

## **Overview**

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### **East Asia in 2008**

## **1. From Bush to Obama**

The Democratic Party candidate, Barack Obama, won the US presidential election on November 4, 2008. While the overriding challenge for the new president will be to rebuild the US economy, which has declined steeply in the face of the financial crisis, President Obama will also be inheriting many tasks from the Bush administration in the areas of national security and foreign policy.

The first task is restoring the international prestige which was seriously damaged under President George W. Bush and revising foreign policies toward that end. By putting an end to unilateralism, emphasizing close collaboration and cooperation with allies, expanding and strengthening partnerships with the emerging states, and pursuing potential solutions to problems through direct dialogue with the states hostile to the United States, the Obama administration could move sharply to new directions in its foreign policies.

The second is deciding how to proceed in the battle against global terrorism. The issue of Iraq remains, and here the administration will begin to withdraw US troops while assessing the situation that unfolds in that country. Obama will also have to tackle the question of how to bring stability to Afghanistan, which he has defined as the main front in the battle against terrorism. To succeed, he must take action in several areas, including increasing the number of US troops in the country, strengthening collaboration with allies and partners in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and other parts of the world, and engaging in diplomatic efforts with Pakistan.

Thirdly, the Obama administration must decide how the US military should involve itself in missions of capacity building in fragile states, such as those in Africa. The answer will depend on whether the United States will consider exercising its military power outside the realm of self-defense for the sake of a common security that enhances global stability, and whether it will operate globally with awareness that poor societies and fragile nations have become hotbeds of disease, terrorism, and conflict.

Fourth is the task of building a security strategy amid the structural changes that are occurring in international society. In terms of its relations with other states, the United States must decide what kind of relations it wants to build with newly emerging great powers such as China and India, which are increasing their influence in international society, and how it wants to confront Russia, which is making a comeback as a great power. With respect to China, the United States is

likely to consider it a “responsible stakeholder” and engage it more deeply on a wide range of issues such as nuclear non-proliferation and the environment, while continuing a policy of hedging. On the other hand, because of its political, economic, and geopolitical importance, the United States and other major nations are endeavoring to strengthen their ties with India in the political, economic, and security arenas. The decision by the United States during the Bush administration to cooperate with India on nuclear energy reflected a judgment that it would not be able to build stronger security relationships with India by keeping it unengaged on issues of nuclear cooperation and non-proliferation. Thus another issue for the Obama administration will be how to develop and/or strengthen ties that have been developed by the Bush administration with India. Rebuilding relations with Russia will also be an important challenge, with the world watching to see how the United States works to improve relations that have deteriorated since the Georgian conflict in August 2008.

Fifth, the United States must decide how it will deal with global-scale problems such as climate change and energy and food security, and how it will confront increased national security risks from terrorism involving the use of weapons of mass destruction (WMD), nuclear proliferation in the Middle East, and so on. In relation to WMDs and the problem of nuclear proliferation, another focal point will be how the Obama administration tackles the problem of North Korea’s nuclear capabilities. The United States is likely to continue to press for a denuclearized North Korea within the framework of the Six-party Talks. At the heads of delegation meeting for the Six-party Talks held in July 2008, an agreement was reached on a framework of verification for North Korea’s nuclear program. Thereafter, however, negotiations between the United States and North Korea reached an impasse over verification protocol, which led North Korea to discontinue its disablement of the Yongbyon nuclear facility. As of the end of 2008, the outlook for a denuclearized North Korea was not bright. Many outstanding issues remained, including the disposal of North Korea’s existing nuclear weapons and related material, verification of its uranium enrichment program, and inspections relating to transfers of nuclear material to Syria and other countries. In dealing with these issues, it will become increasingly vital for Japan, the United States and South Korea to coordinate their actions more closely, and for the parties to urge China to become more fully involved in the process.

## **2. The Issue of China as a Responsible Great Power**

One of the most closely watched events in East Asia in 2008 was the Beijing Olympics in August. By pulling off a successful Olympics, the Chinese leadership succeeded in making a strong statement domestically and internationally about the country's development and in so doing further enhanced China's presence as a major power in international society. The participation of leaders from the United States, Japan, and other major countries in the game's opening ceremony was an indication of the importance that the world is placing on its relations with China and also of what China has accomplished through a foreign policy focused on cooperation.

For China, one of the most important challenges it faces is maintaining economic development over the long term. Toward that end, it is endeavoring to build and strengthen cooperative relations with the major economic powers and to ensure the creation of a stable international environment. It is also, therefore, taking steps to improve and strengthen its relations with Japan. On the occasion of President Hu Jintao's visit to Japan in May 2008, Japanese and Chinese leaders vowed to promote a mutually beneficial strategic relationship across a broad spectrum of issues. The leaders agreed that the relationship between Japan and China was one of the most important bilateral relationships in the world for both nations and agreed further that their two countries would have a major impact on, and responsibility for, peace, stability, and development in the Asia-Pacific region and the world. In addition, recognizing that each country was a cooperating partner of the other, and that neither was a threat to the other, Japan and China reiterated that they would pursue a broad mutually beneficial relationship based on common strategic interests. Specifically, both countries recognized that cooperation between Japan and China would be instrumental in promoting the Six-party Talks on North Korea's nuclear development and in strengthening regional cooperation in East Asia, primarily through the vehicle of ASEAN + 3 (Japan, China, and South Korea).

