

Topic: The Obama Administrations's Security and Foreign Policy Strategy and the Korean Peninsula

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■ **Welcoming Remarks by Sook-Jong Lee**

The just completed US elections held much significance for many people. President-elect Barack H. Obama's victory speech showcased the leadership of hope that he espoused during the campaign. The Americans are not the only ones who are interested and have high expectations of the incoming administration, but those feelings are being echoed around the world. In Korea, various institutions are holding policy discussion forums to discuss about the new US administration. EAI GlobalNet21 will especially be the venue to discuss the security and foreign policy of the Obama administration and what changes that would bring to the US East Asia policy, as well as what Korea's response should be to those changes.

■ **Introduction by Youngsun Ha**

In EAI's National Security Panel, the group has met to debate and discuss what the issues what the next administration's security and foreign policy would be from about a year ago. So, this forum is not a presentation on what the individual presenters are thinking, but a presentation of the thoughts of the NSP teams. This forum should be seen as the opportunity to have a theoretical and policy discussion on US foreign policy and its East Asia strategy from the long-term perspective.

When discussing the foreign policy of the incoming US administration, there are three things that need to be considered. First, it will be impossible to have this discussion without taking into account the sudden and unanticipated financial crisis facing the US and the ensuing global financial difficulties. This crisis is without doubt the central issue of Obama's presidential transition team. It is necessary to be mindful of this fact when the discussing security and foreign policy issues. Secondly, when looking at Obama's campaign, presidential-elect, and other public speeches, as well as private conversations, the prefix "re" appears often. In other words, "re" refers to "new." Indeed, the question needs to be asked "What does the incoming Obama administration mean when it talks about "new"? And how will this "new" materialize? The answer to these questions will soon be answered by the transition team's basic values and philosophical leanings. During the discussion, the philosophical questions and the knotty problem of reality will need to be addressed. Thirdly, the Korean Peninsula issues and the related-issues of the US relationship, with both North and South Korea will need to be parsed in a cool-headed manner. The purpose of this discussion is not simply to an exercise to project what the next administration's policies will be, it is about

understanding the linkages between the Korea and these issues and finding appropriate solutions. To get to this point, the interests of Korea and the US need to overlap and an understanding needs to be created on how the parts that cause tension can be harmonized.

■ Discussion

Domestic Politics

- The discontinuity between the Bush and Obama administrations should not be discounted. The differences between the administrations will be very large. The reason for this line of thinking is: 1. The failures of the Bush administration made the election of Obama a possibility; 2. Obama has “grand ambitions” in contrast to that of Bush; 3. Obama very successfully ran his massive election organization by setting the major agenda items and priority.

Consequently, the formulated strategy is in response to Bush's aggressive foreign policy. In certain respects, it can be thought of as 1970's conservative engagement. Someone once referred to the appearance of FDR(Franklin Delano Roosevelt) as that sword.

- If Obama supporters' demographics are analyzed, he received the most support from Latin Americans, the youth, and African Americans. Not only that, without the broad support of the American public, Obama could not have been elected president. However, one thing that needs to be clear is that Obama does not have a secure support base. The reason being is that Obama has not been clear on who he represents. He does not have a positive identity for uniting his support base. Therefore, going forward as the Obama administration solidifies his support base, it will his task to decide beforehand to continue successful policy execution.
- The Obama administration's first task is to help the US recover from the financial crisis. For the time being, the financial crisis will be priority number one, so other issues will be pushed to the back. The central task will be to determine what regulations will be applied and what resources will be mobilized to overcome the crisis. As McCain has stated before, there is a high possibility of the Obama administration becoming a "spender government." Obama has made a commitment to funding economic recovery, medical care reform, etc, but where will the resources be coming from? It will not be an easy task to be promoting reform, while pushing for a balanced budget.
- The Obama administration is starting off with two wars and the financial crisis, which are weighty and very important issues. It will be without a doubt a difficult start. In this situation, it will be difficult to push for bold policy initiatives.

