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**Directeur de publication &
Rédacteur en chef**
Catherine Bouchet-Orphelin

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Comité de lecture et de rédaction
Laurent Amelot, Catherine Bouchet-Orphelin, Philippe Coué, Philippe Delalande, Patrick Hébert, Jean Hourcade, Alain Lamballe, Arnaud Leveau, Jorge Lusaf, Rémi Perelman, Jean Perrin, Maurice Rossin, Daniel Schaeffer, Edouard Valensi.



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1°

Major recent events and future challenges

China

Highly political samples

China is aiming for all the planets in the solar system. But after the Moon, Mars is the priority. The Middle Kingdom wants to bring samples of this planet back to Earth.

FACTS

In the spring, Beijing reaffirmed its intention to bring Mars samples back to our planet. In 2028, China plans to send two CZ-5 heavy-lift launchers, each carrying a lander to collect the samples before sending them into orbit, and a vehicle to return them to Earth. Sustained communication on this mission to return Martian samples leaves no doubt that this highly ambitious project will be carried out.

Starship: SpaceX's Starship spacecraft and Super Heavy rocket - collectively known as Starship - are a fully reusable transport system designed to carry crew and cargo to Earth orbit, the Moon, Mars and beyond.

Starship HLS: *Human Landing System*, is a variant of the second stage of the Starship launch vehicle.

CHALLENGES

China hopes to collect and return Martian pebbles to our planet before the Americans. If successful, this would be a symbolic milestone after the arrival of taikonauts on the Moon by 2029.

FORWARD-LOOKING COMMENTS

After the Moon, exploration of the Red Planet is the goal of all the major space powers. There are already many probes orbiting, landing and driving on Mars. The next step will undoubtedly be the return of Martian samples. With this in mind, the MSR (*Mars Sample Return*) mission has been developed and financed for several years by the USA and Europe. But because of its high cost and successive delays, this project now seems to be in doubt under the new US Administration. Based on statements by Elon Musk, the new administration believes that regular flights by

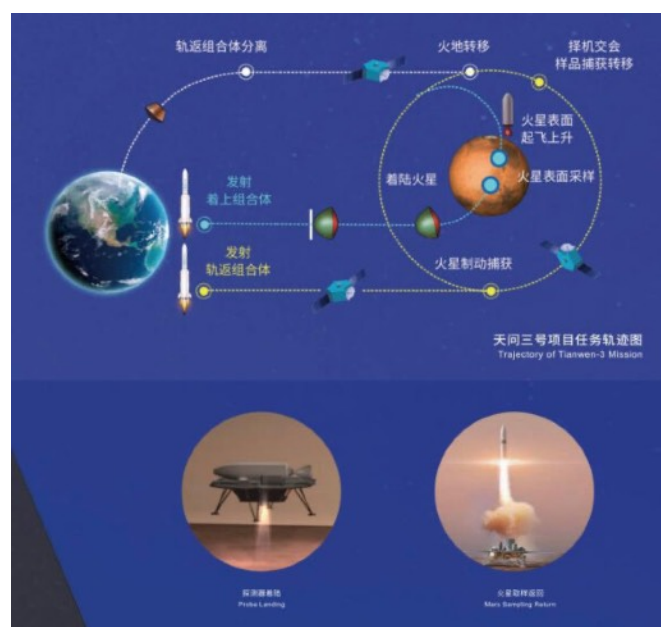
SpaceX's future Starship* negate the need for such an automatic mission.

However, the American super-heavy launcher has yet to deliver a single launch into orbit after eight test launches, and its development is proving particularly complicated. Under these conditions, neither the Moon (to be reached by a Starship HLS*) nor Mars seem immediately accessible. By entrusting all their ambitions to the Starship, the Americans are taking the risk of competing directly with China on a timetable that looks increasingly tense.

In Beijing, this complicated context has been acknowledged. China's plans for the Moon and Mars are less complex and ambitious than those of the Americans, but they remain highly realistic and increasingly credible.

Philippe Coué, Asie21

Schematic diagram of China's ambitious Mars sample return mission. They should be collected in 2029 and returned to Earth in 2030/2031. ©DR



China

Qingdao submarine base

From April 14, 2025, the international press gave a sensational spin to the analysis of *Google Earth* images of the Qingdao submarine base by an Australian naval analyst. However, this in no way detracts from the interest of Alex Luck's work and the revelation to the general public of the existence and organization of this base.

FACTS

April 11, 2025: Alex Luck posts an analysis of the Qingdao* submarine base on his X account, based on *Google Earth** images from February 13, 2025.

April 14, 2025: the analysis is picked up by *Newsweek** under the title *New Google Earth Photos Capture China's Nuclear Submarine Force*¹.

From then on, a whole series of international press articles, each more sensational than the last, claimed in particular to reveal the existence of a secret base of nuclear submarines, SNA* and SNLE*.

CHALLENGES

At the 1st level and at international level, the necessary rigor to deliver reliable information free from over-interpretation.

2nd degree

For China, the first step is to have sufficient naval facilities to accommodate all the units of a rapidly expanding navy. Secondly, for submarines, in addition to active protection, to ensure passive protection, as exemplified by the Hainan base for SSBNs.

For countries potentially hostile to China - the United States, Japan, South Korea, the Philippines, Australia, Canada and even Nato - if Tokyo and Washington succeed in attracting the

Google Earth: 3D virtual mapping software

Luck Alex: Australian naval analyst

Newsweek: American weekly magazine

Qingdao: one of China's three major naval bases

SNA: nuclear attack submarines

SNLE: ballistic missile submarines

Alliance to the Indo-Pacific, the aim is to obtain maximum quality intelligence on the entire Chinese navy, right down to its ability to defend port bases and maintenance sites.

FORWARD-LOOKING COMMENTS

The Qingdao submarine base(*) is by no means a new installation. It's the *Google Earth* images that are new. It's certainly not known to the general public because the Chinese don't advertise it, any more than they advertise other bases. But it would be astonishing if, with the images gathered by the world's major intelligence services and provided by specialized observation satellites, interested states did not have a permanent update on Chinese naval bases. In the case of submarines, this information is all the more valuable as it enables us to determine when they will be leaving and returning.

As far as the photos of this base² are concerned, apart from the docked submarines, the facilities appear rather sober, with no major deployment of equipment on the platforms.

When it comes to naval submarine installations, it has to be said that while China's indented coastline offers numerous installation possibilities, the adjacent seas offer no real advantage for discreet submarine deployments.

In the South China Sea, you need to cover some 100 km from Hainan Island to the Yulin base in Sanya to reach the edge of the continental shelf and access the deep sea. Over this distance, the water depth increases only very gradually, dropping to just 150 m at the edge of the slope, before plunging into the deep sea. Under these conditions, such a shallow depth is hardly conducive to military submarine navigation, as it increases the risk of detection. To reach the oceans, submersibles are also constrained by the

Straits of Malacca, between Singapore, Malaysia and Indonesia, and Bashi, between the Philippines and Taiwan.

The situation is even worse in the East China Sea, where the average depth is 100 m between the Chinese mainland and the Okinawa Trough, 100 to 200 km wide between south and north, which borders the Japanese Ryukyu archipelago. To exit to the Pacific, ships must pass through the straits that pierce this archipelago, none of which is deep enough to dive through without risk of detection. The same applies to the Tsushima Strait, between Japan and Korea, before reaching the semi-enclosed Sea of Japan, which offers favorable conditions for diving.

Daniel Schaeffer, Asie21

- (1) <https://www.newsweek.com/china-conflict-undersea-cables-cutting-internet-data-subsea-marine-baltic-taiwan-2012396>
- (2) See illustrations 1 to 7, shots of the base, various docks and moored submarines. Source: *Google Earth* screenshot, February 13, 2025



Figure 1 -
General view of the Qingdao submarine base





Figure 2 - Quay 1, north-west of the basin, 2 ANS in principle; type unidentifiable by specialists



Illustration 3 -

Pier 3, southwest of the basin,
a priori 1 SNA ;
type identifiable by specialized analysts (note:
between platform 1 and platform 3, platform 2 is
unoccupied)

Figure 4 -

To the northeast of the basin, a dry
dock with a building undergoing
maintenance or deconstruction.
(according to Alex Luck)





Figure 5 -

In the central-eastern part of the basin, an ANS; type identifiable by specialized analysts

Figure 6 -

South-east pier 1 of the basin, presumably an SNLE; to be confirmed by specialist analysts

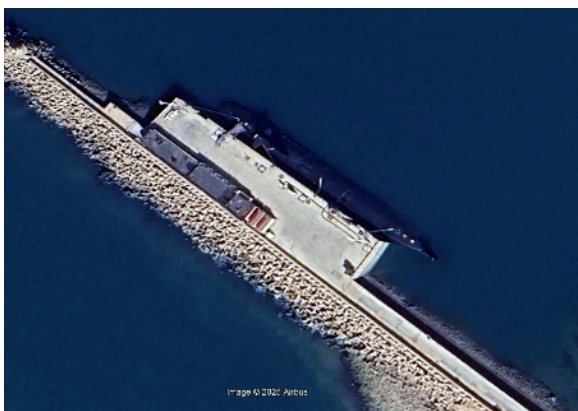


Figure 7

South-east quay 2 of the basin; presumably an ANS: to be confirmed by specialist analysts

China - Pakistan

First foreigner aboard Tiangong-3

A Pakistani astronaut will spend two years in China's Tiangong-3 space station.

FACTS

The project had been mooted for several years, but came to fruition at the end of February 2025: a Pakistani astronaut will embark on a Shenzhou spacecraft for a short stay aboard the Chinese space station. Following the signing of the cooperation agreement between China and Pakistan, the process of selecting five candidates has begun. This preliminary selection will be followed by secondary and final selections in China. Only two Pakistanis will join the Beijing Aerospace City: the mission holder and his understudy.

CHALLENGES

The SinoPakistani manned space flight is of great importance to Beijing, which is doing everything it can to open up its most emblematic space programs - manned flight and space exploration - to foreign partners. For the exploration of the Moon, its Chang'E probes and its ILRS* automatic base program, Beijing has already entered into several cooperative ventures with governments and private organizations. As a result, ILRS* has become the main competitor to the US-led Artemis lunar program. Beijing's commitment to space cooperation is set to grow even stronger in the future.

FORWARD-LOOKING COMMENTS

If we take into account the minimum training period for taikonauts, it will take at least a year before a Pakistani astronaut flies into space. This

ILRS: International Lunar Research Station

Artemis: NASA's manned space program, aiming to land a crew on the moon by 2027.

Chang'E (嫦娥): series of lunar space missions led by the China National Space Administration (CNSA: China National Space Administration, 国家航天局). The Chang'E program was launched to explore the Moon, conducting scientific research, collecting data and developing technologies for space exploration

ILRS: *International Lunar Research Station* is an international cooperative project to establish a permanent research station on the Moon. The project is mainly led by China and Russia, who have announced their intention to build the station together.

Tiangong-3: China's third space station is one of a series of Chinese space missions designed to establish a permanent presence in Earth orbit.

would put his flight at the end of 2026 or the beginning of 2027. This timing may not have been chosen by chance. Indeed, it is during this period that India - Pakistan's usual great rival - is scheduled to carry out the two automatic flight tests of its future Gaganyaan manned spacecraft. Similarly, it's not out of the question for India to carry out its first manned flight by 2027. Comparison is not reason, but on both sides of the Indus, the means are completely different. Indeed, the Pakistani astronaut will be flying on a

Chinese "jump seat", as his country does not have the specific means to launch rockets and satellites indigenously, let alone manned spacecraft that are much larger and more complex than simple satellites.

India, on the other hand, is poised to become the fourth power capable of launching its own citizens into space. It's worth noting that Europe has no short-term plans in this area, owing to political procrastination that is incomprehensible in the current dynamics of the great powers.

The arrival of a Pakistani astronaut on board China's permanent space station will mark the true internationalization of this program. Other foreign payloads should be installed on Tiangong-3 in the coming months and years. But logically, other foreign astronauts should follow the Pakistani. In particular, those from member countries of Apsco, the Chinese-led International Space Agency. Under these conditions, astronauts

from South-East Asia and the Middle East are expected to join the station. Among them, Iran has often been mentioned. But Apsco also includes Peru in South America. Politically, the flight of an astronaut from an Andean country would be another milestone in the internationalization of China's manned space flights.

It is not yet known under what conditions the flight of a Pakistani astronaut will take place. Will he take part in hot relief with a long-term crew? Will he fly aboard the Shenzhou spacecraft or the future Mengzhou? As the Sino-pakistani flight is due to take place within the next two years, we should soon be informed in greater detail. We'll be sure to report on future developments in future newsletters.

Philippe Coué, Asie21

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South Korea - Japan - United States

Towards a "unified defence zone": Japanese and American ambitions

South Korean concerns

Faced with rising tensions in the Indo-Pacific, Japan has proposed to the United States the creation of a "unified defense zone" bringing together American, Japanese, South Korean, Australian and Philippine forces. This initiative, welcomed in the United States, is worrying South Korea, which fears that its army will be drawn into conflicts beyond the Korean peninsula, particularly in the event of a crisis around Taiwan. This tension illustrates the continuing fragility of the construction of a genuine collective security architecture in East Asia.

FACTS

March 30, 2025: at a meeting in Tokyo, Japanese Defense Minister Gen Nakatani proposes to his American counterpart, Pete Hegseth, the concept of a "single operational theater" in East Asia. The plan aims to coordinate American, Japanese, South Korean, Australian and Filipino forces to simultaneously counter threats from China, North Korea and Russia. The United States welcomed the initiative, without any immediate official response from South Korea.

Early April 2025: while the country is in the midst of a presidential campaign, the South Korean press (*Yonhap*, *Korea Herald*, *Joongang Daily*, etc.) expresses deep concern about a possible redefinition of the role of US forces stationed in South Korea (USFK*), fearing involvement in a conflict beyond the Korean theater, particularly in the event of a crisis around Taiwan.

April 22-23, 2025: preparatory meeting for the 16th trilateral defense dialogue, to be held before the end of the first half of 2025.

USFK: *United States Forces Korea*, responsible for the support and training of the joint Korean-US forces and the multinational forces of the United Nations Command.

CHALLENGES

For Japan :

- consolidate its role as a regional "hub" in the Indo-Pacific ;
- develop multilateral action capabilities under the American umbrella;
- prepare Japanese domestic opinion for a military build-up justified by coordination with allies.

For South Korea :

- preserve the specificity of the USFK* exclusively focused on deterrence against North Korea;
- to avoid being drawn into operations against China, a major economic partner;
- maintain an autonomous and balanced strategic posture between Washington and Beijing.

For the United States :

- strengthen the operational integration of their allies in East Asia;
- simultaneously deter China in the South China Sea, North Korea on the peninsula, and Russia in the Far East;
- test the strength of the Tokyo-Seoul axis in an increasingly tense geopolitical context.

FORWARD-LOOKING COMMENTS

The Japanese initiative is part of a structural evolution in Japanese security policy that began back in 2015, with the relaxation of constitutional constraints on the use of force. It also reflects rising "strategic anxiety" in the face of Chinese maritime activism, North Korean instability and Russian intrusion into the region.

Nevertheless, this proposal risks undermining the still recent progress of the Japan-South Korea rapprochement, encouraged by the United States since 2023. South Korea remains wary of any move that could de facto associate it with US military operations outside the context of the peninsula. The possibility of USFK* intervention in a Taiwan-related conflict that does not directly concern South Korean national security is an unofficial red line.

More generally, the idea of a "unified theater" reveals the desire of the United States and Japan to restructure collective deterrence in East Asia, in anticipation of multipolar scenarios: simultaneous conflicts in the South China Sea, the Taiwan Strait and the Korean peninsula.

In the short term, South Korea could seek to negotiate a precise framework of engagement with the United States, limiting USFK deployments outside the Korean theater. In the medium term, this tension could fuel an acceleration of internal debates in South Korea on the desirability of autonomous rearmament, or even the development of a national nuclear capability.

South Korea's internal political debate underscores the sensitivity of the subject: the People's Power Party (PPP) argues for maintaining the USFK's focus on North Korean deterrence, while the Democratic Party (DP) warns of the risks of a deterioration in relations with China in the event of greater involvement in the defense of Taiwan.

South Korean public opinion is also increasingly concerned about the reliability of the US defense commitment. According to a study conducted by the *Brookings Institution*, the proportion of South Koreans who consider US military intervention likely or very likely in the event of conflict with North Korea fell from 44.5% in July 2024 to 37.5% in March 2025. This drop in confidence reflects the uncertainties associated with the direction of US foreign policy under the current administration.

Paradoxically, the Japanese project could thus contribute to a further fragmentation of regional alignments, instead of the desired coordination.

Arnaud Leveau, Asie21

Box 1**The "single operational theater" concept: doctrine and implications**

Historically applied within the framework of NATO or the Allied Pacific Command, the concept of a single operational theater aims to bring together allied military resources under a single strategic planning umbrella, facilitating the coordination of resources, doctrines and interventions in the event of a crisis.

Transposed to East Asia, this model would require close synchronization of air, naval and

cyber defense capabilities, particularly in the face of "multi-front scenarios": Chinese aggression against Taiwan, North Korean attacks, and Russian naval demonstrations in the North Pacific. Such alignment would, however, require a high degree of political trust between partners, which is still far from being achieved, particularly between South Korea and Japan.

Arnaud Leveau, Asie21

Box 2**South Korean perception: "no Taiwanization" of USFK**

Since the 1953 agreements, the US Forces in South Korea (USFK) have been seen primarily as a "safeguard" against North Korea. The idea that these troops could be mobilized for operations to defend Taiwan is deeply resented in South Korea, where the national priority remains protecting the country from the nuclear threat posed by North Korea.

