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US-Japan Relations,  
and Implications for Korea**

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# **The US Election, US-Japan Relations, and Implications for Korea**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The U.S. presidential election in November 2004 is a highly anticipated event not just in the U.S. but around the world. The shift in U.S. foreign policy after the September 11<sup>th</sup> terror attacks has grave implications for Asia and Europe, and especially South Korea. Will a different president mean another change in foreign policy?

Although foreign policy platforms seem quite different from one president to the next, in recent years, these lines have blurred. The entire framework of the U.S. agenda has changed drastically since September 11<sup>th</sup>; a new leader will bring shifts in rhetoric, nuance and subtlety, but not much else.

## **Introduction**

I want to talk mainly about what to expect of U.S. foreign policy after the election, particularly in this part of the world. I will not talk so much about the election itself, which I will simply cover at the beginning of my lecture.

My major point, on which I will elaborate later, is that one should not realistically expect a lot of change in the fundamentals of U.S. foreign policy strategy, no matter who gets elected in November. There will be important differences, particularly in style, rhetoric, and consultation with allies. But what drives U.S. foreign policy is not so much the personality of the president, as the environment within which the U.S. thinks it must survive. That environment is very different after September 11, 2001, than it was before. If there is time, I will say a little about Japan's foreign policy and the U.S.-Japan agenda, as well.

## **The U.S. Election**

The honest prediction about the election in November is that nobody knows. That's meaningful. What it means, first of all, is that George Bush—who lost the 2000 election in terms of the popular vote but ended up winning thanks to a five-to-four Supreme Court decision—has not increased his support to the point where one can say that he has an easy re-election opportunity. If anything, the last few months of the disaster in Iraq has cut his popularity down to its lowest point ever, down to about 42%.

I don't think that is very significant, in terms of actual numbers; the election will be decided in October, not in June. The President is not in a position where one can say he's definitely going to win unless something terrible happens, though in some ways terrible things have happened, especially with Iraq. Nor can you say he is in such trouble that the Democratic candidate, John Kerry, has an easy shot at it. If the election were held this week, my bet would be that President Bush would be re-elected.

There are several things that work in Bush's favor in this election. One is that the economy is strong. After all, in elections, the most important factor is what people think and see about the economy and how it is affecting them. Economic growth is good, and in the last few months we've seen a growth in jobs. So the Democrats have dropped the slogan, "jobless recovery".

Furthermore, and this is critically important, the U.S. is a nation at war. Almost all U.S. people believe we are in a war. It's a kind of "Third World War," except our enemy is one you cannot see. It's not a state. It's a trans-national network of terrorist organizations. It's a natural reaction not to change the commander-in-chief when you're a country at war, and to support the president who's leading the nation at war.

You can see this when George Bush gives speeches. Whether they are about health care, abortion, gay marriage, or foreign policy, he will always talk about the "War on Terror." It's a war, and it's on terror. The phrase tends to make people support the incumbent president. Moreover, all public opinion polls show that the U.S. people believe that Republicans are better fighters of wars than Democrats. So if the nation is at war, it is a strong positive factor for George Bush.

The other advantage George Bush has is his opponent. John Kerry, at least so far, has not caught fire. He has not inspired anybody. He has not found a message that the public finds exciting and a desirable alternative to what George Bush has to offer.

On the key issue of Iraq, you have to look very hard to see what the difference is between John Kerry and George Bush. The main difference is that Kerry says we should increase the number of U.S. forces in Iraq. He does not say that we should get out and that we cannot win the war. Instead, Kerry believes that we should put more emphasis on getting other countries to participate, that we should increase the number of U.S. forces, and that we should be there for a decade. This is not a position that makes him look as though he's offering a reasonable alternative to the current administration's policy. So far, at least, John Kerry has not gotten a lot of enthusiastic response from the U.S. public.

Support for Bush is going down. Positive support for John Kerry, though, has not been going up. When he chooses his vice-presidential candidate, maybe he'll get a little bounce, particularly if something dramatic happens, like John McCain of the Republican Party decides to bolt and accept the position as vice-presidential candidate. This is the Democratic dream, but I don't think he will; he's made it clear he has no intention of accepting the offer. But there's still a lot of enthusiasm among key Democrats to try to convince him to come over.

The other thing that Bush has in his favor is a curious thing. If the anti-war sentiment grows stronger, as it's likely to do in the U.S., it's going to increase the vote for Ralph Nader. Nader gets a peculiar pro-environment vote, mostly on domestic issues. Now he's going to draw the anti-war vote. He does not need much, only 1% or 2%, of the vote to destroy John Kerry's chance of getting elected. Kerry has been desperately trying to get Ralph Nader to drop out of the race. If he does not, and if he gets 4% or 5% of the vote in total, then George Bush will be re-elected.

