

Yoichi Funabashi interview with Secretary of State Clinton February 18 2009

Yoichi Funabashi, the Chief Editor of the Asahi Shimbun, met with Hillary Clinton earlier this week.

Question: Secretary Clinton, thank you very much for coming. We really appreciate you sharing your precious time and thoughts with us. Our first question is about North Korea. What would you say is the biggest difference between your administration's policy toward North Korea, particularly with regard to the nuclear issue, and the previous Bush administration's policy?

Answer: Well, the previous administration's policy changed, as you know, over time. And I think the ending policy, that we had to engage in the six-party talks and even bilaterally with North Korea, is where they should have started, because I think that is exactly what we must do ... and that we have to work closely with the other partners, particularly Japan and South Korea, and engage with China and Russia to bring influence to bear on North Korea, to convince them that their pursuit of nuclear weapons is not acceptable and carries costs that are going to be quite high.

So we start from the premise that the six-party talks are a good forum and we will be appointing a successor envoy to Secretary (Christopher) Hill and engaging as broadly as we possibly can while trying to speak directly to the North Korean people and to the others in the government who are jockeying for a position that there are benefits that they would obtain if they began to cooperate.

Q: With this approach, how you see the human rights issues in this context?

A: I believe that the agenda for the six-party talks is a comprehensive one - denuclearizing in a verifiable and complete way, dealing with their missiles, and the human rights agenda, which includes the abductees.

Q: On China, concerns have emerged about its nuclear build-up. Since you have started to talk about the reinitiation of the START (Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty) with Russia--and also the desire for ratification of the CTBT, how do you put China's nuclear build-up in this context?

A: Excellent question. And it is one of the issues I intend to discuss with the Chinese—about the possibility of their becoming more involved in nonproliferation and arms control, as the Russians historically have been. China has a role that is important for them to play, and I hope that there will be an opportunity for us to begin negotiating on some of those issues.

Q: So you are trying to initiate a bilateral negotiation, at least a process, to discuss this issue between the United States and China in the coming months and years?

A: Yes, it will be a discussion that can very well lead to some process.

Q: With regard to the United States, China and Japan, there have been some voices arguing for starting that new process among those three countries because, particularly on global issues, so much overlapping interest and concerns have emerged. Perhaps it is the right time for those three countries to get together to at least consult each other with those mutual interests and concerns. Do you agree with that?

A: I think that's an idea worth exploring. Certainly Japan and China and the United States have a lot of concerns in common. As you know, China and Japan both have historically exported a lot of goods to the United States. In this economic crisis, they're both confronting some difficult decisions. The United States has a great desire in creating a cooperative relationship among China, Japan and ourselves. So we will be asking both countries if there are such opportunities for a trilateral dialogue that we could perhaps look forward to.

Q: Would it possibly include trilateral summits?

A: Well, this is one of those ideas that is just being born, so I think we have to see whether we can create a format that is acceptable to all three countries.

Q: Specifically, in what way do you think that those three countries really should promote mutual understanding and explore that common approach with regard to the global warming/climate change issue?

A: Well, I think that's a perfect example. Japan is further advanced than the United States and China in energy efficiency and clean energy technology. So creating a partnership among the three of us would benefit China and the United States, and economically benefit Japan. I think that helping China understand ways that it can lower emissions without undermining their economic growth, which is their big fear—you know, they look at Japan, how advanced Japan is; they look at the United States and they say, well, we have the right to develop and give our people a higher standard of living. Well, they do. But it would be far better if they did so in a way that limited emissions and led to clean energy uses. Japan has so much to offer to China on that front, and we have partnerships that we can offer as well. So I think that's a perfect example for the kind of trilateral discussion that you refer to.

Q: Your predecessor, Secretary Condoleeza Rice, twice skipped attending the ARF and the ASEAN Regional Forum—perhaps for good reason—but the Southeast Asian countries, the officials and the politicians were a bit disappointed with the lack of presence on the part of the United States. What is your view of the United States' presence and commitment to Southeast Asian countries, particularly regionalism?

A: I think it's an important part of our global strategy to be involved in organizations like ASEAN. I certainly intend whenever possible to be at the regional meetings where the

United States is invited to participate. And I hope that we can create even closer cooperation between the United States and the ASEAN countries.

Q: Are you planning to also participate in the East Asian Summit?

A: That I'm not as familiar with, so I will have to look at that. I know the timing on the ASEAN summit; I don't know the timing on the East Asian Summit.

Q: As you know, Japanese politics have been in disarray, and this sort of political immobility actually has already hampered the Japanese government from pursuing perhaps more dynamic, more forthcoming approaches or postures. Do you think this problem already has caused some problems in the context of Japan-U.S. relations, or at least imposed some constraints on the United States in terms of it exploring a common approach with Japan?

A: I don't believe so. Of course, it is up to the Japanese people to determine their own political leadership. But I think that our alliance and partnership is durable, and it continues no matter who's in the White House in Washington, and it continues no matter who is in charge here in Tokyo. And I want to underscore that, because as important as my ministerial meetings are — and I had excellent meetings today with the foreign minister and the defense minister, and I'm looking forward to my dinner with the prime minister — the people of Japan and the people of the United States have a close relationship. We have so many values in common, we have a view of how it's possible to improve life for everyone by working together and having economic growth and prosperity. So I see our relationship as being very fundamental and we look forward to working with whomever the people of Japan choose as their leaders.