As the global economic downturn worsened in the fall of 2008, the rapidly growing Chinese economy also began to feel its negative impacts. For China, it is becoming increasingly important to promote cooperative foreign policies that share with international society the burdens of overcoming these kinds of crises.

Chinese defense spending is increasing at a pace commensurate with its economic development. Although China is taking steps to strengthen its military

power, the general view is that it is aiming to keep increases in its defense capabilities at levels that do not hinder economic development. As indicated in debates about the amounts of its military expenditures, however, there are concerns in other countries about the “transparency” of the Chinese military situation. To counter these concerns, China is attempting to demonstrate the increase of transparency by publishing a white paper on national defense, opening up its military units and exercises to outside observers, and engaging in exchange programs with foreign militaries.

### **3. Progress in International Cooperation on Large-scale Natural Disasters**

In May 2008, two major disasters struck. A large cyclone battered Myanmar, leaving in its wake catastrophic damage. Then, a massive earthquake hit Sichuan Province, China, causing countless deaths and missing persons and enormous economic losses. These two disasters compelled both the affected governments and international society to wrestle with the question of how to cooperate internationally on disaster relief. In dealing with the earthquake disaster, the Chinese government allowed overseas aid into the country, including an international rescue team from Japan. The Myanmar military government, on the other hand, initially resisted offers of aid from international organizations and from Europe and the United States before ultimately allowing access through the good offices of ASEAN.

These two disasters and the resulting relief activities brought to light a number of challenges that must be addressed when cooperating internationally on non-traditional security risks. The first is the need to figure out how to build and strengthen mechanisms for cooperation among the nations providing the assistance. This is an issue that extends beyond disaster assistance to the problem of how to build and strengthen such mechanisms to deal with all non-traditional security risks. There is growing interest in these endeavors not only among the ASEAN countries and their principle dialogue partners, Japan, China, and South Korea, but also among countries such as the United States and Australia. Second, there is a need to figure out how to build and strengthen cooperative relationships between the country receiving the aid and the countries providing it. The government of an affected nation may sometimes resist offers of aid. In that instance, supporting nations must decide how much aid is appropriate in light of

their need to respect the other country's sovereignty. In other words, they must also decide under what circumstances "human security" will take precedence over traditional security based on national sovereignty. The third challenge relates to the role of a multilateral security mechanism in the Asia-Pacific region. The ASEAN Regional Forum is aiming to strengthen cooperation in the realms of emergency response, disaster assistance and reconstruction in order to build an effective disaster response capability.

#### **4. Heightened Interest in Climate Change, Energy, and Food Issues**

In recent years, the issues of climate change and energy and food security are being taken increasingly seriously as global problems. The skyrocketing prices of energy and food that were so pronounced in first half of 2008 were caused in part by huge amounts of speculative money pouring into the futures markets for these commodities. In addition to these financial factors, prices were pushed up by increasing demand for energy in newly emerging major powers such as China and India, which are experiencing tremendous spurts of economic development. Spiking food prices, on the other hand, were attributable to poor harvests caused by abnormal weather in the major food exporting nations and to the diversion of corn, soybeans and other raw materials to biofuel production, which was increasing as a result of environmental concerns. Biofuel production in particular was influenced by concerns about climate change, with the world demanding that dependence on fossil fuels be reduced in order to cut CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. In this way, the problems of energy, food, and climate change were interrelated.

At the G8 Hokkaido Toyako Summit in July 2008, these issues were included as major agenda items both at meetings of the heads of state and at the meeting of the major economies. Thus, in addition to a "G8 Hokkaido Toyako Summit Leaders Declaration," the summit also released a "Declaration of Leaders Meeting of Major Economies on Energy Security and Climate Change," in which economic leaders expressed a commitment to tackle the problem of climate change and the related problems of energy and food security.

At the United Nations (UN), many have begun calling for the issue of climate change to be framed as a problem of national security. At the 61st session of the General Assembly in September 2006, the United Kingdom had already begun arguing that the UN had an important role to play in the issue of climate change

and made reference to the need for climate security. At the 62nd session of the General Assembly in September 2007, high-level events were held on climate change as well as on traditional security issues before the general debate. Finally, at the 63rd session in September 2008, a dinner meeting on the food crisis and climate change was hosted by the Secretary-General.

The problems of climate change and of energy and food security are not amenable to solution by individual countries. Rather, they are global issues that must be tackled by countries working in cooperation with one another.