

What's missing in Hillary's Strategy for Asia

By KAWATO Akio

I read Hillary Clinton's essay on foreign policy in Foreign Affairs. It describes the diplomatic strategy she would pursue in the event that she takes over the administration. Although she makes many references to controversial topics such as the Iraq and North Korea issues, the essay doesn't perceive Asia comprehensively. She only mentions countries such as China, India, Australia and Japan individually, and it's hard to see an organic, integral strategy for Asia. The Republic of Korea (ROK) and the members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) are greatly expanding their reach in Asia; their involvement is indispensable for Asia's stability and prosperity. Taiwan is also enjoying a high level of freedom and democracy. Yet, her essay doesn't pay any attention to these countries and area. Or is it her strategy to let China take care of Asia, as per her statement that "the U.S. relationship with China is the most important bilateral relationship in the world"?

She speaks about the need to restore faith in the traditional values of the U.S., including freedom and democracy. As one aspect of that, she makes an appeal for reinforcing the Atlantic alliance, but her strategy for maintaining or expanding freedom and democracy in Asia remains unclear. For example, I can not figure out how she positions Japan's role within the entire American strategy in Asia. In fact, she only makes two brief mentions of Japan in the entirety of the long paper. Japan is a stronghold of democracy and market economy in Asia. It provides for the US a number of important air, naval, and marine bases; a guarantee for the maintenance of the status quo in Asia. What is more, Japan bears costs of 6 billion dollars annually, or two thirds of the expenses for the maintenance of U.S. forces in those bases.

Hillary Clinton dedicates a large portion of her essay to discussing the North Korean issue, an immediate diplomatic task for the U.S. She praises China's contribution in negotiations with North Korea. She writes, "We should build on North Korean denuclearization to establish a Northeast Asian security regime." This logic of creating a security regime in Northeast Asia with the Six-Party Talks as its basis is a recent trend in the U.S. You can see lots of papers carrying on their discussions following this same logic. Basically I welcome this move. We do need a stream-lined mechanism in which we can engage China in a collective discussion on security in Asia. However, if this move reflects an intention on the American part to distance itself from direct involvement in the issues in Asia, I cannot agree. And U.S. will have to pay a high price for such a policy. True, China was helpful in North Korean issue. But its involvement in the Myanmar incident impressed us that we cannot depend upon China when it matters freedom, democracy and genuine market economy. The less the U.S. involves itself in Asia today, the more they will lose in Asia tomorrow.

In the meantime, Japan ought to present alternatives. Though there is absolutely no need to change the Japan-U.S. alliance particularly in view of the global resurgence of

Russian power. However, we need to institutionalize a new collective mechanism for security discussions in Asia, and China should be a member of such a mechanism. Such a mechanism should be geographically more comprehensive and organic than the Six-Party Talks. Southeast Asia, that is to say ASEAN, should also be brought into the membership of such a mechanism. In the same vein, we should realize that the U.S.'s participation in any discussions on the building of an East Asia community is indispensable. The economic development of East Asian countries depends on exports to the U.S., so we cannot be so endlessly stuck to Mahathir-like Asian supremacist policies.

(This is the original text written for CEAC Commentary by Mr. KAWATO Akio, General Manager of Japan-World Trends.)