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It is interesting for us to have other perspectives on this election and Mr. Akita is going to give us his view of how Asia sees this upcoming election and what it means for Asian countries, as well as maybe alluding to the Taiwanese elections.

Hiroyuki Akita, Commentator of *Nikkei*, Japan

Thank you very much for having me. I am from one of the most dangerous geostrategic locations in the world because Japan is surrounded by Russia, North Korea and China, it is just next to the Taiwan Strait and Korean Peninsula, and Russia has been occupying Japanese territory for about 70 years. Because of that, I hope you will allow me to present a pessimistic view and in that context, I will make three points. One is about the prospects for the US Presidential election Second, the implications of the US presidential elections for Asia or for US allies and partners. Third, I will talk about the Taiwan presidential election next January.

First, on the prospects for the US presidential election, I travelled to the southern part of the US last months, Georgia, to meet a lot of supporters of Mr. Trump. It reminded me of two things. One is that they are very serious about supporting Mr. Trump but more importantly, a lot of people say that the US economic situation is terrible, although, objective economic data says that the unemployment rate is quite low and the US economy is growing. I asked political scientists about this and they say it is partisan bias, so people do not accept objective data anymore. I think this means that the US elections next year is not a topic to analyze based on objective data because people do not buy it, rather it is a political civil war. If it is a political civil war the prospects could be highly polarized and regardless whether Mr. Biden or Mr. Trump wins it is going to deepen divisions in the United States. That is my first prospect on the US presidential elections.

Second, then it comes to the implications of the US presidential election on US allies. No matter who will become next President, I think the election will accelerate so-called Plan A-trend among US allies and partners. The Plan A world is one where the US maintains dominant power and strong leadership so that US allies or partners could ride cheaply under the US security umbrella with US leadership. That is a Plan A but maybe the first Trump administration brought the world to the Plan A- domain, which is where we are now. Plan A- is the world in which US allies or partners continue to rely on a US military presence or leadership to some extent, but they realize that Plan A is no longer sustainable. So they make more efforts to defend themselves or make greater security or military contributions to sustain US military commitment. For example, Japan decided to launch its biggest military buildup since World War Two by doubling its defense budget within five years. Japan has also reached out to Australia, the UK, South Korea, and France to enhance security cooperation to support or complement a US military presence in the Pacific. I think the US presidential election will be highly polarized and if Mr. Trump is elected, the world will accelerate the shift



from Plan A to Plan A-. However, even if Mr. Biden is elected it will highlight the need for internal US changes, so I think that the world will accelerate the Plan A- trend regardless of who is elected. For some countries Plan A-, sustaining US military commitment, may not be even possible, because of the big reduction of US military footprint, for example the Middle East is this case. So for these regions, next year will be the beginning of a Plan B world. My point is that there will be a shift from a Plan A to Plan A- or Plan B world.

My third and last point is about Taiwan presidential election next January and I think whichever candidate wins, the ruling party or the opposition party, there will be common ground for maintaining the status quo. According to a public poll, the majority of the Taiwanese people clearly want to maintain the status quo. If the ruling party candidate wins they may try to keep a distance from mainland China but they will not call for independence. If the opposition party leader wins the presidency, he may try to embrace more dialogue with China but will not accept China's economic or political influence to change the status quo. That is my prediction.

Virginie Robert

That is interesting because Isabelle said these elections are not really going to count because nothing much will change afterwards because what matters is what is going to happen on the battlefield in Ukraine and Israel. You are saying that whatever happens with the elections in the States, we are definitely going to see the importance of the United States decreasing as the major ally.