Those are all factors in favor of the president. Now, what is going against George Bush in this coming election? First of all, Iraq. This is going from bad to worse. U.S. public opinion has shifted dramatically on Iraq. A year ago, 68% of the U.S. public thought going to war with Iraq was the right thing to do. Even after when weapons of mass destruction (WMD) were not discovered and there was no connection with al-Qaeda, 68% still thought it was the right thing to do. That 68% is now down to 45%. So a majority of the U.S. now says going to war in Iraq was not worth the death of U.S. soldiers.

After June 30, formal sovereignty will be transferred over to the Iraqis. We can already see major problems emerging in terms of the U.S. and occupying force. Bush is trying to control the formation of the interim government, and the divisions within the Iraqi establishment itself. The situation can easily deteriorate between now and November and that may overwhelm other issues such as the economy, and lead people to vote against George Bush.

The other issue that may work against George Bush's re-election is what you can call a character issue. What really bothers so many people about this government is not the war in Iraq, or deciding to overthrow Saddam Hussein. It's the belief that this administration is

dominated by people who don't tell the truth, who are lying to the U.S. public, and who have an agenda that they're not really sharing with their own people.

This character issue will grow stronger. The prison abuses in Baghdad, the comportment of the administration, and many other factors, all contribute to the idea that something about this government is not compatible with what U.S. citizens like to think of as the way in which their country is being run. Also, there is a feeling that the strong Christian fundamentalist element in this government is out of touch with mainstream U.S. thinking. All of these contribute to a sense of uneasiness. That alone is not going to win the election for John Kerry, but it will surely be an emerging issue.

Finally, the price of oil is important not only for the economic impact, but also because U.S. citizens are very sensitive to the price of gasoline. When it goes over US\$2 per gallon (KRW 2318.60 per 3.79 liters, or KRW 612 per liter), Americans are absolutely furious. We use our cars a lot, especially in the coming summer months. If the oil price continues to go up, people will perceive this administration's Middle East policy is a disaster. It's not just the economic consequences; these prices are an indication that the administration has no control over its Middle East policy. A lot of cynics would say, though, that by November, given the Bush Administration's close relationship with Saudi Arabia, the price of oil will start to go down and he'll be re-elected.

### **New Administration, New Policy?**

What difference does it make for post-January 2005 U.S. policy? If there's a change in government, and the Democrats come to power, surely there will be important changes in rhetoric. I generally think the Bush Administration has been unnecessarily antagonistic toward our allies and foreign countries. The "you're either with us or against us" expression implies that if you don't like what we're doing, then that's okay – we'll do it anyway. This kind of arrogance and bullying would stop if the regime were to change.

There would also surely be a lot of changes on the rhetoric of domestic issues. George Bush wants to have a Constitutional amendment to make gay marriages illegal. There's a strong push to try to make abortion illegal. These sorts of social issues, which are really big issues in U.S. domestic life, would see a change of policy and rhetoric with a new administration.

Even if John Kerry wins the election in November, the Republicans are almost certain to win a majority in both houses of the Congress. What will happen? Kerry will want tax reform. What will he get? Very little. I don't think you're going to see a great deal of change, even on the domestic side. You'll see some, because the president has the ability to push some issues. But as one famous student of the U.S. presidency said, "You know what the power of the U.S. president is? The power to persuade." You use the bully pulpit and you persuade the public. John Kerry will have to persuade a Republican Congress. So he may get some things done, but not a great deal.

What about foreign policy? There will be much less change than many expect. National interests don't change the day after an election. There is continuity in the way in which the nation sees its interests. If you look just at this part of the world in the past several decades

just in terms of US foreign policy, what's most impressive is the continuity of US policy. Every new administration comes in saying it's going to do things differently than the previous one. Bill Clinton came to office and said, "George Bush coddled the butchers of Beijing." He was going to be tough with the Chinese. Within two or three years, he had turned 180 degrees and by the time he left office he was talking about a "strategic partnership" with China.

Similarly, George Bush Junior came into office and said, "Bill Clinton is too soft on the Chinese. I'm going to be tough. We don't have a strategic partnership. We have a strategic competition with China." I don't think anyone today can see what the difference is between the policies of George Bush toward China and those of Bill Clinton in the last years of his administration. George Bush has also grown to recognize that a positive relationship with China is in the national interest of the U.S.