A redefinition of the USFK's mission towards a broader Indo-Pacific strategy would be seen as an implicit breach of contract between the USA and South Korea. It could also fuel South Korean political forces in favor of greater strategic autonomy, or even the revival of debates on an independent nuclear capability.

Arnaud Leveau, Asie21

Taiwan - Taiwan

Act III Scene 4:

The pomegranate or the dove?

A dictatorship in the making?

At a rally organized by the Kuomintang, 250,000 people rallied to oppose the "Green Communist Party" and "fight the dictatorship" of the current government. Han Kuo-yu*denounced the President of the Republic, Lai Ching-te, who suggested that "those concerned about the decline of democracy in Taiwan should go to Tian'anmen Square in Beijing to protest". The opposition calls it an assassination of democracy.



Han Kuo-yu at the meeting on April 26, 2025.
The banners read:

- "Against green communism" (反綠共)
- "Let's fight dictatorship" (戰獨裁)

FACTS

April 26, 2025: speech by Han Kuo-yu(*) (KMT(*)), Chairman of the Legislative Yuan, on Ketagalan Avenue (in front of the Presidential Palace), at a rally organized by the Kuomintang.

CHALLENGES

- ▶ A shift in public opinion, particularly among young people who had supported the DPP*in previous years.

Chen Shui-bian (陳水扁): President (DPP) of the Republic of China from 2000 to 2008

Chiang Chichen (江啟臣): vice-president of the Legislative Yuan, 10th president of the Kuomintang from 2020 to 2021

DPP (*Democratic Progressist Party*, 民進黨, Minjindang): ruling Democratic Progressist (Independence) Party, party of President Lai Ch'ing-te, also known as the Greens

Han Kuo-yu (KMT): Chairman of the Legislative Yuan

Hsieh Chang-ting (謝長廷): advisor to the presidential office. One of the ten founding members of the DPP

KMT (*Kuomintang*): nationalist party, also known as "The Blues

Lai Ch'ing-te (William Lai): President of the Republic of China and Chairman of the DPP

Lu Hsiu-lien (呂秀蓮): Vice-President (DPP) of the Republic of China from 2000 to 2008

Yu Mu-ming (郁慕明): President of the New Party (新黨) from 2003 to 2020

- ▶ The Taiwanese are worried about a derailment of democracy in Taiwan.
- ▶ For the KMT: to halt the dismissal procedure initiated by the DPP against opposition MPs.

1 2
3 4

- 1- Speech by Han Kuo-yu(*) (inscription in background: 戰獨裁: let's fight dictatorship).
- 2- Slogans: 'Taiwan doesn't need dictatorship' (台灣不需要獨裁) // Against the Communist Greens (反綠共) // Let's fight dictatorship (戰獨裁).
- 3 and 4 - Crowd presence between Ketagalan Avenue (Presidential Palace Avenue, formerly Chieh-shou Road (介壽路) and Chingfumen (景福門) Gate.

Screenshots, CBC TV, April 26, 2025

FORWARD-LOOKING COMMENTS

In January 2024, President Lai Ching-te* was poorly elected with just 40% of the vote and no majority in the Legislative Yuan¹. This is the first time Taiwan has experienced this situation.

1. The government did not organize itself into a coalition. It refused to consider its opposition.

2. DPP* MPs categorically reject the draft laws proposed by the KMT* in Parliament, particularly those calling the DPP government to account. These laws will be passed since the opposition has the majority. Unless the opposition is sacked.



- This led to fights within the Legislative Yuan⁽²⁾.
- The Blue Birds* movement, created by DPP activists on May 17, 2024, aims to undermine the work of opposition MPs³.
- These Bluebirds(*) (青鳥) prevented KMT*) or TPP* deputies from entering the Assembly on voting day.⁴
- A major recall referendum is launched to remove KMT' deputies from office. Although this procedure exists in the constitution, it is currently considered by part of the Taiwanese population as an act of dictatorship.

3. The new chairman of the Legislative Yuan - and it's a great return to politics - is Han Kuo-yu(*) (KMT*) who had been banished from the political scene by the DPP on June 6, 2020, already by a revocatory referendum.⁵

NB: it will be recalled that Han Kuo-yu was elected mayor of Kaohsiung, the cradle and stronghold of the DPP*, in November 2018, against all the odds: he ran an election campaign in 3 weeks via social networks to revive hope of a better economic life for its inhabitants by wishing to renew ties with the mainland.⁶ Buoyed by his success in the local elections, he was a candidate (KMT*) for the January 2020 presidential election. However, Tsai Ing-wen was re-elected. In the months that followed, Han Kuo-yu was removed from **office** by a revocation procedure, on the grounds that he had not done his job as mayor while on the campaign trail.

At this major rally in Taipei, **Han Kuo-yu*** delivered an incisive and charismatic political speech with shock slogans such as "The DPP* should not murder democracy" or "Let's fight dictatorship".

Extracts :

- "Three knives are hanging over Taiwan's head: the US tariffs, the Chinese military exercises and the revocatory referendum to eliminate the opposition MPs elected by the people."
- "The other side is a hostile force. But if Taiwan holds a grenade in one hand, it holds a dove of peace in the other. When Lai throws the grenade, remember that the majority of people in Taiwan, Penghu, Kinmen and Matsu are ready to release doves of peace and live in peace with the other side. The recall referendum is a step backwards for democracy in Taiwan, with opposition MPs just elected. How can President Lai tell foreign countries that democracy is very precious and then murder it in Taiwan?"
- "Former DPP leaders, such as Chen Shui-bian*, Lu Hsiu-lien* and Hsieh Chang-ting have all called for no major recall campaign or overthrow of democracy. The government must seek true democracy, and democracy must have an opposition party."

Han Kuo-yu makes two appeals:

- President Lai and the DPP to stop the referendum process immediately and work together to create a better future for Taiwan;
- the participation of as many Taiwanese as possible in the vote in the event of the revocatory referendum taking place anyway.



"For democracy, you have to get out of your house and go vote [against]."

NB: the number of participants at this political meeting was even greater than that of January 9, 2020.⁷

The vice-chairman of the Legislative Yuan, Chiang Ch'i-chen* declared on this occasion that: "Taiwan needs talent and democracy to enrich itself, not a dictatorship".

We'll recall Yu Mu-ming^(*) (郁慕明)'s words on June 8, 2020, about Han Kuo-yu's impeachment - by revocatory referendum - estimating that it would be fraught with consequences for Taiwanese democracy: "A Pandora's box has been opened on all possible abuses of impeachment and Taiwan will no longer be at peace."⁽⁸⁾ That was five years ago.

Catherine Bouchet-Orphelin, Asie21

- (1) Legislative elections are held at the same time as presidential elections.
- (2) Cf. **Asie21 n° 183/2024-05** Taiwan - China - United States Act I scene 1 Inauguration of the new president: William Lai accepts the role of troublemaker
- (3) Cf. **Asie21 n° 185/2024-07&08** Taiwan: Act 1 scene 3 The Bluebird movement... for democracy or oligarchy?
- (4) Cf. **Asie21 n° 189/2024-12** Box 2: Brawl at the Legislative Yuan in Taiwan - South Korea: Act II scene 2. Martial law in South Korea supported by President Lai's DPP party
- (5) Cf. **Asie21 n° 140/2020-06** Taiwan: Han Kuo-yu's dismissal, Sino-American rivalry for the port of Kaohsiung?
- (6) Cf. **Asie21 n° 125/2019-02** Taiwan: Han Guo-yu, revealing the failure of Tsai Ing-wen's government, 韓國瑜揭露蔡英文政府的失敗
- (7) January 9, 2020, was the eve of the presidential election. At M^{me}Tsai's last rally - on the eve of the election - there were fewer participants. Cf. **Asie21 n° 136/2020-02** Taiwan - United States - China : The Buddha controls the monkey... or the American influence on Taiwanese politics.
- (8) Op. cit **Asie21 n° 140/2020-06**

Taiwan

"Not Hitler but Laitler"

KMT president denounces DPP practices

80 years ago, on September 9, 1945, the Republic of China triumphed over the Japanese invaders. Chiang Kai-shek organized a Japanese surrender ceremony in Nanjing, during which Japanese general Okamura Yasuji (岡村寧次) signed his unconditional surrender to Chinese general He Yingqing (何應欽)¹. In 2025, Lai Ching-te* organized a commemoration of the Allied victory, but made no mention of the Chinese nationalists' victory over the Japanese invaders, which followed, admittedly, only 4 months later.

FACTS

May 7, 2025: Eric Chu* delivers a speech at the KMT Central Standing Committee meeting in which he compares President Lai Ching-te* to Adolf Hitler. He declares that it's a "joke, certainly, even if it's not funny at all."

May 8, 2025: the Lai government organizes a commemoration to mark the 80th anniversary of the victory of the European Allies. No mention is made of the Japanese surrender.

CHALLENGES

For the DPP: use this commemoration to draw closer to the international community.

For KMT :

- remember that it was the KMT* that fought in mainland China,
- denouncing the fascist slope of the DPP*.

FORWARD-LOOKING COMMENTS

Eric Chu* regrets that Lai* did not mention the tragic contribution of the Republic of China in the Chinese theater of war against the Axis power, the Japanese Empire.

Eric Chu* denounces the impatience of the

Eric Chu (Chu Li-lun): KMT Chairman

KMT: Kuomintang

Lai Ching-te: President (DPP) of Taiwan

DPP* to "erase the ashes of history, including those of Chiang Kai-shek"². He took advantage of the commemoration to declare: "Japan, Germany and Italy during the Second World War were all fascists. They used the name of democracy and judicial means to eliminate opposition parties and became dictators. President Lai's recent actions against the KMT(*) opposition party are simply Hitler's."

This statement prompted condemnation from foreign representative offices³ based in Taiwan, including :

- of the German Institute,
- of the Israeli Office,
- of the European Economic and Business Office.

Eric Chu* denounces the "double standards" within the international community with these condemnations:

- Lai Ching-te* used judicial means to eliminate

the opposition party (KMT^(*)) in the name of democracy and became a dictator.

- D. Trump accused the FBI, under the Biden administration, of being "the Gestapo, something Nazi Germany would do".
- Kamala Harris also called D. Trump a "fascist".
- During the Sunflower Student Movement⁴, Kaohsiung mayor Chen Chi-mai (DPP) pasted a moustache on a portrait of former Prime Minister Chiang Yi-hua's (KMT) head, "directly insinuating that dispersing the people occupying the Executive Yuan was like Hitler massacring the Jews". At the time, there were no protests from foreign representative offices.

Eric Chu concludes that:

- foreign representative offices despise the

KMT^{*} and Taiwan, and easily pass moral judgments on the opposition party's speeches;

- the DPP regime has fascist tendencies. The Nazis came to power through democratic procedures (elections), as the "Reichstag fire" enabled Hitler to declare a state of emergency and allow the police to carry out "preventive detentions", and then win a decisive victory in parliamentary elections ;
- the Lai government, on the other hand, doesn't even need to create a file, declare a state of emergency, let alone organize "a martial law farce"⁵ as Yoon Seok-yeol did in South Korea. All it needs is a revocatory referendum (大罷免) to overturn the election results - and all in the name of democracy.

Catherine Bouchet-Orphelin, Asie21

- (1) Japanese general Okamura Yasuji would not be considered a war criminal because, 4 years later, during the battle of Guningtou (古寧頭) northwest of Kinmen in 1949, which was a real disaster for the Communist army against the Nationalist army, we would learn - thanks to declassified archives - that Chiang Kai-shek had been advised by him: Okamura Yasuji had recommended letting the Communists into Kinmen to better encircle them. Cf. **Asie21 n° 187/2024-10** Taiwan: William Lai visits Kinmen (Quemoy). Is Kinmen an issue?
- (2) Cf. **Asie21 n° 194/2025-05** Taiwan: Disappearance of the Han people in Taiwan? Cognitive warfare
- (3) offices **that** function as unofficial embassies
- (4) As far as US-Taiwan relations are concerned, until Ma Ying-jeou's presidency, all KMT^{*} governments were very friendly with the United States. But then came the Sunflower Movement, led by the Greens to protest against **the** Economic Cooperation Free Trade Agreement (ECFA) signed between Xi Jinping and Ma Ying-jeou. Since the Sunflower Movement, the KMT government has lost American support and has been weakened. Demonstrators from this movement entered the Legislative Yuan building and occupied it for 24 days. They had planned a general strike in Taiwan. But the Americans stopped it because their economic interests would be affected. For the record, President Ma Ying-jeou had met Xi Jinping in Singapore before the protests. Cf. **Asie21 n° 152/2021-07** Taiwan - Japan - United States - China: Political games. Taiwanese independence under American control
- (5) See **Asie21 n° 189/2024-12** Taiwan - South Korea: Act II scene 2. Martial law in South Korea backed by President Lai's DPP party

Taiwan - United States - China

Act III scene 5: Trump suddenly mentions unification

The trade war between the USA and China is suspended for 90 days. Donald Trump says: "They've agreed to open up China, to open up China completely, and I think that's going to be fantastic for China, I think it's going to be fantastic for us, and I think it's going to be great for unification and peace."

FACTS

May 12, 2025: President Trump holds a press conference at the White House in Washington.

May 13, 2025: AIT* "sets the record straight" on D. Trump's statement, clarifying that there is no change in US policy.

May 20, 2025: first anniversary of the inauguration of President Lai Ching-te.

CHALLENGES

For the United States: *real* D. Trump's policy, which focuses solely on transactions and not on ideological values.

For Taiwan: concern about D. Trump's statements, which could be an adjustment of US policy towards it.

FORWARD-LOOKING COMMENTS

Washington and Beijing have reached a preliminary consensus to reduce their tariffs by 115%.

Following D. Trump's lecture, AIT* said in a statement that President Trump was speaking about U.S.-China trade: "It is clear that President Trump was speaking in the context of U.S.-China trade relations. [...] U.S.

AIT: *American Institute in Taiwan*, unofficial American embassy in Taiwan

DPP: Democratic Progressive Party

Lai Ching-te (賴清德): President of Taiwan

policy toward Taiwan remains unchanged, and the U.S. approach to Taiwan has remained consistent over decades and administrations."

For Wu Tzu-chia, journalist and former member of the DPP*:

- the easing of relations between the USA and China puts President Lai Ching-te at odds with his slogan of "anti-China and protection of Taiwan⁽¹⁾" (抗中保台). Donald Trump used the words "unification" and "peace", indicating improving relations between the two countries.

- The changes may be seen in Lai Ching-te's speech on the first anniversary of his inauguration, May 20, 2025. His possible pro-independence statements could affect the outcome of trade negotiations between the USA and China. Consequently, his speech will certainly be monitored (see Box 1).

NB: speeches by Taiwanese presidents are always submitted to AIT^(*) in advance.²

The Taiwanese government has already experienced setbacks of this kind. Remember "The American Slap"³: the United States denied Taiwanese comments, reiterating its respect for its "one China" policy.

It's not clear whether the phrase "unification and peace" refers to the future of relations between the USA and China, or the two sides of the Taiwan Strait.

- If it's simply a matter of commercial normalization between these two countries, then it doesn't specifically refer to Taiwan, so Taiwan needn't worry.
- If Trump has inadvertently revealed the substance of his thinking, it would confirm that he doesn't want war and has some ideas about future arrangements between the two sides of the Taiwan Strait because "peaceful reunification is beneficial".
- D. Trump's statement may also be a negotiator's calculation ahead of a phone call with Xi

Jinping, wishing to prepare him for a softening of Beijing's attitude towards Taiwan and create a win-win atmosphere for the US and China.

Trump has rarely spoken positively about Taiwan. He has never expressed his position on sending troops to help defend Taiwan⁽⁴⁾ (see Box 2). On the other hand, he has constantly mentioned his respect for Xi Jinping.

With the US tariff war on Europe and the attitude of D. Trump and JD Vance towards Ukrainian President Zelensky, Taiwan is becoming suspicious of the US and worried that Donald Trump is focusing solely on transactions rather than values, and is "selling out" Taiwan in Sino-American negotiations.

Please note: no official reaction from Beijing regarding D. Trump's mention of unification.

Catherine Bouchet-Orphelin, Asie21

- (1) "Protecting Taiwan": understanding Taiwan's military defense through the purchase of American weapons. See also **Asie21 n° 144/2020-11** Taiwan - USA - China: Record US arms sales to Taiwan under the Tsai government
- (2) Cf. **Asie21 n° 177/2023-11** Box 3: Foreign interference in the election campaign? The Buddha and the monkey in Taiwan - Elections : Blue-White vs. Big shake-up? Who will be the vase?
- (3) Cf. **Asie21 n° 144/2020-11** Taiwan - United States: Joint military exercises by the Marine Corps. The American slap
- (4) Cf. **Asie21 n° 185/2025-04** Taiwan - USA - China: Waiting time for US support in the event of conflict: 30 days

Box 1

Lai Ching-te's investiture anniversary speech

The publication of this issue 194 coincides with the anniversary speech of Lai's first year as president: he said little, as is his wont, about independence and relations between the two shores. At the same time, Trump uttered the word unification, perhaps to ease tensions a little. So, Taiwan continues to serve as an adjustment variable for the United States in its relationship with China.

CBO

Box 2

U.S. policy toward Taiwan

The US approach to Taiwan has always been to recall the three joint Sino-American communiqués, the *Taiwan Relations Act* and the Six Assurances to Taiwan ¹.

