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Forecast of the 2024 US Presidential Election: Donald Trump's Bid for Presidency and Joe Biden's Chances for Re-Election

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The contents of the campaign and foreign policy during Trump's years in office suggest that his re-election would likely result in a reduction of the U.S. role as a global security umbrella and an increase in shared responsibilities among allied nations. This is precisely the reason U.S. allies and partners are contemplating on how to Trump-proof themselves. However, will Trump, who disregards alliances and underestimates the connection between the security of the U.S. and global security, really be elected? This paper examines the factors that will determine the election outcomes between Joe Biden and Donald Trump at this juncture.

Donald Trump's Chances of Winning

The current results of the Republican primaries and opinion polls support the expectation that Trump is likely to be chosen as the next Republican presidential candidate and the next President of the United States. According to a CNN opinion poll conducted among registered voters in early February, 49% of respondents said they would vote for Trump, compared to 45% who chose Biden, showing a 4%p lead for Trump. Additionally, the most important issue determining voters' preferences in U.S. presidential elections traditionally is the economy. The prolonged

Russia-Ukraine war and Israel-Hamas war, coupled with the ongoing economic downturn in the United States would work favorably for Trump. It is difficult to deny that the current situation favors Trump, considering the backdrop of Obama's victory over John McCain with the largest margin in history in the 2008 presidential election. This victory was fueled by voter criticism of the worsening economic indicators under the Bush administration and the prolonged Iraq war.

However, above all, the revised election laws seem to provide a huge advantage for Trump. In the United States, election laws are determined by state legislatures. However, recently, states expected to serve as battlegrounds in the 2024 presidential election have strengthened regulations regarding identification and vote-by-mail processes. For example, Georgia, a swing state in the presidential election, decided not to permit mail-in voting which processes the entire procedures electronically for the 2024 presidential election as opposed to 2022. Regarding North Carolina, another swing state, while photo identification for mail-in voting was not mandatory in the 2020 election, it will be required for the upcoming election. In the United States, where activities such as taking photographs, obtaining and maintaining identification cards, and visiting polling stations are not as simple and easy as they are in Korea, such changes could pose significant challenges to voter turnout, particularly among the main support base of the Democratic Party, who are in the low-income group, particularly communities of color where the proportion of low-income individuals is relatively high.

Joe Biden's Chances of Re-election

The following can be pointed out as positive signals for Biden's chances of re-election: ① voter preference for maintaining the status quo; ② potential economic recovery; ③ temporary escalation or resolution of wars; ④ legal cases faced by Trump; ⑤ the emergence of Nikki Haley. It is a well-known fact that voters tend to prefer maintaining somewhat unsatisfactory current conditions over uncertain changes. Moreover, if the outlook of the U.S. economy improving from the second

half of the year and a potential decrease in interest rates become a reality, it could lead to favorable developments for Biden's victory. Additionally, it could serve as an opportunity for a turnaround to Biden, who is currently grappling with wars in Ukraine and the Middle East. A prolonged, 'sluggish' war tend to act unfavorably to the ruling party and the President during an election. However, the outbreak, temporary escalation, or resolution of wars can stimulate patriotism or be recognized as achievements of the incumbent government, thereby favorably influencing re-election. Therefore, it is difficult to rule out scenarios where the Biden administration seeks to demonstrate America's position and strength as a global leader and garner national support through temporary escalation of wars or make active efforts to end wars this year. This is because there are quite some time left until the Election Day.

Factors that make it difficult to easily anticipate Trump's re-election include ongoing legal battles surrounding Jan. 6 riot, sexual harassment, fraud, tampering with and forgery of corporate documents. Some analysts suggest that these legal challenges could rather galvanize Trump supporters. However, more than three-quarters of Americans still believe that democracy based on the rule of law and the will of the people is the best form of government and political systems. It remains uncertain whether these Americans will continue to turn a blind eye to the true colors of American democracy through Trump's legal cases during the presidential campaign. Nikki Haley's emergence supports such predictions. The emergence of Haley indicates significant discontent among Republican supporters towards extreme and exclusive thinking, and unethical politicians. Hence, it is difficult to exclude the possibility of these individuals opting for a moderate American-first approach represented by Biden, rather than the extreme conservatism of Trump, who may have issues with legal and moral qualifications. Considering the recent close margins of victory in swing states during the last U.S. presidential election, where victory was determined by a 1-2%p difference, it would be difficult for Trump to secure a win if he neglects the issue of defection of moderate Republican voters.

South Korea's Response Measures

Such forecasts indicate that the Korean government should prepare policies not only for a potential Trump election but also for a potential Biden re-election. Above all, if Biden is elected as voters lean towards the right-wing, he is likely to demand an expansion of the roles of allied nations. Therefore, security measures considering all possibilities such as the redeployment and reduction of U.S. troops and defense budget increases must be contemplated. At the same time, proactive leadership is required to continue and enhance trilateral cooperation between South Korea, the United States, and Japan regarding the North Korean nuclear issues. Efforts to institutionalize cooperation, such as the recent signing of the NCG framework document, are crucial in this regard. Furthermore, South Korea must consistently convey its commitment to North Korean denuclearization through various channels of communication between South Korea and the United States. ©KINU 2024

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