Regarding Japan, George Bush Jr. said, "Bill Clinton was too pro-Chinese. He didn't consult enough with Japan. There will be a strategic dialogue with Japan." I give Bush credit for following through on emphasizing a closer relationship with Japan. But if Al Gore had been elected, he would have had a very similar kind of change. The U.S. understood that the tensions in our relationship with Japan needed to be dealt with, and we no longer faced this issue of the Japanese economy taking over the world, which is the way Clinton saw it when he first came into office. There's a lot of continuity.

Regarding North Korea, George Bush Jr. came in taking a much tougher than Bill Clinton, since Clinton was hoping to make a visit to Pyongyang before he left office. Bush came in and said, "Not only are we not going to visit Pyongyang, but we're not even going to talk to the North Koreans. There's nothing to talk about until they give up their nuclear weapons."

But that isn't the position of the Bush Administration today, which is not very different from where I think a Gore Administration would have been. In the Six Party talks now, the U.S. has shifted and now talks about, "You North Koreans give up your nuclear weapons and then we might talk about what benefits you might get as a consequence." Essentially, that's willingness to talk about some kind of package deal. There are bilateral conversations going on between the North Koreans and the U.S. in the hallways at the Six Party Talks.

Some of the most hawkish people about North Korea in Washington D.C. are those who were closely identified with the Democratic Party and involved in negotiating the Agreed Framework in the first place. And they feel betrayed. You cannot find a more hawkish person than the negotiators of the Agreed Framework who feel that they got stabbed in the back. A Kerry Administration is not going to be soft on North Korea. Essentially, Kerry is saying we should have bilateral talks with the North, but the substance is the same – verifiable complete nuclear disarmament or nothing happens.

Bill Clinton gave a talk just a few weeks ago in which he said, "The Bush Administration's approach to North Korea is wrong. We should have bilateral talks. If the North Koreans don't agree to what we want, and proliferate and sell nuclear materials abroad, then we should do whatever necessary to stop it," including the use of military force. So this position is very similar to that of the Bush Administration.

## **A New Policy**

In the absence of any major external shock, you can expect continuity in U.S. foreign policy. But there has been an extraordinary external shock which created this discontinuity, or fundamental shift in U.S. foreign policy. It is impossible to exaggerate the importance of September 11, 2001, on U.S. thinking about national security, relations with allies, and about the strategy that the U.S. should use in its foreign policy.

Here in South Korea, you have forever lived with the danger of war and with a sense of vulnerability. Until the morning of September 11, 2001, people in the U.S. never dreamed, at least in the post-World War II period, that their country would be attacked. The only possibility of the U.S. being attacked was in the context of a nuclear war with the USSR. After the Cuban missile crisis, we became convinced that deterrence works and that there wouldn't be a war with the Soviet Union.

This is why September 11, 2001, was such a huge shock to the U.S. public. The key words in U.S. foreign policy now are vulnerability, homeland defense, or homeland security. This term was hardly used before September 11, 2001. The important point for other countries, including this one, is that September 11, 2001, changed our definition of what it means to be an ally.

Before September 11, 2001, having a security alliance with South Korea meant the U.S. was committed to defending South Korea in the event it were attacked, and to do what was necessary to try to prevent that from happening. But nobody expected the South Korean military to come defend Los Angeles in the event that the U.S. was attacked.

But after September 11, 2001, the idea that an alliance is a relationship in which you help each other when you're in trouble is common sense. It means that if you don't help us when we're at war, you're not an ally.

I think Junichiro Koizumi, Japan's prime minister, who is not a strategic thinker, understood in his gut that September 11, 2001 changed the U.S. view of what it means to be an ally. That's why he responded with the anti-terrorist legislation and sent troops to Iraq.

Even the government of Roh Moo Hyun, which is widely viewed as being anti-U.S. or wanting a different kind of security relationship, understood that sending troops to Iraq was important. Not because they make a significant contribution to security in Iraq, but they make a contribution to maintaining a relationship with the U.S.

The problem for other countries—Japan, Korea, France, or any country—is how to demonstrate that you support the U.S. on issues that the U.S. considers to be in its own vital national interest without appearing to be subservient.

The biggest problem with the Bush Administration is that they don't make that distinction. They put pressure on countries to appear to be subservient to the U.S., because "you're either with us or against us." This is not a subtle, skillful or desirable diplomacy.

Deterrence is not sufficient to protect the U.S. people against an attack; it does not work against terrorists who are ready to die to hurt you. However, deterrence does still work against rogue states, including North Korea. An attack by North Korea would result in the total destruction of North Korea.