The United States has always maintained that the Taiwan question should be resolved peacefully by the people on both sides of the Taiwan Strait themselves, and that the status quo should not be altered unilaterally by either side. The United States is not taking a position on the Taiwan

issue. Of course, Trump doesn't want a war in the Taiwan Strait, but compared to Biden, who has repeatedly stated that the U.S. would send troops if China attacked Taiwan, Trump has never expressed his attitude on sending troops to help defend Taiwan. He has also used the "pen and desk theory" to express his indifference to Taiwan. If "unification" is Trump's "ultimate expectation", it's certainly bad news for Lai Ching-te's Taiwanese government.

CBO

(1) Cf. [Asie21.com: American commitment to Taiwan: Taiwan Relations Act, the three joint communiqués, the Six Assurances](https://www.asie21.com/en/american-commitment-to-taiwan-taiwan-relations-act-the-three-joint-communicues-the-six-assurances)

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Burma

The consequences of the earthquake on the civil war

On March 28, 2025, the most powerful earthquake in a century struck north-central Burma, killing nearly 4,000 people and leaving 2 million others in critical condition. The effects were dramatic for a country already reeling from the civil war that has been raging since the last coup d'état on February 1, 2021. A cataclysm as much geographical as social and strategic, likely to reshuffle the political deck. An opportunity for the Tatmadaw*, but a real ordeal for the opposition to the generals, who are suffering both the consequences of the disorder caused and the army's cynicism. The truce came to an end on April 30, before being reinstated by the junta on May 6.

FACTS

February 1st2021: coup d'état by General Min Aung Laing at the head of the Burmese army.

2021 - 2025: civil war waged by opponents of the coup.

March 28, 2025: a magnitude 7.7 earthquake further aggravates the crisis situation.

April 1st2025: temporary ceasefire announced by various armed groups.

April 2, 2025: the army declares a truce.

April 28, 2025: the army regains control of the town of Lashio (Shan State).

April 30, 2025: end of truce ultimatum.

May 6, 2025: SAC*reinstates the truce until May 31.

CHALLENGES

- The outcome of the civil war,
- overcoming the humanitarian crisis,
- the future of the political and inter-ethnic agreement against the junta,
- the junta's political survival supported by Russia

AA: *Arakan Army*, Burma's ethno-nationalist army, is the military wing of the United League of Arakan.

Bimstec: *Bay of Bengal Initiative for MultiSectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation*, whose main objective is to promote economic cooperation between the countries bordering the Bay of Bengal (Bangladesh, India, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Nepal, Bhutan).

GUN: Government of National Unity, the majority of whose members are in exile.

Mndaa: *The Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army* is an armed resistance group from the Kokang region of Burma.

PDF : *People's Defense Force*

SAC: *State Administration Council*, ruling junta

Tatmadaw: official name of the Burmese Armed Forces

and China,

- the reconstruction of a country that has suffered since its independence in 1948.

FORWARD-LOOKING COMMENTS

In the wake of the latest tragedy in Burma, there are several overlapping fields: economic, social, political and strategic. Each has its own particular importance and impacts on the others. In a country that has been at war for four years, each side immediately considered the consequences of the earthquake on its positions. The earthquake was immediately perceived as an additional difficulty for the opposition and an opportunity for the Tatmadaw*, which at the start of 2025 is experiencing a succession of setbacks in the field.

In military terms, the situation was to the advantage of the armed opposition, which controlled 40% of the territory (compared with 30% for the army), particularly in the Sagaing region, the epicenter of the earthquake. At the cost of complex political and inter-ethnic cooperation, never before unified in contemporary history, the resistance gained credibility with the formation of a parallel government, the GUN*, and the establishment of a "Defense Force" (PDF*) to challenge military initiatives and protect civilians, as well as refuting the declaratory tactics used by the army ("ethnic guerrillas are the enemies of the Barmans"). In the field, numerous joint initiatives by the united resistance front were undertaken to convince the rebel ethnic groups to lend their support. Four years later, it is clear that, despite the difficulties, despite the state of emergency declared throughout the country, and despite the violence of the attacks perpetrated by the army (particularly air attacks), the cooperation worked and enabled the Tatmadaw's ambitions to be thwarted. However, the Tatmadaw's prestige and legitimacy have been permanently undermined; not only are defections continuing, but recruitment is also becoming more difficult.

In this context, the earthquake represented an opportunity for the army:

- on the one hand, to restore its image among a disillusioned and exhausted population,

- secondly, to take advantage of the general disorganization and regain lost positions.

This second objective has clearly been the overriding priority, because in the disaster areas, relief and aid are slow to bring relief to the 198,000 or so displaced people. Many observers deplore the State's negligence.

Since 2021, the resources of the department in charge of crisis and disaster management have been diverted to the security forces. Natural disaster management has been poor, particularly in opposition-controlled regions. Only the populations of the capital, Naypidaw, benefited from public resources. Above all, despite the announcement of a truce after the earthquake, the Tatmadaw* continued its air strikes, an "unbelievable situation" according to UN representatives, who denounced 200 civilians killed and 243 attacks since the end of March.

At the end of April 2025, the junta recaptured the northern town of Lashio, following a Chinese-supervised compromise between the State Administration Council (the junta) and the Mndaa*, which had taken control of this area of Shan State last August. However, this progress remains more mediatized than decisive on the ground, with the resistance retaining control of access roads and surrounding villages.

At this stage, there is nothing to suggest that this compromise, negotiated under the aegis of a China worried about stability on its border, will be sustainable, and that the Mndaa will long accept the setbacks imposed.

Similarly, the army is buckling under the repeated initiatives of the Arakan Army (AA*) and the PDF* in the Bagio and Irrawaddy regions. It is also in difficulty in Kayin State and along the highway linking the Kachen area to Thailand. However, without deceiving anyone, the company

has taken on the role of "facilitator of relief and reconstruction after the earthquake".

In political terms, the most plausible scenario is that the junta will try to take advantage of the current chaos to regain control over an opposition whose remarkable resilience is not inexhaustible. The unifying movement remains fragile, and the junta has every interest in maintaining competition on the ground, even if its inefficiency is obvious. It has announced that it will keep to the electoral timetable, which calls for legislative **elections** by the end of the year, a solution supported by Asean.

Anwar Ibrahim, Prime Minister of Malaysia (president of Asean in 2025), calls on the conflicting parties to work together towards a lasting peace agreement. Probably wishful thinking in a highly complicated context: neither **the** junta nor China has any interest in the emergence of a lasting democratic political solution.

Finally, on the diplomatic front, Min Aung Hlaing, who chairs the SAC*, is also trying to score some successes and "normalize" his situation. Still under global sanctions and despite the urgency of the situation (one week after the earthquake), he attended a Bimstec* meeting in Bangkok on April 4, 2025. He travels to Moscow

on May 9 - the junta leader's fifth visit since the 2021 coup - and to the Asean summit in Kuala-Lumpur on May 26 and 27.

Sophie Boisseau du Rocher, Asie 21



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Cambodia

Between strategic loyalty and prudent diversification

Cambodia's foreign policy is marked by a strengthened strategic partnership with China. However, in a tense geopolitical context, Phnom Penh is showing signs of opening up to other partners, notably Japan, in an attempt to diversify diplomatically and economically in order to preserve its strategic autonomy.

FACTS

April 5, 2025: inauguration by the Cambodian Prime Minister of the extension to the Ream naval base near Sihanoukville, whose construction was financed by China, raising concerns about its possible exclusive military use. The Cambodian government has, however, affirmed its commitment not to allow foreign military bases on its soil, in accordance with its constitution.

April 17, 2025: State visit to Cambodia by Chinese President Xi Jinping. The visit led to the signing of 37 agreements covering areas such as trade, health, education and defense. Among the flagship projects is the US\$1.7 billion Funan Techo **Canal**, designed to link Phnom Penh to the Gulf of Thailand, although China has yet to confirm its full financing¹.

April 19, 2025: the Bungo and Etajima, two Japanese bomb disposal ships, dock at the Ream base for a four-day stopover. They become the first two foreign vessels to dock at the base.

CHALLENGES

For Cambodia

- Preserve its strategic autonomy, by officially refusing to host foreign military bases.

IPEF: Indo-Pacific Economic *Framework*, launched in May 2023 by the United States with Australia, Brunei Darussalam, Fiji, India, Indonesia, Japan, the Republic of Korea, Malaysia, New Zealand, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam.

- Avoid regional diplomatic isolation, by diversifying its partners within Asean and beyond.
- Attract alternative investments, particularly from Japan, to rebalance its development.

For China

- Obtain Cambodia's diplomatic support in regional forums, notably to block critical resolutions on the South China Sea.
- Gain potential access to dual infrastructures, such as the Ream naval base, useful for projecting power in the Gulf of Thailand and beyond.
- The demonstration of a South-South partnership model, in the face of Western initiatives such as the G7 or the *Indo-Pacific Economic Framework**.

For Japan

- Offer a credible alternative to Chinese aid, focusing on infrastructure quality, training and compliance with standards.
- Strengthen our position in the Indo-Pacific, by opening up to defense cooperation (naval port of call in Ream, security dialogues).
- Support a regional architecture based on open multilateral partnerships, in line with Japan's vision of a "free and open Indo-Pacific".

FORWARD-LOOKING COMMENTS

With US\$17.83 billion in trade, China remained Cambodia's leading economic partner for the thirteenth year running in 2024. At the same time, it remains the leading foreign investor in the country, with around 49.82% of foreign direct investment, or a total of US\$6.9 billion approved. However, this trade relationship is characterized by a trade deficit of over US\$13 billion, to Cambodia's disadvantage. Cambodia's economic dependence on China therefore remains significant. However, trade tensions between China and the United States, notably the tariffs imposed by the Trump administration, raise a number of questions about the solidity of this relationship. Since Hun Manet came to power in August 2023, Cambodia has been ostensibly seeking to diversify its relations. Hun Manet is planning an official visit to Japan in May 2025, **with** the aim of attracting more Japanese investment. In addition, Japan has been invited to

make the first foreign naval port call to the Ream base, signalling an openness to military partnerships beyond China.

As Cambodia takes its place in an increasingly polarized regional environment, its ability to play the strategic balancing act - without tipping into silent vassalization or open Chinese defiance - will be decisive. While the diversification undertaken by Hun Manet since August 2023 offers signs of autonomy, it remains fragile in the face of Beijing's economic and political clout.

Three trajectories are taking shape

- Stronger Chinese anchorage: Cambodia accepts de facto Chinese tutelage, capitalizing on investment flows and diplomatic support, at the cost of reduced sovereignty.
- Consolidated equilibrium: Phnom Penh stabilizes an active diversification policy, gradually integrating alternative partners (Japan, South Korea, India), without breaking with China.
- Chinese recovery: too much openness leads to Chinese pressure, forcing a tactical refocusing, or even a tighter alignment.

The success of this ridgeline will depend less on rhetoric than on Cambodia's ability to institutionalize lasting strategic counterparts. It could thus become a model of flexible diplomacy... or a textbook case of asymmetrical dependence. The choice is Cambodia's.

Arnaud Leveau, Asie21

(1) Cf. **Asie21 n° 182/2024-04** [Southeast Asia: The canals of discord](#)

Indonesia

What the withdrawal of *LG Energy Solution* for a project in Indonesia

On December 28, 2020, the LGES*subsidiary signed an MOU*with Bappenas*to invest in a project worth almost US\$10 billion for battery production in two provinces, North Moluccas and Central Java, called *Indonesia Grand Package*. On this occasion, the head of the agency declared that Indonesia had become the first country in the world to integrate the mining industry into battery production.

FACTS

April 21, 2025: Korea's *LG Energy Solution* (LGES), a subsidiary of the LG Group that manufactures batteries for electric vehicles, announces its withdrawal from an \$8.45 billion factory project. Reasons given include "market conditions and the investment environment"¹.

April 23, 2025: Bahlil Lahadalia*, Indonesia's Minister of Energy and Mines, declares that the Chinese company *Zhejiang Huayou Cobalt**, the world's leading cobalt producer, will replace the Korean company².

CHALLENGES

Based on the exploitation of its nickel reserves, which, with a share of between 40% and 50%, are the largest in the world, Indonesia is aiming to develop an integrated upstream/downstream production chain for batteries for electric vehicles. To this end, it is looking for foreign investors.

China, whose CATL*is the world's largest producer of batteries for electric vehicles and BYD the largest manufacturer of electric vehicles, is positioning itself as the dominant player in this project, motivated both by the size of Indonesian nickel reserves and the ban on its export.

Bahlil Lahadalia: Indonesian Minister of Energy and Mines

Bappenas: Indonesia's national investment coordination agency

CATL (宁德时代) : *Contemporary Amperex Technology Co. Limited*, 宁德时代新能源科技股份有限公司

LGES: *LG Energy Solution*, Korean company, subsidiary of the LG Group

MOU: *memorandum of understanding*

Zhejiang Huayou Cobalt (浙江花友钴业): Chinese mining company specializing in cobalt extraction.

FORWARD-LOOKING COMMENTS

According to this MOU*of December 2020, at least 70% of the nickel ore used to produce these batteries was to be processed in Indonesia. Indeed, the previous year, Indonesia had announced that it would stop exporting nickel ore from January 1st2020 to speed up the construction of smelters in the country.

However, LG continues to hold a stake in *HLI Green Power*, a joint venture with Korean carmaker *Hyundai* whose battery manufacturing plant, the first in Indonesia, is due to start up in 2024. LG is

also a shareholder in another joint venture with state-owned *Indonesia Battery Corporation* and Chinese battery manufacturer *Contemporary Amperex Technology Co., Limited* (CATL).

Huayou has been present in Indonesia since 2018 and has already invested US\$8.8 billion in various nickel smelters. The company plans to develop the entire downstream industrial chain for nickel ore processing.

Nickel is making Indonesia extremely dependent on China for the exploitation of its nickel and the development of a downstream industrial chain. Chinese investment in this sector in Indonesia is raising concerns, due to numerous accidents³, workers' rights (including those of Chinese employees⁴), the rights of local populations, and the impact on the environment⁵.

French mining company *Eramet*, which operates the Weda Bay nickel deposit on the Moluccan island of Halmahera, the world's largest in Indonesia, announced in June 2024 with its partner, German chemical group BASF, the abandonment of a nickel refinery project, explaining, "After an in-depth assessment, including the project execution strategy, both partners have decided against this investment." "6In early March 2024, *Le Monde* had echoed the denunciation of "human rights and environmental abuses" by international organizations⁷. European and American companies are under the scrutiny of public opinion, and will be reluctant to commit to projects where Chinese companies have fewer scruples.

Anda Djoehana Wiradikarta, Asie21

- (1) "South Korea's LG Energy Solution pulls out from Indonesia EV battery investment", *Reuters*, April 21, 2025
- (2) "China's Huayou to replace LGES in Indonesian EV battery project, minister says", *Reuters*, April 23, 2025
- (3) "Sludge collapse kills 1 at a Chinese-funded nickel plant in Indonesia", *Associated Press*, March 26, 2025
- (4) "Indonesia's nickel sector under scrutiny as Chinese workers allege inhumane working conditions", *South China Morning Post*, March 3, 2023
- (5) "Chinese-linked nickel miners in Indonesia accelerating deforestation, threatening indigenous Bajau people: report", *South China Morning Post*, April 18, 2024
- (6) "Eramet and BASF decide not to invest in a joint nickel and cobalt refining plant in Indonesia," www.eramet.com, June 24, 2024
- (7) "Un projet du groupe minier français Eramet en Indonésie inquiète les associations", *Le Monde*, March 2, 2024

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Indonesia

Non-alignment and antagonism between China and the United States

Indonesian President Prabowo Subianto, inaugurated in October 2024, visited China on November 8, 2024. It was his first trip abroad. For *The Diplomat*, the trip demonstrated a desire to maintain good relations with China, which is now a major investor in Indonesia¹.

FACTS

August 26, 2024 - September 6, 2024: members of the armed forces of the United States, Indonesia and eight other countries, including France, take part in the *Super Garuda* Shield exercise at three locations in Indonesia.

November 8, 2024: Prabowo travels to China.

May 24, 2025: Chinese Premier Li Qiang pays a three-day visit to Jakarta, at the invitation of the Indonesian President.

CHALLENGES

For Indonesia: stick to its strategy of non-alignment (see Box 1).

FORWARD-LOOKING COMMENTS

According to the Chinese Foreign Ministry, the aim of Li Qiang's visit is to "promote traditional friendship and solidarity and coordination between the two countries". It adds: "The partnership between China and Indonesia continues to develop around five key pillars: politics, economy, cultural and people-to-people exchanges, maritime affairs and security²."

For the time being, Indonesia is not really cooperating with China on the military front. Statements by its President and the Chinese Foreign Ministry seem to suggest that this cooperation will increase.

Bandung Conference: organized in 1955 by Burma, Ceylon (renamed Sri Lanka in 1972), India, Indonesia and Pakistan, the Bandung Conference brought together 29 developing countries from Africa and Asia.

Mohammad Hatta (August 12, 1902 - March 14, 1980): 1st Vice-President of the Republic of Indonesia (August 18, 1945 - December 1st, 1956)

Prabowo Subianto Djojohadikusumo: 8th President of the Republic of Indonesia, elected on March 20, 2024 and inaugurated on October 20, 2024

Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono: President of Indonesia 2009

Yet Indonesia is becoming increasingly economically dependent on China. To mitigate this dependence, it would be in its interest to increase its economic exchanges with the United States, its second-largest customer after China. In fact, Prabowo visited Washington on November 10, 2024, on the heels of his visit to China.

But in April 2025, President Trump announced a proposed 32% tax on imports from Indonesia. Rather than consider countermeasures, Indonesia seemed to prefer to negotiate. A team of Indonesian negotiators visited Washington in April to discuss trade relations between the two countries.