Therefore, it is difficult to be assured on how much of a distinction Obama can make between Bush and himself.

- After being faced with overcoming a financial crisis, in reality, can the Obama administration be able to put forth a new vision? What can Obama add beyond what Clinton spoke about 16 years before? It may be that the current economic malaise that began in the US and has spread throughout the globe will be the event to bring about a huge transformation, however it is doubtful that Obama will be able to propose change that will be the start of a new era under his watch. The outlook is that perhaps the current neo-liberal framework can be preserved, while sections of this framework can be revised.

Global Strategy

- If the post-Cold War period can be summarized by three distinct features of international society, it would be military unipolarity, political multipolarity, and with economics being the first priority. There are changes occurring to these three characteristics: political multipolarity and economics "first" prioritization are getting stronger, while on the other hand, there is an increasing possibility that overtime the US-centered military unipolarity will lessen. US foreign policy can be viewed from this standpoint.

Especially in terms of Iraq, Obama at first revealed a firm stance to withdraw US troops from Iraq. However, it should be noted that his later stance changed. For the US, the withdrawal of US troops was never going to be an easy problem to resolve. The campaign strategy took the approach that the US troop presence would not be extended, but going forward the actual Iraq policy could be something different.

- Up until now, Obama more so than other presidential candidates showed a strong affinity for the concepts of freedom and democracy. On a personal level, Obama may be an idealist, but in terms of actual methods of achieving his policy objectives, he is a pragmatic realist. Even in a democracy, he is thought of as an individual with strong pluralistic values, who is far from the dogmatism of liberal democracy. In other words, Obama's vision of democracy can be summed up as "you and I may be different, but we can go together." In terms of international strategy, values espoused by the US will be applied flexibly and direct talks and compromise will be used. Obama is the person who will be able to expand democracy and values-based alliances, which go hand in hand.

- An interesting fact of this US presidential election is that it was not only about domestic political problems, but was conducted from a global perspective. A feeling that a global president was being elected pervaded the election. As the world watched, each person could imagine the hope and change that Obama spoke about.
- When considering the US financial situation, the burden of direct engagement policies will be large. So, rather than direct engagement in problem regions, the possibility of choosing off-shore balancing is high. This means that the next administration will have a more passive foreign policy than that of the Bush administration. However, whether off-shore balancing is selected or not will depend on the changing tenor of the issues and the time period.

East Asian and Korean Peninsula Strategy

- On issues related to the Korean Peninsula, the Korea-US Alliance in the future will be facing more discussions over the topic of burden sharing. The US in the midst of a financial difficulties in order to maintain their status as the world's only superpower is demanding their alliance partners to take a considerable burden. Even on the North Korean issue, the framework of the Six-Party Talks will be sustained and be the focal point, rather than direct US-DPRK talks. This is due to the continued US distrust of China. The elaborate plan between Korea and the US and achieving the planned coordination between the US and North Korea is the best scheme. But, the North Korea is not an easy adversary. So, we need to have a set response ready. Having known precisely 'what we can and can not do' and 'what we can demand of the US and what we can not,' we need to be able to influence the direction of the US North Korea policy.
- On issues related to East Asia, the possibility of the US joining the East Asia Community is low. However, the US is not disinterested in East Asia issues. In this region the US would mostly likely have an interest in a US-China-Japan trilateral cooperative system. In other words, with the US preferring the engagement shape of a US-China-Japan trilateral cooperation on essential East Asia issues, the US will play a role as an important interlocutor in this region. The US will need to make the effort that Korea will not feel left out.
- Obama as a freshman Congressman has little foreign policy experience. This is a very exceptional case. In regards to foreign policy, it is expected that the Obama administration's 'real ability' will undergo a vigorous scrutiny process. Especially, this early period will be the test-bed for the Obama administration. In this situation, at

minimum the Obama administration should be aware that the North Korea nuclear issue will possibly be the first test period's issue.