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## **Will the U.S.-Japan Alliance Become Dispensable?**

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The president of South Korea changed as will the presidents of Taiwan and the U.S. As a result, significant changes in the international political environment that directly affect the basis of Japan's geopolitical condition such as the nature of the U.S.-Japan alliance, the North Korea issue, and the Taiwan issue can be expected to occur.

Judging by the movement so far, the change in Korean presidency appears to be having a positive effect on Japan-Korea relations and regional stability. At the present juncture, it seems Japan and Korea can become regional partners sharing very similar values, and with close levels of economic development. If the bilateral relationship can move forward in a stable manner, that will be very important for East Asia politically and economically.

On the other hand, any movement on the Taiwan issue needs to be closely watched. Of course, it is unlikely there will be any dramatic changes. However, from the point that the stable situation of Taiwan Straits with the balance of power between China and Taiwan is a lifeline for Japan, careful analysis will be needed of changes in their relations with their increasing economic mutual interdependence and changes in the military balance. From the short-term viewpoint, the major focus is certainly the presidential election, and it is unclear at the present time what the effect of the presidential election of the landslide victory of the Kuomintang in the island's parliamentary election will be. For Japan, the risks must be urgently analyzed with regard to any change which inevitably occurred from the current CHEN Shui-bian administration.

Under the LEE Teng-hui administration and the CHEN administration, though there was a difference in their stance toward Japan, the strategic importance of Japan to Taiwan has been increasing. The Pro-Japan policy under the LEE administration and a little bit "cold" relationship with the U.S. under the CHEN administration, such as the U.S.-Korea relationship, were the drivers of this situation, but that situation will now certainly change. Of course at the present time, it is unclear what direction the next U.S. government will take with its strategy for Asia, or even whether the U.S. will keep its commitment for this region.

With the Cold War over, China increasing its economic power, South Korea and Taiwan becoming economically stronger, the U.S.-Japan alliance is now slowly in the process of changing to become something that is not indispensable but more of a dependent variable, or relative element with regard to the international situation in the East Asia. Of course, in the current situation where China is still a state run by a

one-party dictatorship and continues to pose a security and economic threat to the U.S., the possibility of the value of the U.S.-Japan alliance becoming dramatically irrelevant is still low. However, one should be aware that the alliance cannot be taken for granted, and from now on assessing the geopolitical risks that exist in East Asia, and having a sound sense of which direction to go with things will be of crucial importance to Japan.

**(This is the English translation of an article written by Mr. SUZUKI Keisuke, Member of the House of Representatives (LDP), which originally appeared on the BBS “Hyakka-Somei” of CEAC on January 19, 2008.)**