At the inauguration of his second term in 2009, President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono declared: "Indonesia faces a strategic environment where no country perceives it as an enemy and no country considers it as such"³.

We can only hope that Prabowo will make this maxim his own and remain faithful to the non-alignment that has been part of Indonesia's identity since its earliest years.

Anda Djoejana Wiradikarta, Asie21

- (1) "China, Indonesia Sign \$10 Billion in Deals as Prabowo Visits Beijing," *The Diplomat*, November 11, 2024
- (2) "Indonesia Ready to Welcome Premier Li Qiang in Show of Stronger Ties", *The Jakarta Globe*, May 24, 2025
- (3) "Indonesian Foreign Policy: 'A Million Friends and Zero Enemies'," *The Diplomat*, February 14, 2014.

Box 1 History

On September 2, 1948, Mohammad Hatta, Indonesia's first Vice-President, delivered a speech to the *Komite Nasional Indonesia Pusat* (Central Indonesian National Committee)¹ entitled *Mendayung di antara dua karang*, (Rowing between two reefs). In it, Hatta set out the broad lines of Indonesia's foreign policy, which was to be "*bebas aktif*" (independent and active), against the backdrop of the onset of the Cold War. Since the proclamation of its independence on August 17, 1945³, Indonesia had been in conflict with the Dutch, who had resettled in most of what they still considered their colony. Both the United States and the Soviet Union supported the Indonesian cause.

In 1955, Indonesia, along with Burma, India and Pakistan, organized the Bandung Conference, which brought together 29 developing countries from Africa and Asia, all of them former European colonies, with the exception of Japan, which was also the only industrialized country taking part. This conference led to the launch of the Non-Aligned Movement, of which Indonesia is a founding member, in Belgrade in 1961.

But secret US support for separatist rebellions in 1957 and 1958 pushed President Soekarno closer to the Eastern bloc and, after the Sino-Soviet

breakup in 1963, to Communist China.

Following General Soeharto's seizure of power in March 1966, Indonesia broke off diplomatic relations with China, which the new regime accused of supporting a "September 30 Movement"³. It opened its doors to foreign investment in the oil sector, dominated by American companies, and in the mining sector, enabling the American company *Freeport* to sign a contract with the Indonesian government for the development and exploitation of the Grasberg copper mine in West New Guinea, which would turn out to be the world's largest copper deposit.

However, the Soeharto regime reaffirmed Indonesia's non-alignment. It re-established diplomatic relations with China in 1990. Indonesia held the presidency of the movement from 1992 to 1995 - the 40th anniversary of the Bandung Conference.

On August 30, 1999, a referendum was held in East Timor - a Portuguese colony invaded by the Indonesian army in 1975 and annexed the following year - on whether or not to remain part of Indonesia within the framework of regional autonomy. The vote took place without incident, with a turnout of 95%. The "no" vote was 78.5%. Publication of the final results

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triggers a campaign of violence orchestrated by militias and elements of the army. In response, the United States and the European Union suspend all military cooperation with Indonesia.

Under the first administration of George W. Bush (2001-2005), the United States restored limited ties with Indonesia. It lifted an arms embargo in 2005. They wanted to avoid alienating Indonesia, which, described as "the world's most populous Muslim nation", had itself recently been the victim of several bomb attacks by "terrorists linked to Al Qaeda"⁴. In 2007, the two countries set up a military exercise between their land forces, which they named *Garuda Shield*⁵. In 2022, this exercise became *Super Garuda Shield*, with the participation of other countries, including several US allies⁶.

It's a win-win situation for both sides. For the USA, it's an opportunity to demonstrate that "the centrality of ASEAN is a fundamental principle of our approach to the region"⁷. For them, *Super Garuda Shield* is a way of involving countries in their goal of maintaining freedom of navigation in the Indo-Pacific region. For Indonesia, it is an

opportunity to improve its military operational capabilities and interoperability with the armed forces of other countries.

At the end of his visit to Beijing in November 2024, Prabowo called for "*joint development in areas of overlapping claims*" in the South China Sea, a departure from Indonesia's previous position of not recognizing any overlap between Chinese claims and Indonesia's exclusive economic zone recognized under international law⁸.

Indonesia held its first joint military exercise with China in 2011. Called *Sharp Knife*, it involved special forces from both countries and focused on counter-terrorism and hostage rescue. Su Hao, director of the Strategy and Conflict Management Research Center at China Foreign Affairs University, said at the time that a large proportion of China's supplies, including energy imports, passed through the Strait of Malacca. He added that China wished to cooperate more with other countries to guarantee security in the South China Sea and the Strait⁹.

ADW

- (1) It is a body responsible for assisting the President of the Republic of Indonesia, which proclaimed its independence on August 17, 1945. In military and diplomatic conflict with the Netherlands, the former colonial power, which considered the archipelago still its colony, Indonesia did not have the means to organize elections, the first of which were finally held in 1955.
- (2) Indonesia was thus the first colony to declare independence after the end of the Second World War. On August 15, 1945, Emperor Hirohito had addressed the Japanese people in a radio address in which he declared his acceptance of the terms of the Potsdam Conference on the outskirts of Berlin, which had brought together the United States, the United Kingdom and the Soviet Union, marking the end of the war.
- (3) Indonesia: the "September 30 Movement" of 1965 - Asialyst
- (4) "U.S. lifts arms embargo against Indonesia", *NBC News*, November 23, 2005
- (5) Garuda is a fabulous bird in Hindu mythology. It is the vahana (mount) of the god Vishnu and the emblem of the Republic of Indonesia.
- (6) "Super Garuda Shield: is Indonesia becoming a US ally? - Asialyst
- (7) U.S. Indo-Pacific Strategy after one year, *East-West Center* (2024)
- (8) "Of Diplomacy and Gaffes: Making Sense of Prabowo and Anwar's China Visits", *The Diplomat*, December 25, 2024
- (9) "China, Indonesia end first joint training", *China Daily*, June 18, 2011

Philippines - China - United States

No springtime for Manila

Manila is experiencing a turbulent spring. In recent weeks, its relationship with Beijing has undergone a sharp rise in tension, illustrated by the parade of flags on the disputed Sandy Cay reef. This climate of tension is also fueled by a context that Beijing is quick to declare provocative: Pete Hegseth's reassurance tour, the assertion of sovereignty in the South China Sea, the US-Philippine Balikatan-2025 exercise - whose scenarios and maneuver zone approach Taiwan - the Philippine declaration of inevitable involvement in the event of conflict in Taiwan, Manila's defense agreements with Japan and New Zealand.... Since the Marcos presidency, the Philippines has adopted a more uncompromising and less conciliatory stance towards China, boosted by the support shown by Washington, which, in its pivot towards South-East Asia, may be planning to use the Philippines as a proxy for its strategy to contain China, at the heart of the system developed along the first island chain. Manila seems to be preparing for this.

FACTS

March 27 to 30, 2025: reassurance tour by Pete Hegseth*, reminding us during the Philippine leg of the density of the bilateral relationship and that the 1951 Mutual Defense Treaty* was more topical than ever, and evoking in Japan the concept of a "unified defense zone" in Northeast Asia.

April 14, 2025: incident between the Philippine BRP* Cabra and the CCG* Zhongnan near Scarborough shoal^(*) (see Box 1).

April 20, 2025: incident near Scarborough shoal* between the Philippine BRP Apolinario Mabini and a CCG vessel (see Box 1).

April 21, 2025: start of exercise Balikatan-25, co-organized by the US and Philippine armed forces.

April 24, 2025: statement by the Philippine National Security Council suspecting China of engaging in a disinformation campaign to influence the current election campaign.

April 25, 2025

- China accuses the Philippines of damaging the coral reef around Sandy Cay*, due to a nearby construction project.
- GCC* landing on Sandy Cay* atoll (see Box 1).

April 27, 2025: Philippine sovereignty operation (GCP*, navy, maritime police) on the island of Tithu* and reefs Cay 1, 2, 3^(*) (see Box 1).

April 29, 2025: new Chinese patrol near Sandy Cay (see Box 1).

April 2, 2025: announcement by the CTE* of the end of the financial year, "all objectives having been achieved".

April 30, 2025: *West Philippine Sea* disappeared from *Google Maps* for a few hours.

May 1st 2025: arrest of a Chinese national suspected of spying on the Philippine Election Commission using electronic means (IMSI catcher^(*)). In February, two Chinese nationals were arrested with the same type of equipment, in the vicinity of military and government installations. Accusations denied by the Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman.

May 3, 2025: Vietnam issues a formal protest against Chinese and Philippine violations of its sovereignty over territories claimed in the MdCM*.

May 5, 2025:

- interception and escort by the Philippine coastguard of the Chinese scientific research vessel Tan Suo 3 (see Box 1).
- incident between the Philippine BRP*Emilio Jacinto and a GCC*vessel and two PLAN*frigates southeast of Scarborough shoal* (see Box 1).

May 7, 2025:

- an investigation by the Philippine Senate accuses the Chinese Embassy in Manila of funding an online disinformation campaign to influence the May 12 elections.
- President Marcos*orders an investigation into sand extracted from the Philippine coast and used for Chinese artificial constructions in disputed areas of MdCM*.

CHALLENGES

For the Philippines

- Assert their sovereignty over the part of the MdCM*they claim, based in particular on international law (Montego Bay Convention, 2016 arbitration by the Permanent Court of Arbitration in The Hague in favor of the Philippines).
- Show their determination in the face of Chinese intimidation, confront and respond to Chinese provocations, and denounce them by making them public.
- Maintain the lifeline extended by Washington (under the 1951 Mutual Defense Treaty) and broaden their support base in the region and beyond.

For the United States

- Supporting Manila, while avoiding getting carried away by Philippine enthusiasm.
- Reassure regional partners of their commitment to the region in the face of China.

- Consolidate a line of containment against China along the first island chain*, with the support of key partners, the Philippines and Japan as first curtain.

For China

- Preserve its claimed sovereignty over the MdCM*and maintain its freedom of manoeuvre all the way to the Pacific, beyond the first island chain.
- Dissuade any hint of resistance by using the full arsenal of "grey zone"*operations, thus avoiding the triggering of the US-Philippine Mutual Defense Treaty*.
- Prevent the formation of an "anti-Chinese clique" at Washington's behest.
- Oppose all support for Taiwanese independence.

FORWARD-LOOKING COMMENTS

Manila has had a turbulent spring, fraught with tensions with Beijing, due to a succession of incidents in the MdCM* (see box 1), disinformation manoeuvres allegedly carried out by China during the Philippine electoral campaign, and the Balikatan-25 exercise (see box 2), a show of force of an alliance between partners who are preparing for war with China. The Philippines, boosted by the support of its partners, first and foremost the United States, seems to have taken the lead and is not hesitating to challenge Beijing, as illustrated by the parade of flags on Sandy Cay and the declarations on Taiwan.

The Philippine posture has changed since the election of Ferdinand Marcos Jr.*who, in contrast to the waltz-hesitations of his predecessor, displays great determination, uninhibited self-assurance and the will to resist Chinese pressure in relations with China, and

particularly in disputes over the MdCM*. In episodes of friction at sea with the Chinese, Manila relies on international law and resorts to systematic, carefully documented communication (backed up by videos) to denounce the behavior of Chinese vessels.

To add insult to injury, Manila has made clear its support for Taiwan:

- during Balikatan-25, the Chief of Staff of the Philippine Armed Forces spoke of the Philippines' inevitable involvement in the event of a conflict involving Taiwan;
- communication by the Philippine navy spokesman in MdCM* of links, admittedly unofficial and informal, with the Taiwanese navy and possible joint patrols in the Luzon Strait;
- easing of the Philippine government's restrictions on Taiwanese travel on April 21.

What's more, the collection of Philippine supporters against China is growing, with its appearance of an anti-Chinese bloc, and Manila is giving them plenty of media coverage:

- visit by Indonesia's Defense Minister on April 23 ;
- visit at the end of April by the Japanese Prime Minister, with the signing of an ACSA* and a draft agreement on the exchange of sensitive information, and the first participation of Japanese self-defense forces in the Balikatan exercise;
- signature of a SOVFA* with New Zealand (the Philippines had already signed one with the United States, Australia and Canada).

China's attitude is unsurprising. On the one hand, it is taking advantage of the fact that the world's attention is focused elsewhere (trade war, Ukraine, Middle East) to advance its pawns, in the grey zone, little by little and according to the tried and tested tactic of the fait accompli :

- landing on Sandy Cay*;

- installation of metal structures in the disputed waters opposite South Korea in the Yellow Sea in April ;
- incursion of 4 CCG*vessels into Senkaku/Diaoyu* territorial waters on May 3.

It relies on low resistance and the absence of intervention, although this no longer seems to work with the Philippines.

In the face of what Beijing sees as provocations, its reactions have remained in line with expectations. On the Sandy Cay incident, it denounced the "unrest created by the Philippines in MdCM* and the call for forces from outside the region". Regarding Manila's reference to Taiwan, Beijing reiterated its "opposition to any official interaction with the Chinese region of Taiwan by countries having diplomatic relations with China", advised the Philippines "not to play with fire", and summoned the Philippine ambassador to Beijing. In response to the Balikatan-25 exercise, in addition to the classic denunciation of the destabilizing role of the United States - "to maintain its own hegemony and selfish interests, the United States has repeatedly used China as an excuse to try to turn the Asia-Pacific into a powder keg and certain countries into cannon fodder" - Beijing stepped up its military activities. It has deployed reconnaissance aircraft and drones in the Philippine Sea and off the coast of Taiwan, two spy ships (the Yuhengxing and the Kaiyangxing) in the MoCM*, and the naval battle group of the aircraft carrier Shandong from the Pacific, just 4 km north of the Babuyan Islands.

The Philippines' self-confidence in the face of Beijing is undoubtedly boosted by Washington's expressions of interest. In Manila at the end of March, Pete Hegseth reiterated the unwavering nature of their alliance and the strength of the Mutual Defense Treaty, and the deployment of powerful, modern equipment at Balikatan-25. This strong support from Washington, illustrating the pivot to Southeast Asia, seems to make Manila an American outpost against China. The

missiles deployed in the Philippines (see Box 2) are part of the "missile wall" announced by General Flynn in 2023, to be erected from the Philippines to Japan to deter China's assault on Taiwan. However, the United States will have to be wary of a possible Filipino overconfidence, which could embarrass them. A Filipino death in a poorly managed incident would be difficult to manage, as it would theoretically trigger the implementation of the Mutual Defense Treaty; Beijing must also take this into account.

could even imagine that it is sponsored by the Trump administration, which is only too happy to find proxies for its strategy of containment. In any case, this reinforcement of defense ties between the Philippines and Japan is driven by the crucial need to bridge the uncertainty that Washington is causing, even if the show of strength and cohesion provided by the 40th edition of the Balikatan exercise will have removed, at least for three weeks, any ambiguity about the American commitment.

The rapprochement between Manila and Tokyo comes at just the right time for Washington. One

Philippe Deponcelle, Asie21

ACSA: *Acquisition and Cross-Services Agreement*, designed to simplify and accelerate acquisition, supply, exchange and logistics support processes for the armed forces of signatory nations.

PLA: People's Liberation Army of the People's Republic of China

BrahMos: supersonic cruise missile (mach 2.8, with a range of 290 to 400 km) produced in India, designed for anti-ship warfare, but which also has land targeting capabilities.

BRP: *Barko ng Republika ng Pilipinas*, ship of the Republic of the Philippines, prefix of Philippine navy ship names

Cay 1, 2, 3: Cays 1, 2 and 3 are three small sandbars that make up Sandy Cay.

CT Sud: Southern Theater Command of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) of the People's Republic of *China*

Ferdinand Marcos Jr.: elected President of the Philippines in May 2022, marking the return of the Marcos clan to power, 36 years after the fall of his father.

FS-LIDS: *Fixed Site-Low, Slow, Small Unmanned Aircraft System Integrated Defeat System*, a defense solution designed to detect, identify and neutralize small, slow-moving, low-altitude drones.

GCC: Chinese Coast Guard (People's Republic of China)

GCP: Philippine Coast Guard

Hegseth (Pete): U.S. Secretary of Defense since January 25, 2025

HIMARS: high-mobility artillery rocket system, launching high-precision guided missiles (range up to 300 km) mounted on a light vehicle.

IFPC-HPM: *Indirect Fire Protection Capability - High-Powered Microwave*, a defense system using a high-powered microwave weapon designed to neutralize or disable drones, especially swarms of small drones.

IMSI catcher: surveillance device used to intercept mobile communications traffic, retrieve information remotely or track the movements of terminal users.

MADIS: *Marine Air Defense Integrated System*, a short-range air defense system designed to detect, track and neutralize unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs).

MdCM: South China Sea

LIG Nex1 C-Star missile: anti-ship missile produced in Korea, designed for surface attacks against naval targets, particularly in *sea-skimming* mode, i.e. flying at very low altitude to avoid radar detection.

NMESIS missile: *Navy Marine Expeditionary Ship Interdiction System*, an anti-ship missile system developed for the United States Marine Corps (USMC) to support land-sea attacks. It combines the Naval Strike Missile (NSM), capable of neutralizing sea and land targets over 100 nautical miles away, with an autonomous land platform.

"Grey zone" operations: hostile actions below the threshold of full-scale armed aggression, without triggering an immediate conventional military response.

PLAN (PLA Navy): People's Republic of China Navy

First island chain: in military strategy, the island chain strategy refers to the maritime containment of the People's Republic of China by the United States. The first island chain is defined as the chain of islands comprising, from north to south, the Kuril Islands, the Korean peninsula, the Japanese archipelago including the Ryukyu Islands and Taiwan, the north-western part of the Philippines (in particular Luzon, Mindoro and Palawan) and Borneo.

