nuclear problem on the Korean Peninsula, all international agreements will be observed. North Korea indicated that it will extend its freeze on missile launches beyond 2003.

Prime Minister Koizumi spoke at a press conference following the conclusion of the summit.

Commenting on the abductions, he stated, "I am pained to my very core . . . I am at a loss for words when I think of the feelings of the bereaved family members." He added that he hopes to resolve the issue of compensation for victims during the normalization talks. Prime Minister Koizumi explained the reasons for deciding to reopen negotiations, saying, "There continue to remain grave concerns. However, I judged that prospects exist to make progress on various issues in a comprehensive manner. As such, I decided to relaunch the negotiations for normalization in order to make sure that these issues are resolved."

Newspapers Approve of Normalization Talks with Conditions All of Japan's major newspapers addressed the topic of Prime Minister Koizumi's visit to North Korea and the first-ever summit between the two countries in their September 18 editorials.

All of the newspapers expressed shock and anger at the information provided by North Korea indicating that most of the abductees are dead and demanded a full accounting of the incidents.

At the same time, **the Asahi Shimbun** stated that the abduction issue "should not be reason to close the door on normalization talks. We support Prime Minister Koizumi's decision to enter into talks in order to keep this problem from ever occurring again, as well as the apology for Japan's period of colonial rule."

The Mainichi Shimbun labeled the abductions "unforgivable state terror" and panned North Korea's response, writing, "We are not satisfied with this one-way explanation of events." But at the same time, the Mainichi offered praise for Prime Minister Koizumi's decision to reopen negotiations, commenting, "We honestly recognize the efforts that swung this heavy door open. . . . It seems to be a realistic decision."

The Yomiuri Shimbun deemed solutions to such issues as meetings between surviving abductees and their families, the return of the remains of the deceased, and compensation to be "the minimum conditions for reopening talks." The Yomiuri also commented, "It is important for Japan to maintain its principled stand and not to make any easy compromises." In addition, the Yomiuri stressed the importance of working together with the United States and the Republic of Korea, writing, "There must not be any developments that cause Japan-North Korea relations to protrude."

The Nihon Keizai Shimbun noted that "how the agreement is delved into and how a mechanism for ensuring that promises are kept is constructed are important concerns" and added, "Japan should conduct prudent and tough normalization talks while at the same time working closely with the United States and the Republic of Korea."

The Sankei Shimbun noted, "The decision-making and effort shown by Prime Minister Koizumi have previously been lacking in Japanese politicians." At the same time, the Sankei argued, "Many citizens will find it difficult to agree with the Japan-DPRK Pyongyang Declaration, which presupposes the reopening of negotiations on normalizing diplomatic relations with what is an inhumane state. They will not be able to feel unrestrained joy over the resumption of normalization talks."

The Tokyo Shimbun wrote, "The government should make a tough response by demanding an explanation from North Korea with regard to the causes of death and the details. . . . There are still many pending problems that should be solved between the reopening of negotiations and the establishment of diplomatic relations. While moving forward, it is necessary to keep a close eye on the attitude of North Korea."