

America's "Super Tuesday" and What It Means to Japan?

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For
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March 3, 2004

President Bush has unified the Democratic Party, something his former opponent Al Gore could not do. The results of the "Super Tuesday" primary elections held in the United States on March 2 make this clear. Democratic Senator John Kerry will be the Democratic Party's candidate in the 2004 presidential election. What does this mean for Japan?

First, let us set the stage before we answer this question. American journalists came up with the term "Super Tuesday." It is their nickname for the first Tuesday in March, every fourth year, when ten states hold presidential primary elections. Voters in California, Connecticut, Georgia, Maryland, Massachusetts, Minnesota, New York, Ohio, Rhode Island, and Vermont cast their ballot to designate their favorite candidate for president. On "Super Tuesday" this year, Kerry won in nine out of ten states. He lost only in Vermont, the home state of former presidential candidate and former Vermont government Howard Dean.

Democrats Demand Regime Change

Seventy nine percent of the voters said that they preferred Kerry because, "He can defeat George W. Bush." (according to polls taken after voters had cast their ballot and as reported in the Washington Post on March 3). President Bush obviously has failed to rally the support of the American people, a promise he made during the 2000 election. Only about half the American people, according to pre-election polls, approve of how he is managing the government. His policies have driven a wedge between Republicans and Democrats. He has angered Democrats and convinced them to rally behind their party. They want a candidate who can expel Bush from the White House. All other considerations are of secondary importance to Democrats.

Democrats also selected Kerry because of his positions regarding the American people's other major concerns: the war in Iraq, health care and the economy. American involvement in Iraq is a serious political liability for President Bush. After one year of intervention in Iraq, the deaths of thousands of Iraqis and hundreds of Americans, and the spending of billions of dollars, the situation only seems to worsen. Also, Americans do not feel any safer now because international terrorist groups like Al Qaeda remains active.

Meanwhile, the rising costs are making medical insurance unaffordable for growing numbers of Americans and concern about the economy is deepening. The Federal

government's deficit is at an all time high. This increases government borrowing, which will increase the cost of loans to the average American who wants to buy a home or car, pay for medical expenses or finance a child's education. At the same time, the value of stocks is wavering and unemployment remains relatively high.

What Does This Mean for Japan?

Actually, the Japanese government and people are in an advantageous position regardless of who wins the White House this fall. So far, none of the American candidates have had anything to say, positive or negative, about Japan and the US-Japan relationship. This is good news for Japan. But future developments in Iraq are worrisome.

Neither Bush nor his Democratic opponent has reason to bash Japan. Bush cannot blame America's economic woes on Japan, as previous presidential administrations often have done. Bush blames his predecessor, Bill Clinton. Also, Bush needs his friend Prime Minister Koizumi's continued support and cooperation. Koizumi has made Japan important to Bush by supporting his "war on terrorism," risking political criticism at home by sending troops to Iraq and backing most of President Bush's initiatives against terrorism. Despite the huge, and still growing US-Japan trade deficit (in Japan's favor), Americans have a generally positive image of Japan.

Nor is Bush's opponent, Senator Kerry, likely to beat up on Japan. Kerry champions multilateral diplomacy. He has criticized Bush for not working closely enough with international organizations and other nations, as well as for not engaging in negotiations with North Korea. These are the cornerstones of Prime Minister Koizumi's and Japan's foreign policy. Kerry, like Bush, sees Japan as a partner when it comes to international affairs. Also, both American presidential candidates share the Japanese people's and government's desire for a peaceful diplomatic resolution of differences with North Korea, including the abduction issue.

What About Iraq?

Future developments in Iraq, however, could have a decisive impact on both the US presidential election and the US-Japan alliance. If the situation in Iraq does not improve significantly soon, the American people's frustration could cost Bush re-election. If the price of Japan's involvement in Iraq comes to include the death of Japanese soldiers, Prime Minister Koizumi could face similar frustration from the Japanese people. In the final analysis, the political fate of President Bush and Prime Minister Koizumi are closely linked to future developments in Iraq. On the other hand, Senator Kerry's political prospects would improve.