Sabina shoal: atoll in the Spratly Islands in the South China Sea, claimed by the People's Republic of China, Taiwan and Vietnam.

Sandy Cay (Tiexian Jiao in Chinese): a small reef in the Spratly archipelago in the South China Sea, measuring around 200 m², located just 3 km from Thitu Island (Pag-asa), a Philippine military base. Claimed by China, Taiwan, the Philippines and Vietnam

Scarborough shoal: atoll-shaped reef in the South China Sea claimed by the People's Republic of China, the Philippines and Taiwan.

Second Thomas shoal: atoll in the Spratly Islands

in the South China Sea, claimed by the People's Republic of China, Taiwan and Vietnam. It is occupied militarily by the Philippines, who voluntarily grounded the BRP Sierra Madre there in 1999.

Senkaku/Diaoyu: a group of eight uninhabited Japanese islets in the East China Sea, claimed by Taiwan and the People's Republic of China since 1971.

SOVFA: *Status of Visiting Forces Agreement*, formalizing military cooperation between two countries, in particular enabling the dispatch of troops for training and joint operations.

Spratleys: archipelago of 14 small coral islands or sparsely inhabited cays in the South China Sea, the subject of territorial disputes between China, the Philippines, Taiwan, Malaysia, Vietnam and Brunei.

Tithu: inhabited island in the Spratly archipelago, controlled by the Philippines and claimed by the People's Republic of China, Taiwan and Vietnam.

Mutual Defense Treaty: treaty signed between the United States and the Philippines on August 30, 1951, providing for each of the two states to come to the aid of the other signatory state in the event of an armed attack.

Typhoon: ground-to-ground missile system designed to fill the gap between tactical and hypersonic missiles, offering medium-range strike capability (500 to 1,800 km depending on the missile used).

EEZ: exclusive economic zone, maritime area over which a coastal state exercises sovereign and economic rights with regard to the exploitation and use of natural resources. It extends from the state's baseline to a maximum of 200 nautical miles (370.42 km) from its coastline.



Box 1**Renewed Sino-Philippine tensions in MDCM* in April-May 2025**

April 14, 2025: incident between the Philippine BRP**Cabra* and the CCG* *Zhongnan 36* nautical miles south of Scarborough shoal*, with the Chinese vessel behaving in an unprofessional and dangerous manner, according to the Philippine navy.

April 20, 2025: incident 8.5 nautical miles northeast of Scarborough shoal* between the Philippine navy vessel BRP *Apolinario Mabini* and a GCC*vessel. CT Sud*said the GCC*had "expelled" it after its "illegal intrusion" into the atoll's waters, while the Philippine armed forces claimed it was carrying out a regular maritime patrol in compliance with national and international laws.

April 25, 2025: China accuses the Philippines of degrading the coral reef around Sandy Cay*, due to a nearby construction project.

April 25, 2025: GCC* land on Sandy Cay*atoll, allegedly following the "illegal" landing of Filipinos "in mid-April"; assertion of "legitimate" sovereignty, staged with photos of the Chinese flag unfurled on the site. Note that China claims Sandy Cay is under its jurisdiction, but does not occupy it, nor does the Philippines.

April 27, 2025: Philippine sovereignty assertion operation (GCP*, navy, maritime police) on the island of Tithu* and Cay 1, 2, 3*reefs.

April 29, 2025: new Chinese patrol on April 29,

according to the PLA(*) CT Sud, after the official condemnation of the Philippine operation.

May 5, 2025: interception and escort by the Philippine Coast Guard (one ship and one helicopter) 92 nautical miles off the northern coast of the Philippines, of the Chinese scientific research vessel *Tan Suo 3*, suspected of carrying out illegal scientific activities in the Philippine EEZ*. The Chinese vessel was seen recovering the deep-sea exploration submarine *Shanghai Yongshi* and marine research equipment. On April 16, the Philippine army reported the results of an investigation into five drones discovered in Philippine waters in 2022 and 2023, some of which contained Chinese components and a Chinese SIM card, suggesting that they were collecting data for commercial and military purposes.

May 5, 2025: incident between the Philippine vessel BRP**Emilio Jacinto* and a GCC*vessel and two PLAN*frigates, around 11.8 nautical miles southeast of the disputed Scarborough Reef*. The Philippine army referred to Chinese maneuvers as "irresponsible", aggressive and dangerous, while China referred to a legitimate interception, and a professional and law-abiding attitude. The Chinese Ministry of Defense spokesman denounced "the Philippines' repeated violations and provocations at sea".

Philippe Deponcelle, Asie21

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Box 2**Balikatan-25: strategic signals to Beijing**

Exercise Balikatan-25 took place from April 21 to May 9, 2025; this was the 40th edition of this exercise co-organized by the Philippines and the United States.

Some 16,000 American soldiers and 6,000 Filipinos formed the core of the participants, who were joined by Australian troops and, for the first time, elements of the Japanese Self-Defense Forces. A dozen European countries sent observers, including the UK, France, Germany, Poland and the Netherlands. Traditionally dedicated to operational readiness and improving interoperability between partner armies, this year's exercise featured a number of innovations in line with the company's stated aim of countering Chinese ambitions in the region.

Certain phases of the exercise (with scenarios reminiscent of Taiwan), and the use of the most modern equipment, were strategic signals to Beijing:

- **March 28, 2025:** as a prelude to the exercise, a joint U.S.-Philippine-Japanese naval patrol near Scarborough shoal in MdCM.
- **April 28, 2025:** exercise with American, Filipino and Australian troops to repel an amphibious assault.

- **April 24 to 29, 2025:** *Multilateral Maritime Event* (MME) involving the US Navy and Coast Guard, Japanese and Philippine navies.
- **April 29, 2025:** joint patrol of the Philippine, US and Australian navies in the Philippine EEZ (9th *Multilateral Maritime Cooperative Activity* - MMCA).
- Deployment of a second Typhoon* intermediate missile system, which may also remain on site beyond the exercise.
- Deployment (and firing) of NMESIS* anti-ship missile batteries by the US Marine Corps on the island of Batan in the Bashi Strait between Taiwan and Luzon.
- Deployment (and firing of 6 rockets) of HIMARS* on the island of Palawan.
- First deployment of the MADIS* anti-drone system outside the United States.
- On the Philippine side, deployment of the new supersonic missile of Indian origin BrahMos* received in April 2024, and anti-ship missiles of Korean origin LIG NEX 1 C-Star*.
- Deployment of the American carrier battle group around the aircraft carrier USS Nimitz.

Philippe Deponcelle, Asie21

India - Pakistan

New Indo-Pakistani armed conflict, but a global war avoided

The attack on April 22, 2025, attributed by India to a Pakistani-backed militant group, led to a sharp deterioration in relations between the two countries, violent air battles, air strikes on the ground and exchanges of artillery and drone fire. A new all-out war between the two countries was narrowly averted.

FACTS

April 22, 2025: terrorist attack near Pahalgam in Indian-administered Kashmir, killing 26 people, all Indians (25 tourists and 1 local). According to some sources, a Nepalese was among the 26 victims.

April 23, 2025: expulsion of Pakistani diplomats posted to New Delhi, including military attachés. Closure of the border and consequent cessation of all traffic through the Attari/Wagah border crossing. India suspends the Indus Treaty of 1960.

April 24, 2025: India suspends the issue of visas to Pakistanis. Pakistan bans Indian aircraft from flying over its territory. No more visas issued to Indians, with the exception of Sikhs on pilgrimage. Suspension of various bilateral agreements, including the Simla Agreement. India demands the departure of all Pakistanis on its territory by April 29 at the latest.

last week of April 2025: Indian and Pakistani troops exchange fire along the Line of Control in Kashmir

April 30, 2025: India bans Pakistani aircraft from flying over its territory.

May 3, 2025: India bans all imports from Pakistan.

Night of May 6 to 7, 2025: Indian air attacks on terrorist sites in Pakistan-administered Kashmir and Pakistani Punjab.

May 7 2025: Pakistani retaliation against Indian military sites in Indian-administered Kashmir and Indian Punjab. Air battles resulting in aircraft losses not clearly identified.

May 9, 2025: India launches missiles at several Pakistani military sites, including the Nur Khan air base in Rawalpindi.

May 10, 2025: Ceasefire between the two countries.

May 20, 2025: General Syed Asim Munir, Chief of Staff of the Pakistani Army, is promoted to the rank of Field Marshal.

CHALLENGES

For India, the challenge is to maintain order in Kashmir and prevent further major terrorist acts.

For Pakistan, the aim is to internationalize the Kashmir problem and force India to apply the Indus Treaty, signed in 1960, guaranteeing the sharing of waters between the two countries.

FORWARD-LOOKING COMMENTS

The attack was claimed by a little-known group, *The Resistance Front*, a branch of *Laksbar-e-Taiba*, an Islamist movement supported by Pakistan and considered an Islamist organization by the European Union and several countries including the UK, USA and Canada. *The Resistance Front* was

created in 2019, shortly after India revoked Kashmir's special status and bifurcated it into two Union territories, Jammu and Kashmir on the one hand and Ladakh on the other. In fact, *The Resistance Front* has retracted its statement that it was not the perpetrator of the attack.

For the time being, the perpetrators of the attack remain unaccounted for. The Indian police have released sketches of three men, including two Pakistanis.

Pakistani reactions to Indian accusations were swift. While insisting on India's lack of proof, Islamabad denies any responsibility for the attack and is ready to collaborate in an independent investigation. New Delhi refuses to accept any international involvement. The Indian government also announced that it was suspending application of the Indus Treaty signed in 1960. Islamabad claims that any massive use of the waters of the Indus and its tributaries Chenab and Jhelum, prohibited by the 1960 treaty, would be considered a *casus belli*¹.

Naturally, Indian tourism in Kashmir will cease indefinitely, even though it is an important and much-appreciated source of income. Deprived of tourism resources, what will the Kashmiris do? Will they oppose the militants or not? Or will they support their demand for independence or attachment to Pakistan? It's hard to say, as the population is divided between supporters of independence and supporters of India or Pakistan. In all likelihood, the perpetrators of the attack benefited from local complicity. The attack provoked reactions throughout India. Clashes between Hindus and Muslims took place in various parts of the country. Kashmiris are particularly targeted by Hindu extremists. On the Pakistani side, as on the Indian side, tourists are avoiding border areas, in this case Gilgit-Baltistan in the Pakistan-administered part of Kashmir.

The Indian press generally supports the Indian government's firm stance. So do the various political parties and public opinion. On the night of May 6-7, India launched air strikes in Pakistan-administered Kashmir and Pakistani Punjab, targeting what it claimed were terrorist sites, but sparing military infrastructure. Pakistan had expected Indian attacks, and the terrorists had presumably left the area. He said the Indian strikes had actually destroyed mosques and madrassas, killing many civilians and discrediting India. According to him, the Indian operation, called *Sindoor* (distinctive vermilion powder on the hair of Hindu married women), was a failure. In their retaliation, called *Bunyan-um-Marsoos* (Iron Wall), the Pakistanis claim to have damaged air bases and other military sites in Indian-administered Kashmir and Indian Punjab. In fact, the damage is said to have been minor. The Indians then attacked several Pakistani airbases with some success, in particular Bholari, 160 km from Karachi, Nur Khan in Rawalpindi, Rahim Khan and Sargodha.

It seems certain that Indian aircraft, including at least one Rafale, have been destroyed. The Pakistani Prime Minister has stated that six Indian aircraft, including three Rafales, have been shot down. If the destruction of the Rafales is confirmed, it could be attributed to Pakistan's use of a Saab 2000 Erieye radar aircraft. This radar, which is more powerful than that of the J-10 fighter, would have made it possible to detect the Indian Rafales well ahead of time and transmit the firing coordinates to the J-10 fighters in real time. In Pakistan, commentators are quick to point out the excellence of the Pakistani air force, and also to praise the performance of Chinese J-10 aircraft equipped with PL 15 E air-to-air missiles, also of Chinese origin. On the other hand, they point out that the Indian army's Rafales are technologically obsolete. The fact is that Dassault has been weakened and could suffer the consequences for its exports. Indians and the

French will have to learn the lessons of recent battles. These were reported to have taken place while aircraft from both sides were in their respective national airspaces. In fact, if Rafales were shot down, it may well have been because of the disparity between the missiles used by the two sides. Is the Chinese PL 15 E missile on the J10 superior to the French Meteor missile on the Rafale? Do the Pakistani and Indian air forces have the latest modernized versions of these missiles? A PL 15 E missile launched by Pakistan that missed its target was reportedly recovered on Indian soil, almost intact. Enough to interest Western armies. The range of on-board radars may also be to blame. And what about pilot training? Are Indian pilots sufficiently trained in a weapon system that has only been available to them for a relatively short time? The Indian authorities remain silent on the losses suffered, claiming only to have disabled a Pakistani aircraft. They emphasize the excellence of the Russian SU 400 surface-to-air system, which has proved its effectiveness in recent battles.

India had largely underestimated the Pakistani armed forces. Moreover, the appointment, as of April 30, of a new Commander-in-Chief of the *Northern Command* to replace a general who had retired, came as a surprise in these troubled times. Indeed, in the event of war against Pakistan, or even China, this major command would be directly involved.

Pakistan's defense budget is very high, given the country's financial resources. However, as well as the fight against Islamist terrorist and independence movements in the two western provinces, recent fighting with India justifies this expenditure, which will increase significantly. Paradoxically, Pakistan's military successes will have negative consequences for the country, contributing to its downgrading because of the enormous expenditure that will be devoted to

security and defense, which will be detrimental to development, hampered moreover by significant demographic growth. This will be detrimental to the country's development, which will also be hampered by significant demographic growth. Civilians were increasingly under the thumb of the powerful, violently anti-Indian Army Chief of Staff, General Syed Asim Munir. His elevation to the rank of field marshal seems surprising, given that it is essentially the air force that has distinguished itself. This distinction confirms the minor role played by General Sahir Shamshad Mirza, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the highest-ranking officer in the military hierarchy. The armed conflict has restored the military's image in the country, which had been seriously tarnished. As in India, the Pakistani people support their government. National unity has been restored, at least temporarily. What's more, the Kashmir problem is the subject of international debate, to India's detriment. But economically, India appears solid and capable of increasing its defense budget without compromising its development, even if it must guard against two fronts, Pakistan and China. The gap with Pakistan will widen in India's favor.

Little has been heard from the warring parties' neighboring countries. A retired Bangladeshi general and advisor to Muhammad Yunus, the head of the interim government, suggested a joint attack by Bangladesh and China to seize India's northeastern provinces, should the latter launch a war against Pakistan. The Bangladeshi Foreign Ministry said it did not associate itself with this statement. In any case, India must be cautious. India is restricting its imports from Bangladesh, confirming the deterioration in relations between the two countries.

The *Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan* (TTP) terrorist movement did not take advantage of the Indo-Pakistan conflict to intensify its actions in

Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa. Similarly, China has refrained from intervening in the northern part of Kashmir in Aksai Chin to increase its territorial conquests. China supports Pakistan, while the United States and the European Union call for moderation on the part of India and Pakistan, while supporting the former in the fight against terrorists. The countries of the Persian Gulf are adopting a balanced policy, taking a stand for neither India nor Pakistan, and

advocating de-escalation and a peaceful solution. Many countries, particularly NATO members, took an interest in the conflict, which saw the massive use of fighter planes and drones. Lessons will be learned by comparing the performance of Chinese weapons systems used by Pakistan with that of Russian and Western weapons systems used by India.

Alain Lamballe, Asie21

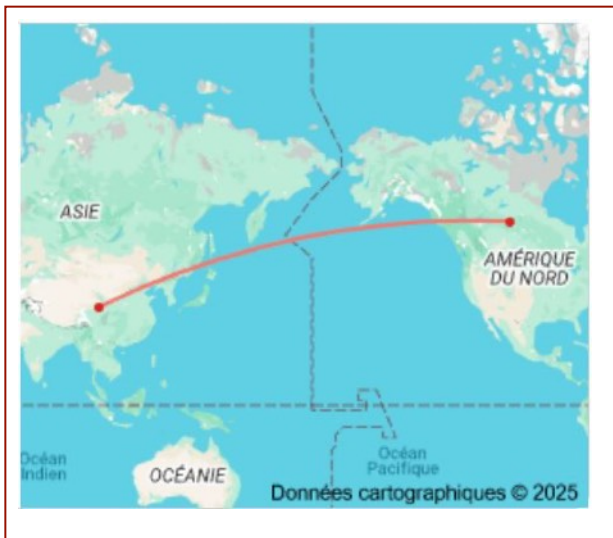
- (1) Cf. **Asie21 n° 194/2025-05** Pakistan - Afghanistan - India - Bangladesh: Towards a major confrontation between Pakistan, Afghanistan, India and Bangladesh over shared waters

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Asia - Canada - United States

Concerns

The change of governance in Washington is a new concern for Canada. Often an expiatory victim in the place of the United States, notably for certain Asian countries, it must now deal with those countries whose emigrant populations are important to its population and involved in its government.



Falun Gong: "Dharma Wheel discipline", an amalgam of physical and spiritual practices developed in 1992 by Li Hongzhi and adopted by millions of Chinese, which has been the subject of a government crackdown since 1999.
Five Eyes: Anglo-Saxon intelligence alliance comprising Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the United Kingdom and the United States.
Hardeep Singh Nijjar: Indian-Canadian political and religious activist assassinated on June 18, 2023 in Surrey (British Columbia), known for having supported the creation of a Sikh state in the Punjab region, Khalistan
WTO: World Trade Organization

FACTS

2016: on the campaign trail, Donald Trump was already criticizing various agreements with Canada.

