

Sub-project I. Domestic factors influencing US foreign policy (US Study Group)

1. Issues to be addressed

With President Obama's second term coming to an end, 2016 will mark a major turning point for US politics and foreign policy. Republican majorities in both the House of Representatives and the Senate since the 2014 mid-term elections have made the Obama administration a "lame duck" but, with no concerns about re-election, the administration is now using its "free hand" to issue executive orders and exercise presidential authority for the sake of "legacy building" through, say, revisions to the Immigration Act and normalization of diplomatic relations with Cuba.

Faced with severe fiscal restrictions even as it resumes bombing in Iraq despite its earlier withdrawal of ground forces, the US has been struggling to maintain its "return" to Asia, where China and other emerging countries are on the rise.

In light of the significant changes in the international circumstances surrounding the US, how will a post-Obama America interact with the rest of the world? As the US' domestic and foreign circumstances undergo major changes, it is essential to understand the the US' domestic foundations shaken by partisan polarization and the reciprocal effects with international affairs – in line with Richard Haas' insight that "Foreign policy begins at home" – and to prepare for the US' future foreign policy, including its China policy, and for measures to improve Japan-US relations.

2. Research overview

The research for Sub-project I will focus on numerous domestic elements in the US that have an impact on the US' foreign policy. While looking ahead to "the post-Obama era" and bearing in mind partisan perspectives, this sub-project will analyze (1) ideological trends surrounding foreign policy and socioeconomic conditions at the macro level, (2) the roles played by various political organizations, public opinion and other groups in the policy-making process, and (3) the points of contention at the micro level that are shaking the administration's foundations.

The first task is analyzing the macro-level trends that lie at the foundation of foreign policy formation. This will entail developing an overview of ideological trends within US domestic politics and foreign policy as well as economic, fiscal, and demographic factors. The

second task is analyzing the various political processes surrounding foreign policy. With partisan conflict and polarization intensifying, the systemic dysfunctions in the US government and the relationships among various government organizations need to be ascertained. Given the high level of public participation in US political processes, public opinion trends and the efforts of groups connected with the foreign policy making process must be examined. The third task is concretely analyzing the orientation and approaches of various actors at the micro level that have an impact on the political base. This involves studying interest groups focused on disparities and welfare, subjects that could become points of political contention in the 2016 presidential, congressional, and gubernatorial elections, as well as social classes, major racial/ethnic groups, and public religions tied to cultural conflict.

Once the election campaigns get underway in earnest, attention will also be focused on the public pledges made by the Democratic and Republican candidates. After analyzing the US domestic political base and foreign policy trends, this sub-project will examine the potential effects of the 2016 elections on Japan-US relations and on US foreign policy, including its policy toward China.

3. Research team (US Study Group)

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