But the idea that deterrence is insufficient to deal with terrorism is not a Bush Administration view; it is a U.S. view. This means a strategy of preemption is going to be a strategy of a Kerry Administration, as it will be of a Bush Administration.

If John Kerry becomes president, and there's intelligence—hopefully accurate intelligence, unlike on Iraq—that there's a terrorist group located in Place X that's planning an attack against U.S. interests, there is no chance that he would wait until the attack took place before responding. That is deeply believed among the advisors to John Kerry—like William Perry, Sandy Berger and others who are advising him—as it is to the Republicans.

Another idea that's part of U.S. thinking is that we're in a war against terrorism that will last for a long time. This means that the way in which we deploy military forces will be different than in the past. For instance, during the Cold War, we had forces up against the nose of our enemy in a defensive position. If the Russians come across into Germany, or if the North Koreans come south, we're there to push them back. Now, the doctrine is to get away from these defensive positions and get right up next to the enemy, so that we can move with speed and mobility to where the forces are needed. Donald Rumsfeld, the U.S. Defense Secretary, has elaborated about this policy.

If John Kerry is elected in November, do you really think this new global repositioning of U.S. forces would fundamentally change and go back to what it was before? I don't think there's a chance of that. The situation which exists now will last for at least the next few years.

The problem with the Korean issue is that if you read the global military repositioning documents, they all talk about the fact that the Cold War is over and we need mobility, not a tripwire. But the Cold War is not over in Northeast Asia or the Korean Peninsula. We need the tripwire. The US position of moving away from being up against the North Koreans at the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel and withdrawing lots of troops out of Korea raises issues that are not as significant in, say, Western Europe as they are here.

What is most disturbing about the Bush Administration's position on the troop reduction in South Korea is, again, a lack of consultation. There is little understanding of what the motivations really are. Is this a downgrading of the US-South Korea relationship? I don't think so. And it probably wouldn't be interpreted as a kind of slap at President Roh because he's not nice to us. But there's a lack of full consultation, though maybe it goes both ways. That's a big problem.

If the administration changes in Washington D.C., there will be some shifts in rhetoric, nuance and subtlety. But the fundamental thrust of U.S. foreign policy is not going to change. Therefore, other countries have to recognize that reality and then figure out what their position is. This does not mean doing exactly what the U.S. wants, but it does mean having realistic expectations.



## Japan

Concerning Japan, I would like to stress two things. One, I think there's less real change going on in Japanese foreign policy than a lot of people think. There is a general shift to the right. A lot of the old taboos are disappearing. People also talk about constitutional revisions.

Nowadays, in fact, the great majority of the Japanese favor a constitutional revision. But we forget that there's absolutely no agreement on what the revised constitution should say. In my view, it will be a decade before that kind of consensus emerges. The debate over revising the constitution is going to come more into focus, but it is not going to be revised anytime in the near future.

What characterizes the administration of Prime Minister Koizumi is a lack of a strategic sense of where Japanese foreign policy should be going. You see Koizumi going in several directions at once. On China relations, he has allowed the Yasukuni Shrine issue to remain and to grow as a major obstacle to the political development with China. This is a major problem. He's playing to the right wing in his own country on this issue.

On North Korea, his visit to North Korea last Saturday showed the small-scale thinking on foreign policy. It seems that he went to North Korea basically to bring back the five children. He was hoping to bring back eight, including the kids of the U.S. defector. He had an opportunity to talk about the nuclear, missile, and other issues, but the conversation was cut short by thirty minutes.

As you know, Kim Jong-Il hardly ever meets the leaders of other countries outside the Chinese. Here was an opportunity. Koizumi, though, is not like Yasuhiro Nakasone, a former prime minister and LDP heavyweight. Koizumi does not think in strategic terms. He's a man who goes with his instincts. His political instincts are amazingly good, which is why his popularity remains so high.

I don't think you're going to see a major new thrust in Japanese foreign policy. Inside the Japanese foreign ministry, the dominant element remains the U.S. specialists, particularly the Japanese ambassador to Washington D.C. He's a key player in Japanese foreign policy. Then there are the so-called Asia hands. They're pulling a little at each other, but there's no contest for leadership.

There will not be much change with Japanese foreign policy anytime soon. The fundamentals will remain as they have been until now: try to see what the major currents are in the world, and ride them. Don't oppose them, react to them. This means a very positive relationship with the U.S., which is what Koizumi is most focused on.