2018: *Huawei's* CFO is arrested in Vancouver¹.

2018-2019

- chinese white paper on arctic policy,
- Polar Silk Road Initiative.

2019 and 2021: Chinese interference officially identified in several Canadian ridings.

2023: murder of a Sikh religious and independence activist near Vancouver².

2024

- Donald Trump advocates annexing Canada as the 51st state,
- India accuses Canada of human trafficking.

2025

- two-thirds of immigrants **have** come from Asia since 2016,
- one Canadian in six is from Asia.

CHALLENGES

For Canada

- Avoid becoming an outlet for the quarrels of grown-ups.
- Broaden the range of allies and partners to present common fronts.

- Protecting people of all origins.
- Don't dry up immigration because of mistrust.

For the United States

- Consider that a neighbor, a loyal ally, is better than a defeated one on your doorstep.

For the Commonwealth core states, Australia and New Zealand

- Faced with some of the same concerns, keeping the block they've formed up to now strong with Canada.

For the European Union

- Getting even closer to a country that, while moving away from its roots, shares its convictions.

For China

- Strive to further accentuate the discord between Ottawa and Washington.
- Keep up the pressure on Ottawa.

For India

- Seek peaceful rather than aggressive solutions with Canada.

For Pakistan

- To stop interfering if it wants to make it a possible ally against the United States and obtain its neutrality in its confrontations with India.

For other Asian countries: Korea, Japan, Indonesia, Philippines (2th Asian community of over a million), **Vietnam**

- Strengthen the ties that facilitate their populations living in Canada.

For Russia

- Pursue its fight against the United States, using Canada as a springboard.
-

FORWARD-LOOKING COMMENTS

A unique ethnic and cultural amalgam, **Canada** is more committed than most to international law and human rights. It respects the decisions of international bodies and remains faithful to its alliances. It also serves as a convenient scapegoat for the wrongs of its powerful neighbor, when it comes to authoritarian regimes. It has already experienced this on several occasions, and its nationals have regularly been the individual victims of so-called hostage diplomacy. A typical example is the 2018 episode involving, at Washington's request, the prosecution (dropped four years later) of *Huawei* executive Meng Wanzhou, to which Beijing reacted by directly targeting Canada and its nationals.

It is subject to aggressive acts of various types and origins.

D. Trump accuses it of facilitating illegal immigration and fentanyl trafficking³. It is through economic but not military pressure, in a position of undisputed first partner - trade between the two countries is the largest in the world - that he would annex it for what would be his supposed benefit.

Other "aggressors" are identified by a report from the Canadian intelligence community. It points to China, Russia, India, Pakistan and Iran as threats, and cites their motivations, their interference and what it may reveal about their methods. All are obviously pragmatic, and take the path of least resistance, supporting parties or individuals deemed most favorable to their interests. Their support bases are their diasporas.

China, which accounts for half of the 3.4 million people who identify themselves as Asian, is by far the most effective, with the most advanced methods and little restraint towards the weakest, in its eyes, Canada.

China's primary objective remains diaspora surveillance and transnational repression of the regime's opponents. The targets are the Five Poisons: *Falun Gong** practitioners, pro-democracy activists, Taiwanese independence fighters, Uighurs and Tibetans. Beijing has reportedly carried out clandestine abductions, and its own *China Global Television Network* (CGTN) has revealed forced confessions.

Its weapons against Ottawa are powerful and unrestrained, starting with hostage diplomacy and the imposition of impromptu punitive taxes on sensitive products. At the WTO*, challenged on the canola⁴ issue, Beijing is blocking the investigation and, in so doing, issuing a warning to middle powers with less capacity to resist the pursuit of its objectives. For Canada, this means dissociating itself as much as possible from the United States.

The country is also more conducive to industrial espionage on the many American-made products.

China has reportedly already implemented artificial intelligence to interfere in election campaigns, a threat to elections. In addition to appealing to and threatening its diaspora, China clandestinely plays on communities of opponents and provides financial support to candidates who are in line with its strategic interests. It interferes in the social media, seeking to mislead both local opinion and native Chinese.

In short, although the two countries have trade exchanges that are essential to both, China continues to attack a target it considers easy, to the point of ignoring its requests for dialogue. It has already scored a victory in Ottawa's moderation on the Taiwan question.

India, with 250,000 immigrants - twice as many as China - has taken the lead in the number of

foreign entries into Canada, with over 18% of the total, ahead of China in third place with 9%. It also practices transnational repression, including assassinations such as that of Hardeep Singh Nijjar*. This was the first confirmed action by its secret services abroad outside the Indian peninsula. Effective, they can even take an interest in simple opponents of the ruling power. Delhi supports Canadian politicians who are sympathetic to it. The main target is the Sikh diaspora, accused as a whole, but wrongly, of terrorism. Its particular target is the small number of the most ultras dreaming of creating a Khalistan.

Pakistan, with a more limited diaspora of around 300,000 people, is also prospecting among Punjabis (almost as numerous), Sri Lankans, Tamils and Bangladeshis, who have a strong presence. Its actions are aimed at countering Indian influence. Its representatives strive to seduce personalities sympathetic to them, while discrediting those who lean towards India. It does not hesitate to exert its own influence by interfering indirectly in electoral campaigns. He also seeks to identify and intimidate political opponents of his regime.

Russia also exerts its influence, but mainly against the United States and the international institutions in which they play an essential role: UN, Nato, Aukus, Five Eyes*, IMF.

Its social media networks and websites relay the Kremlin's messages and drive wedges into social divisions to influence public opinion.

Iran, which has a community of 200,000, carries out information and intimidation campaigns against its diaspora. The Islamic Republic seeks to muzzle those most critical of its regime. Iranian nationals, like Chinese nationals, are blacklisted from entering Canada.

Canada is stepping up exchanges **with Vietnam**. Many Vietnamese study here. Bilateral trade is growing. While there are exchanges on these subjects, the question of political regimes and human rights nevertheless divides the two countries.

Relations are good with **Indonesia** and the **Philippines**, and Canada has carried out a number of international initiatives with Korea, which shares many of our values.

After many complex historical events involving its now-integrated nationals, **Japan's** relations with China are now more peaceful. The two countries' fears of China can only bring them closer together.

Australia is in a similar situation to Canada in its relations with China, which uses the same procedures against it, to the point of demanding fourteen policy changes by ultimatum. In addition, because of their geographical proximity, Australia is particularly vigilant in the face of military threats.

Along with the **United States, the United Kingdom and New Zealand, Australia and Canada** make up the *Five Eyes** alliance of intelligence services, focused primarily on China. But Canada is not part of the Aukus, a military cooperation agreement kept secret for a time, which also seeks to oppose Chinese ambitions in the Pacific. This tripartite agreement includes only the United States, the United Kingdom and Australia. Canada and New Zealand have chosen not to sign up, in order to spare Beijing.

The Arctic poses a geostrategic problem. China, which has invested in ports and airfields in

Norway and Iceland, sees itself as a "neighboring country" in this region. Its interests are allied to those of Russia, with whom it signed an agreement on a North Atlantic sea route in 2020. The Polar Silk Road brings it closer to Europe and avoids Suez. While Beijing is genuinely involved in scientific research, its motivations remain primarily strategic and economic, given the easier access to resources such as gas, oil and minerals, made possible by global warming. In addition, Canada and the United States share important common interests. Finally, the environmental question divides Canadians both generally and specifically with regard to this region.

Both the recently elected government and its opposition agree that Canada needs to diversify its network of international relations. The next G7 summit, to be held in Alberta in June 2025, could contribute to this. Somewhat easily, outgoing politicians insist that the country must open up even to those whose political systems diverge, or even oppose each other in terms of governance, such as China, India or Saudi Arabia.

If we consider that Asians represent the fastest-growing population group in Canada, due to immigration and the birth rate⁵, and that the country has a relatively significant percentage of indigenous and African populations, we can conclude that the Canadian whipping boy, with its strong European roots and beyond its current concerns, while not a paragon of virtue, is an exemplary country of racial mix and tolerance. The example would have more weight if it had a population of more than 40 million.

Jorge Lusaf, Asie21

(1) Cf. **Asie21 n° 154/2021-10** [Grapillages - China - Canada: Towards a change?](#)

(2) See **Asie21 n° 190/2025-01** [India-Canada: The Sikh question](#)

(3) Cf. **Asie21 n° 192/2025-03** [China - Mexico - United States - World: Fentanyl and more](#)

(4) A rapeseed variety with enriched qualities, **canola** (*can* for Canada, *ola* for oil) is **the** fruit of Canadian research. China is a major importer of canola, but plays on tariffs when it wants to bend Ottawa's position.

(5) Cf. **Asie21 n° 166/2022-11** [Asia-Canada: Asia in numbers](#)

2.

Points to watch

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Australia

Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese wins parliamentary election

Anthony Albanese is re-elected Prime Minister following the Australian general election on May 3, 2025.

Anthony Albanese¹ was Australia's Labor Prime Minister from the 2022 general election, when he ended 9 years of Liberal-National government. He was re-elected in the 2025 general election. He campaigned on the themes of purchasing power, the environment and higher US tariffs. After his victory, he declared: "Thank you to the Australian people for giving me the chance to continue to serve the best nation in the world".

In a major blow to Australia's political landscape, the country's conservative opposition leader, Liberal Party leader Peter Dutton, has lost his parliamentary seat to Labor's Ali France. According to the *Australian*

Electoral Commision (AEC), Labor leads in 71 constituencies, close to the 76 seats needed for a majority in the lower house² of parliament.

The event remains exceptional. This re-election is the first landslide in a federal election, since the 90 seats won by Tony Abbot's Liberal-National Party in 2013. He becomes the second sitting Prime Minister to be re-elected, the first being Conservative John Howard in 2004. Will Anthony Albanese be re-elected in 3 years' time at the next election? The question remains.

He became the second sitting Prime Minister to be re-elected, the first being Conservative John Howard in 2004.

Patrick Hébert, Asie21

- (1) First Australian head of government not to bear a British surname.
- (2) The Australian Parliament consists of an upper house (Senate), made up of 76 senators elected for a 6-year term, and a lower house (House of Representatives) made up of 151 members elected for a 3-year term.

North Korea - Russia

Intervention of North Korean troops on Russian soil

On April 26, 2025, President Putin congratulated the troops engaged in the total liberation of the Kursk border region occupied by Ukrainian armed forces since August 2024. General Valery Gerasimov, Chief of the General Staff, confirmed that a North Korean contingent, estimated by Western sources at around 10,000 men, would take part in the fighting.

In Pyongyang two days later, President Kim Jong-un described the participation of North Korean fighters as a "sacred mission to strengthen the traditional friendship and unity between Korea and Russia".

According to information available in Moscow, they are members of the Special Forces, aged between 23 and 27, commanded by General Kim Yong-bok, Vice-Chief of the General Staff of the People's Army. The corps would comprise 150,000 men. Enlisted fighters would have about five years' training.

The North Korean Central Military Committee stated that this operation was carried out under Article 4 of the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership Treaty signed in June 2024 between the DPRK and Russia, which came into force in December 2024. Comprising 23 articles, the text covers cooperation between the two states in a number of areas (trade, economy, investment, scientific cooperation and civil nuclear power).

In Russia, film footage shows North Korean military training in trenches and communication methods under combat conditions.

Russian instructors had to show Korean soldiers how to fight in small groups rather than in successive waves. Language barriers also had to be overcome, and bilingual vocabularies were printed. In addition, Korean food rations were distributed with the help of the North Korean embassy in Moscow.

In Pyongyang, Kim Jong-un announced that a monument would be erected in honor of the soldiers who took part in the Kursk operation. He also spoke of support for their families. For his part, Russian ambassador Alexander Matsegora said that monuments and streets in the Kursk region would commemorate the exploits of Korean soldiers at the front.

This Russian-Korean alliance may come as a surprise. However, relations between Russians and Koreans go back a long way. Korean minorities live in the Russian Far East and Sakhalin, as well as in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, where they are valued for their craftsmanship.

Historically, both peoples have had to endure the Japanese conquering spirit. In Russia, the Russo-

Japanese war and the Japanese intervention in Siberia after the Bolshevik revolution have left their mark. It's also worth noting that the last queen of Korea, Queen Min, was assassinated by the Japanese in 1895 because she was seeking

help from Russia and its legation in Seoul to thwart Japanese colonization.

Jean Perrin, Asie21



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Pakistan - Afghanistan - India - Bangladesh

Towards a major confrontation between Pakistan, Afghanistan and India and Bangladesh for water sharing

Water sharing in the Indus Basin is governed by the 1960 treaty signed by India and Pakistan for an indefinite period.



India requested modification of the Indus Treaty in January 2023, citing fundamental changes in demographics, climate change and new technologies for dam construction. It renewed its request in September 2024¹. In response to the deadly attack at Pahalgam in Indian-administered

Kashmir on April 22, 2025, which it claims was masterminded by Pakistan, India has declared that it is suspending the treaty. This could have very serious consequences for Pakistan, which is already under water stress. India could well go ahead with the construction of dams on the

Indus and its two tributaries, the Jhelum and the Chenab, three rivers allocated to Pakistan under the 1960 treaty, with very limited uses for India. The construction of dams with vast reservoirs for irrigation, forbidden by the treaty, would considerably reduce the flow of these three rivers on their Pakistani course. This construction would necessarily be spread over several years. The complete detour of the Indus, Jhelum and Chenab rivers is technically and politically impossible. Pakistan, a downstream country, vitally needs these rivers. Its only other resources are the monsoon rains and the water tables, which are too often polluted, overstretched and liable to disappear. Without the Indus and its tributaries, Pakistan cannot exist.

Pakistan appealed to the international community. The World Bank, under whose aegis the 1960 treaty had been concluded, was called upon. China supported Pakistan, and the United States called on India and Pakistan to show restraint. The international community is not very vocal, but can only support Pakistan's legitimate rights and save the treaty. In fact, the treaty should not be cancelled, but amended to take account of climate change, demographic evolution and new technologies for dam construction and flow monitoring.

The Pakistani press occasionally accuses India of stealing the waters of **the** Indus basin. Water is a highly sensitive subject that arouses strong emotions among the population. India's construction of major infrastructures with vast reservoirs for irrigation in the upper reaches of the Indus, Jhelum and Chenab rivers could be *a casus belli*. India is already increasing the reservoir capacity of two dams, Salal and Baghlihar, built on the Chenab river. In doing so, it is not overstepping its rights, as its water withdrawals currently remain below the limits set in the treaty.

The Paka Dul dam project on the Marusudar, a tributary of the Chenab, will be the largest reservoir in the part of Kashmir administered by India. India is also continuing to build the Ratle dam on the Chenab and the Kishanganga dam on the eponymous river (called Neelum on the Pakistani side), a tributary of the Jhelum. This shows that India is acting to use all its rights as it does on the Indus tributaries allocated to it, the Sutlej, the Ravi and the Beas¹. The Pakistani Defense Minister has stated that if India builds water infrastructures that do not comply with the treaty, they will be destroyed. India would not fail to retaliate against Pakistan's large dams, perhaps as a prelude to a full-scale war. To defend its rights, Pakistan is even considering the use of nuclear weapons.

India has declared that it is suspending application of the treaty, which means that it is not leaving it definitively. Pakistan points out that the treaty contains no suspension clause. It therefore considers India's decision to be illegal.

Sharing the waters of the Indus also concerns Afghanistan, since the Kabul River (after which the Afghan capital is named) is a major tributary of the Indus, on its right bank. Despite repeated requests from Pakistan, Afghanistan refuses any negotiations aimed at sharing the waters of the Kabul River. Worse still, it has in the past asked India to build dams on this river and on one of its tributaries, the Kunar, which has a greater flow than the Kabul. It may renew its request, and India may accept, with the intention of harming Pakistan by increasing its water deficit².

Sharing the waters of the Ganges is governed by the 1996 treaty signed by India and Bangladesh for a period of 30 years. It expires at the end of 2026. The hostile attitude of the new regime in Dhaka could prompt India not to renew it. In

addition, it may maintain its refusal to share the waters of the Teesta, a tributary of the Brahmaputra, flowing through Sikkim and West Bengal before entering Bangladesh.

basins are therefore undermined by tensions between India on the one hand and Pakistan and Bangladesh on the other, and between Pakistan and Afghanistan.

Water-sharing treaties in the Indus and Ganges

Alain Lamballe, Asie21

- (1) Cf. **Asie21 n° 194/2025-04** India - Pakistan: Indian pressure on Pakistan to manage shared rivers
- (2) Cf. **Asie21 n° 174/2023-07-08** Afghanistan - Iran - Uzbekistan -Turkmenistan - Pakistan: Afghanistan criticized by neighboring countries for its management of waterways
- (3) Cf. **Asie21 n° 142/2020-10** Bangladesh - India - China: The Teesta, a river that divides and unites or Water in Bangladesh's diplomacy

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Taiwan - United States

Taiwanese suspicion on the rise towards the United States

According to a survey conducted by the *Brookings Institute**, published on May 1st 2025, Taiwanese confidence in the United States, with Trump back in power, is falling, even reaching a new low. In fact, confidence in the United States is declining year on year. The war in Ukraine has particularly reinforced Taiwanese pessimism. But the DPP government will continue to cooperate with the American political line.

Trump's hostile policies towards Taiwan have led a growing proportion of Taiwanese to become distrustful of the United States (see Box 1).

- If the "Lai government pursues its pro-American line, internal conflicts will arise and the population will be disgusted, even distrustful, of the President.
- If Lai Ching-te does not adjust his administration, a crisis could arise.

Yuan Heling's analysis of the DPP's position

- ▶ The DPP* has chosen to be "pro-American and anti-Chinese", and "suspicion of the USA" has no place in Taiwan and - above all - is not allowed. US tariff policy on an international scale has called into question the credibility of the USA by various countries, and Taiwanese mistrust has grown.
- ▶ Trump's MAGA policy is different from that of America's former establishment elites. The USA has retreated from multilateralism and globalization and embraced protectionism, with a hegemonic strategy, aiming to make its country the heart of the world. In this way, D. Trump has reinforced international suspicion of the United States, which has become an

Brookings Institute: Washington think tank

DPP: Progressive Democratic Party

Yuan Heling: EMBA assistant professor at Feng Chia University, holds a PhD in political science from the University of Texas at Austin, an MA in international affairs from Ohio University and a BA in political science from Soochow University. President of the Chinese Association for Taiwanese Business Studies. Former professor and director of international affairs at Taichung University of Science and Technology.

For Professor Yuan Heling(*) ,US President

unreliable partner and an erratic hegemon.

- ▶ The "rock-solid" Taiwan-U.S. relationship repeatedly emphasized by Ms. Tsai's DPP government has become increasingly unverifiable under Trump's second term, notably by forcing TSMC to increase investment in the U.S. and imposing a hefty 32% tariff on Taiwan.
- ▶ Taiwan has invested heavily in its relationship with the United States, collaborating on numerous policies and acquiring a significant volume of American armaments¹. The island has also relaxed its restrictions on imports of

American meat containing ractopamine residues². However, despite these efforts, Taiwan was unable to escape the tariff increases imposed by the United States.

- During the nine years the DPP was in power, it put all its eggs in one basket, relying 100% on the United States. Taiwan gave a lot, but the United States made no concessions. It did not grant Taiwan equal reciprocity and mutual benefits, and did not consider Taiwan as a partner, but only as a "pawn" in its confrontation with China.³

Despite this poll, Lai Ching-te's political orientation will remain the same, because with his anti-China, pro-US slogan (抗中親美)⁴, it's impossible for him to suddenly start echoing the Taiwanese's "suspicion of the United States". Lai

Ching-te won't listen to dissent. Any action by Lai is aimed at using the 40% minority voters to override the 60% majority public opinion⁵. Consequently, the DPP government will continue to cooperate with the American political line.

As more and more Taiwanese begin to doubt the USA, it will become difficult for Lai Ching-te to continue using the minority to distract the majority: the poll shows that the proportion of DPP supporters among Taiwanese who distrust the USA is increasing. If Lai Ching-te doesn't turn to listening to the opinions of the 60% majority of the population, resistance to his administration will only increase.

Catherine Bouchet-Orphelin, Asie21

(1) Cf. Asia21 :

- n° **188/2024-11** Taiwan - United States: US military-industrial complex: Taipei never discusses price
- n° **130/2019-07&08** Taiwan - United States: arms purchases in exchange for electoral support

(2) Cf. Asia21 :

- n° **138/2020-04** Taiwan - United States: The day after the elections, the U.S. asks Taiwan to open up its market
- n° **142/2020-09 Sidebar** Taiwan 2009: "No to toxic beef, no to betrayal, no to deception" in Taiwan - États-Unis American beef and ractopamine-laced pork on the Taiwanese market: DPP* supporters denounce Tsai's authoritarian policies

(3) Cf. **Asie21** n° **131/2019-09** Taiwan - Hong Kong: Both pawns in the US strategy to encircle China

(4) Cf. **Asie21** n° **158/2022-02** Taiwan - China: Beijing's grand strategy for reunification

(5) For the record: Lai Ching-te won the 2024 presidential election with just 40% of the vote.

Box 1***Brookings Institute survey*****Diminishing Taiwanese confidence in Washington's response to a Chinese attack on Taiwan:**

- 46.7% consider it "impossible" or "very unlikely" for the USA to help Taiwan, as the US is now perceived by Taiwan as a less reliable partner with a negative impact on global democracy.
- 15.9% consider the US to be a "very unreliable" ally, almost double the 8.2% in July 2024.
- 22% consider the United States to be "unreliable";
- around 23.1% consider the USA to be "very trustworthy" or "trustworthy".

Possible US support in the event of war in the Taiwan Strait

- Only 37.5% consider it "possible" or "very likely", compared with 44.5% in July 2024.
- 46.7% think it "impossible" or "very unlikely" that the USA will help Taiwan.
- Even among DPP supporters who trust the US the most, confidence in the US has fallen by 14 percentage points over the past eight months.

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3. Alerts



Taiwan

Disappearance of the Han people in Taiwan? Cognitive warfare

In 2024, the official website of the Executive Yuan stated that Taiwan's registered population was "made up of Hans as the largest ethnic group, representing 96.4% of the total population". Recently, this site has discreetly replaced this phrase with "the rest of the population". This is a way of erasing the word "Han", which refers to the mainland Chinese population.

The recently changed text indicates three differentiations:

- 2.6% of Taiwan's current registered population is made up of indigenous ethnic groups;
- the immigrant population (mainly from Southeast Asia, unskilled labor) represents 1.2%;
- the "remaining" population represents 96.4%.

Chen Jinghui (陳菁徽): KMT deputy

KMT: Kuomintang

Li Hui-chi (李慧芝): Executive Yuan spokesman

Weng Hsiaoling: KMT MP

Executive Yuan: Prime Minister's Office

There is no longer any mention of the "Han" population.



The reactions of three KMT*deputies are noteworthy:

- ➔ Lin Pei-hsiang* suggested that it might be preferable to replace "remaining population" with "Mars population", to be more in line with ethnic integration and democratic freedom,
- ➔ Chen Jinghui* declared that Lai Ching-te's government was number one in cognitive warfare, using the lack of information to mislead the public¹,
- ➔ For Mrs. Weng Hsiao-ling*, the whole of the People's Republic of China is made up of different ethnic groups, as is Taiwan, but the Han people are still the largest ethnic group on

both sides. The aim of this presentation is essentially to achieve small-scale progress such as the disinization and dehanization of ethnic groups in Taiwan.

The Executive Yuan* emphasized that this was to promote ethnic equality. Madame Li Hui-chi* spoke of an adjustment made by the Executive Yuan in cooperation with the Supervisory Committee's proposal for this promotion. She called on the outside world "not to make unnecessary interpretations".

Another way of rewriting history? ²

Catherine Bouchet-Orphelin, Asie21

(1) A large proportion of the audiovisual media are controlled by the Greens (DPP). We recall the censorship of the CtiTV channel, whose license was not renewed. Cf. **Asie21 n° 145/2020-12** Taiwan: Censorship, CtiTV news channel's not renewed license

(2) Cf. **Asie21**: Taiwan : Amnésie forcée ? Manipulating collective memory 台灣：被操弄的集體失憶？

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4.

The words of the lampyre



World

Emerging from chaos

Over the past 5 centuries, the West has taken power over the world through the creation of goods and wealth - through "having" - and, taking its cue from Aragon, through "having to the point of losing one's mind". Einstein, foreseeing the danger as early as 1934, wrote: "The possession of marvellous means of production has not brought freedom, but worry and famine". Brazil's *boia fria*, the man of the people who lives through these two evils - worry and famine - has a more straightforward formula: "Ladraõ tonto o esta preso o esta morto, mas no esta vivo" (Foolish thief is either in prison or dead, but he's not of this world). Could the adventure of mankind, born of the initial chaos already formulated by Hesiod seven centuries before our era, soon end in another chaos? Can three powers, three men, correct this hectic and dangerous course of wealth creation and distribution? They can destroy EVERYTHING, or build EVERYTHING, and allow the world to regain its lost sanity. To do so, they will have to break the curves leading to disaster. Ukraine remains no more than a zakouski at the table of generalized negotiations.

History has shown that economic trends don't correct themselves; wars correct what men are incapable of doing of their own free will and/or intelligence... intelligence?

E=MC² 1905, Hiroshima 1945,
Tsar Bomba 1961: 3,125 times *Little boy*

My father, a Burgundian farmer, remembered Blériot's crossing of the English Channel. 40 years later, Enola Gay dropped a bomb on Hiroshima, sending 130,000 souls up in smoke: "intelligence-power convergence. Humanity knows.

"We can't imagine a world without Russia," Putin would have said, any more than we can imagine a world without the United States, a world without China...

Fortunately, 80 years ago, we didn't have to verify the obvious "(...) a world without Germany" or "(...) a world without Japan", the land of *seppuku*.

Energy guides the world... since the dawn of time, sun and light

The mastery of energy has led to power, and the hazards of geology to the distribution of this power accumulated in fossil fuels.

As the evolution of the human brain has perfected the art of predation, with the wolf as its model, according to Hobbes, *homo homini lupus est*, the distribution of wealth from energy has reached an impasse: creative power, equivalent to destructive capacity, has gone out of control.

Artificial Intelligence, which ignores creative chance - "can the flapping of a butterfly's wings in Brazil cause a tornado in Texas" (Lorentz) - only accelerates this loss of control over the mastery of progress. Are we heading for the end of *homo sapiens*, in a gigantic flash of light?

Wealth creation and unequal distribution: the impasse (see Table 1).

Imbalances in wealth distribution are out of control.

Boia fria: rural worker

Hb : inhabitants

HIC: high income country

LIC: low income country

M: million

When the dream of a minority leads to the nightmare of the world, or the preserve of the American dream

If everyone lived like Americans - with 4.2% of the population sharing 16% of the wealth in 2023 - the *World US equivalent* would need 10 times as much wealth in 10 years' time. In 2023, SNAP served an average of 42.1 million participants per month, with federal SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) spending of \$112.8 billion, 2/3 of national aid to needy Americans.

(see tables 2 & 3)

As the world's wealth increases, so do the imbalances in its distribution. The impasse is obvious.

What price becoming the world leader? Deficits for some, surpluses for others

The result is an ever-increasing trade deficit, a colossal debt, a military budget representing 50% of the world's total, and an acceleration of trends.

- **Trade balances** (see tables 4 & 5)
- **Fossil energy** is saving the United States, hence Trump's call: *Forez forez ...*, and his first trip abroad to the land of oil... black gold miracle?
- **Will Russia - the owner of fossil fuels - save the EU?** We doubt it. Perhaps China and/or the United States: that's what the current negotiations are all about.

- ▶ **A growing U.S. trade deficit**, whose cumulative total is approaching that of the federal debt (see table 6).
- ▶ **Abysmal debt** (see table 7)
- ▶ **Alarming cumulative figures** (see table 8)

Meanwhile, the world has changed, and Asia is emerging from its long slumber.

- ▶ **The world's nations continue to grow richer**: in purchasing power parity, China outstrips the United States, but remains at 1/3 of PPP wealth per capita (see table 9).

The impasse is total

- The deficit of one (USA) feeds the enrichment of the other (China), until when will the suffering of one (1/3 of the per capita wealth of the other) feed the enjoyment of the other? One - suffering with dreams and memories - is finite and cultural, the other - with enjoyment and the infinite desire to have more - seems infinite and acultural. 5,000 years to build a country, 250 years to dominate the multicultural world.
- India and the whole of Asia follow, with 10 to 25% of the Western bloc's per capita wealth,
- 5,000 years to build a country (China) and 250 years to dominate the multicultural world (USA).
- When will we break up?
(see table 10)

50% of imports create 75% of US trade deficits. Tariff barriers - like any barrier or quota - will be circumvented, they will delay, they will not change the world.

- An analysis of the U.S. trade deficit shows that customs protection is an illusory solution.
- Latin America will feed China (soybeans, meat),

increasing the US deficit, and Siberia will once again become - at best, Central Asian, at worst, purely Asian. The Silk Roads are eternal.

- Impoverished for centuries by the ebony trade, Africa, destroyed by successive colonizations, will continue to be plundered of its wealth, now mineral wealth.
- Europe, the rentier of the last 400 years - a very short history of its long history - is seeking its **way** between the West and the open sea, the East with its natural vocation for land conquests, and the South which rejects it in the name of history. The Congress of Berlin, which so violently carved up Africa, is far from forgotten. 1885 was yesterday.

Foreseeable outcome: Inflation in the United States and collateral damage for Europe: Mercosur agreement

- Inflation will not correct,
- Asia (China) will remain the United States' workshop.
- Among the US trade deficit items are "automotive 87" and "pharmaceuticals 30". Europe has become the target, with Germany signing the Mercosur agreement to replace losses in the US market, and more pragmatically, Sanofi will invest 25 billion \$ US in the United States.

The new players - based on 3 to 5,000 years of history - have arrived. Was the West an intruder in the great trajectory of human history?

The army to save the world system?

And to save the system, *Si vis pacem, para bellum*. Too good a formula to be valid in a world where the bit has replaced the flint.

A strange recipe, valid in the time of Thucydides or even Clausewitz, but after Hiroshima, we doubt such irrational and above all irreversible



methods. The US military budget - 1,000 bn \$ or 50% of world spending - represents less than 3% of the US federal debt or 1/4 of health spending (4,164 bn in 2023). The path of arms diverges from the path of reason.

We can't maintain an economic imbalance of wealth creation and redistribution with a system capable of destroying humanity at such low cost.

Trends in defense budget and federal debt (double scale) (see table 11).

Conclusion

- ▶ The wisdom of an Ovid, "*Non omnia possumus omnes*", was followed 1500 years later by the cynicism of Hobbes "*Status hominum naturalis antequam in societatem coiretur Bellum fuerit; neque hoc simpliciter, sed bellum omnium in omnes.*" ("The natural state of men, before they were joined together, was war, and not simply, but a war of all against all.")
- ▶ Trump is no worse than his predecessors, he's not hiding, he's doing the politics of a businessman who knows that war kills and doubts Clausewitz's maxim, war as an extension

of political activities or "the continuation of politics **by** other means". This was the case in the days of Napoleon and Hitler, but today we've changed our references. The battle of Azincourt 600 years ago showed how the arrows of Henry V's archers could annihilate the invincibility of France's heavy, caparisoned cavalry, just as in Ukraine, a \$500 drone could destroy invincible tanks costing tens of millions of dollars. War is not the continuation but the failure of politics.

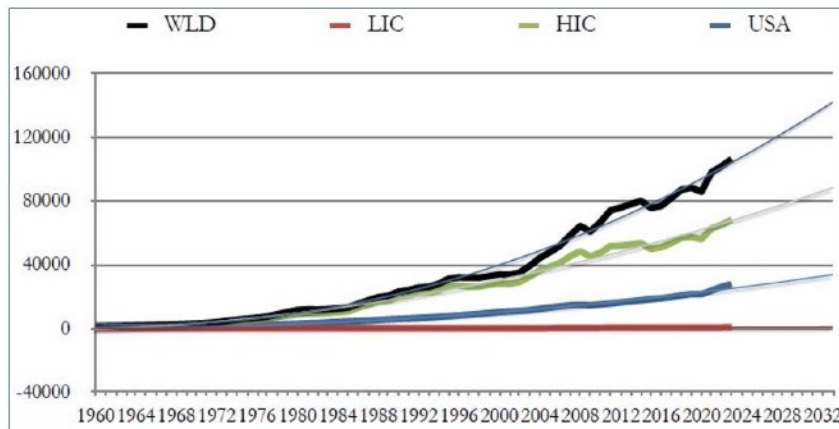
- ▶ Trump's cynicism or madness can't be pinned down by Artificial Intelligence; he's too unpredictable. Cynicism for some, madness for others. Didn't the philosopher Giorgi Colli write that "*madness is the matrix of wisdom*"?
- ▶ What will emerge from this chaos? A new order or general disorder.
- ▶ We'd do better to avoid verifying Einstein's premonitory intelligence: "I don't know what the Third World War will be like, but what I am sure of is that the Fourth World War will be resolved with sticks and flints."

Maurice Rossin, Asie21



Automatic translation
from French to English
with Deepl software

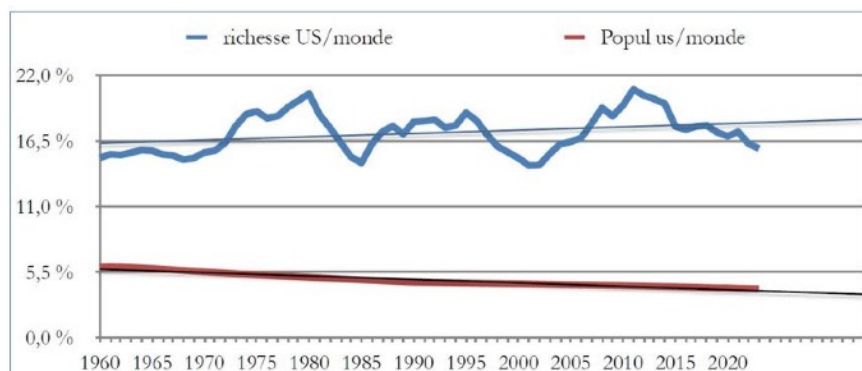
1- World wealth between the USA, rich countries (HIC) and poor countries (LIC)



From 2000 to 2023, LIC will grow from 400 to 736 million hb, with wealth rising from \$124 to \$664 billion,

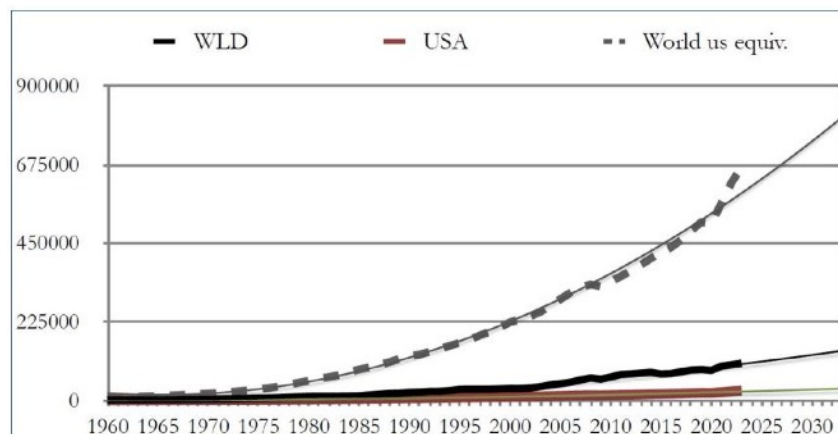
and HIC from 1,250 to 1,400 M hb with wealth from 28,000 to 68,300 Mds \$

2- US share of world wealth and population



When 4.4% of the world's population captures 16.5% of the world's wealth...

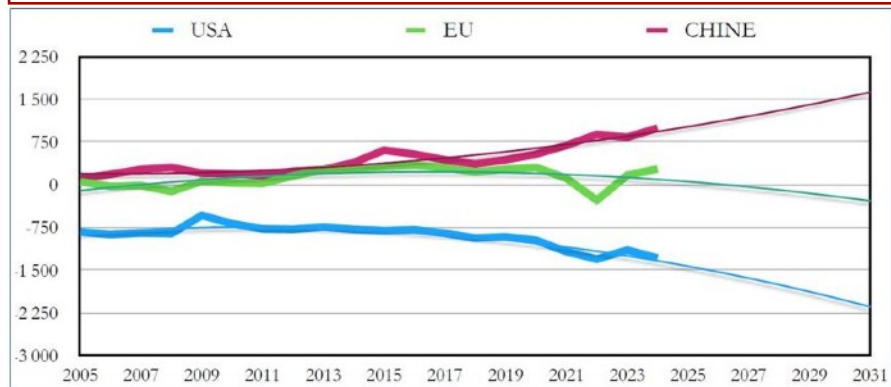
3- The impasse: if the world had the wealth of the USA/Capita



How long will American exceptionalism remain the world's beacon?

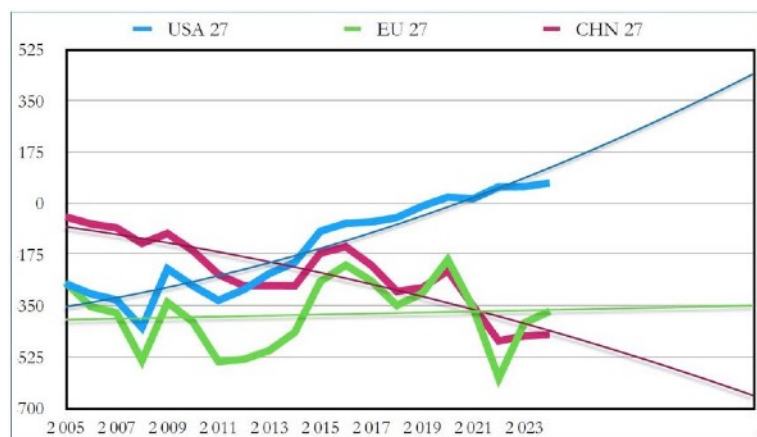
4- Annual trade surplus deficit billion dollars

The deficit of the 3 large blocks : Europe is closing in on the USA, China has growing surpluses

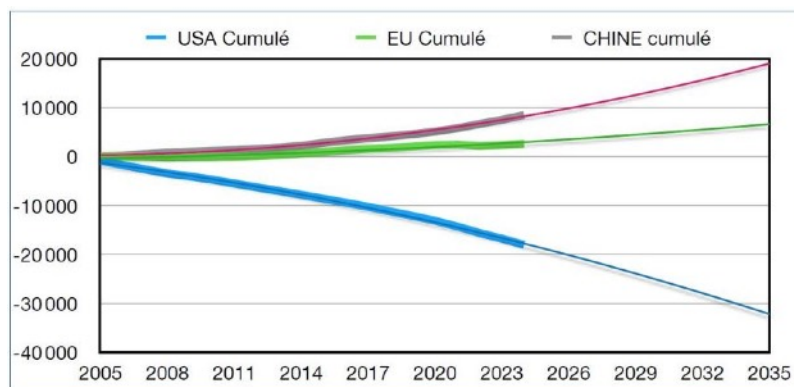


5- Trade balance chap. 27 (petroleum products)

The balance of trade in energy (fossil fuels) chap. 27 is now positive in the USA and in increasing deficit in Europe and China. Russia is becoming a master of the game.

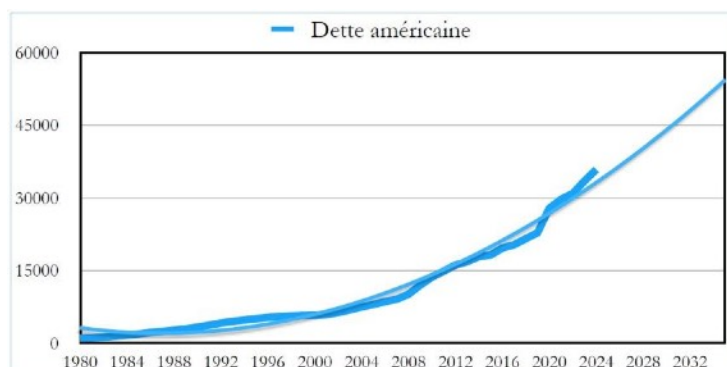


6- Cumulative trade balance deficit and surplus in billions of dollars



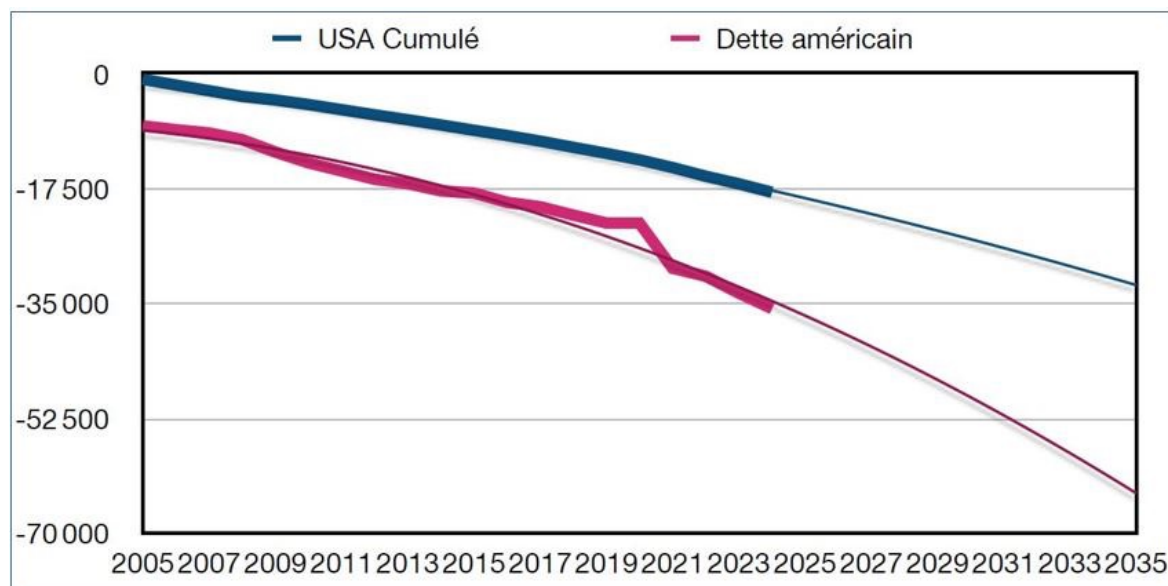
How do you break the curves without breaking the world?

7- US debt in billions of dollars

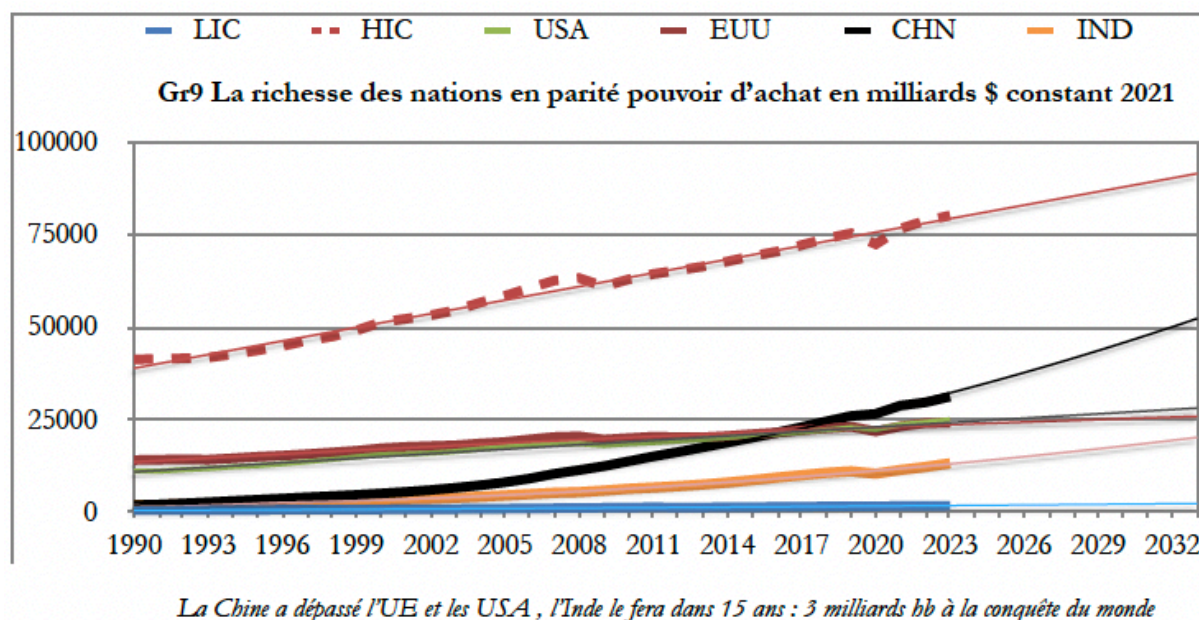


Debt explode.

8- Debt vs BC Cumulative in billions of dollars



9- Wealth of nations in purchasing power parity constant \$ 2021



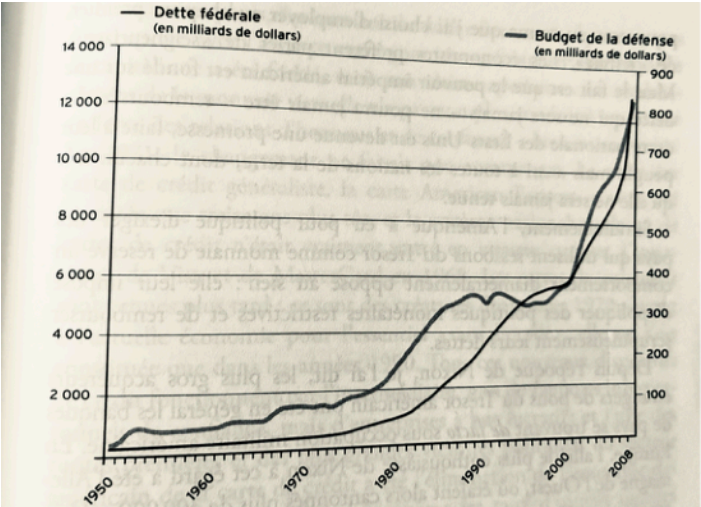
10- United States: Trade deficit and major imports in billions of dollars

		Déficit BC	Déficit BC	Import	Imp. cumul	deficit /total	deficit /total	Crois déficit	Déficit cumulé	Part import
	Année	2 020	2 024	2 024	2 024	2 020	2 024	2024/2020	2 024	2 024
TOTAL	Tous produits confondus	-982	-1 295	3 359		100 %	100 %	132 %		
84	Réacteurs nucléaires, engins mécan.	-178	-279	531	531	18 %	22 %	156 %	22 %	16 %
85	Machines, appareils matér	-181	-272	486	1 017	18 %	21 %	151 %	43 %	30 %
87	automobiles, tracteurs,	-149	-248	391	1 409	15 %	19 %	166 %	62 %	42 %
30	Produits pharmac.	-86	-118	213	1 621	9 %	9 %	138 %	71 %	48 %
94	Meubles; mobil.médico	-57	-63	73	1 694	6 %	5 %	111 %	76 %	50 %
	Etc..									
22	Boissons, liqu.	-19	-23	-24		2 %	2 %	118 %		

Trump's priority will be to reduce imports of the 5 deficit-creating items: cars, medicines, equipment and furniture. Asia-China and Europe will be the first targets. You can't replace cheap labour and related economic flows with tariffs. Consumers will pay through inflation and price rises.

11- Trends in defense budget and federal debt (double scale)

By 2024, debt will have risen to \$35,000 billion and defense to \$1,000 billion: strange instability!



5.

Reading note



Asia-Pacific. The new center of the world,
Odile Jacob, January 2025,
Sophie Boisseau du Rocher and Christian Lechervy

Book review by Gal (2S) Alain Lamballe

In this 307-page book, Sophie Boisseau du Rocher and Christian Lechervy focus on the Asia-Pacific region, which is smaller than the Indo-Pacific. For the two authors, Asia-Pacific comprises 17 states: Mongolia, North Korea, South Korea, Japan, China, Taiwan, Burma, Laos, Thailand, Cambodia, Vietnam, Brunei, Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, Timor Leste and the Philippines. Gathering together the Sinicized world, these countries are helpfully shown on a black-and-white map at the beginning of the book. This region of North-East Asia and South-East Asia lies at the crossroads of two oceans, the Pacific and the Indian, the northern parts of

which are shown on the front cover. The authors indicate that China includes the entire Pacific Ocean in the Asia-Pacific zone.

The book takes an original form, focusing on themes rather than countries. The **introduction** mentions that this region is at the origin of the de-Westernization of the world. It makes it clear that this process is not only provoked by the emergence of China, but also feeds on ancient, pre-colonial dynamics reactivated by the region's various states. The Asia-Pacific region accounts for 60% of global GDP and 60% of global growth. On the strength of their economic

successes, the powers of the future - and not just China - are to be found here. In fact, they are regaining the position they occupied in the world before the arrival of the Europeans. China is adopting a global strategy that is first and foremost evident in its neighborhood in Asia and the Pacific. It asserts its power above all in the economic sphere, without neglecting its army. But Japan provides a counterweight. For the Asians, Europe does not seem capable of helping them solve their problems. And they are worried about the United States. On the whole, the West disappoints them, but they don't turn away.

Chapter 1, "From the periphery to the center of the world-economy", begins with a quotation from Parag Khanna, an American political scientist of Indian origin: "In the 19th century, the world was 'Europeanized'; in the 20th century, it was 'Americanized'; in the 21st century, it is 'Asianizing'. For this political scientist, Asia will achieve the greatest economic success thanks to the most advanced technologies. Asia-Pacific countries will emancipate themselves from Western circuits, becoming increasingly autonomous. Growth will be driven by regional markets and domestic consumption. According to UNCTAD, 60% of the world's maritime traffic passes through Asia-Pacific. With a population of 2.3 billion, Asia-Pacific countries are already asserting themselves in the fields of telecommunications, renewable energies, automobiles and nanotechnologies. They no longer regard Europe as a model of modernity. Asian financial centers such as Shenzhen, Shanghai, Hong Kong, Singapore, Seoul and Tokyo are

asserting themselves. By 2030, a third of the world's middle class will be found in Asia-Pacific. This is the region with the highest number of millennials - almost 800 million - who are big consumers and confident about the future. Aging countries (Japan, China, South Korea, Thailand, Singapore) are increasingly investing in younger countries (Philippines, Vietnam, Indonesia, Cambodia). Economically, the Asia-Pacific region is the most dynamic in the world. China, South Korea, Singapore and Taiwan stand out for their high productivity and excellent infrastructure.

Much of the world's shipping traffic passes through the Asia-Pacific region. Of the world's six largest ports, five are in China. Other "super-ports" exist in Japan and South Korea. Major ports have been created in Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia and Taiwan. Almost 85,000 ships pass through the Strait of Malacca every year. Maritime communications between countries in the region are developing rapidly. Coastal regions have set up special economic zones, notably in southern China (Zhuhai, Shenzhen), North Korea (Kaesong) and South Korea (Incheon). The Taiwanese port of Kaohsiung was the first free trade zone in Asia, established in 1966. Asia-Pacific masters container traffic. China, Japan and South Korea are major shipbuilders. Nearly 54% of the world's fleet is located in the Asia-Pacific region.

Read more on this link :

[Asia-Pacific. New center of the world , Odile Jacob January 2025](#)

Auteurs et membres du groupe Asie21 ayant participé au n° 194/2025-05 : Sophie Boisseau du Rocher, Catherine Bouchet-Orphelin, Philippe Coué, Philippe Deponcelle, Patrick Hébert, Arnaud Leveau, Alain Lamballe, Jorge Lusaf, Jean Perrin, Maurice Rossin, Daniel Schaeffer, Edouard Valensi, Anda Djoejana Wiradikarta ■

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75016 Paris

Comité de rédaction

Laurent Amelot, Catherine Bouchet-Orphelin, Philippe Coué, Philippe Delalande, Patrick Hébert, Jean Hourcade, Alain Lamballe, Jorge Lusaï, Rémi Perelman, Jean Perrin, Maurice Rossin, Daniel Schaeffer, Edouard Valensi.



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