

Washington Aims to Build New U.S.-led Asian Order

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U.S. President Barack Obama's tour of Hawaii, Australia and Indonesia indicated his two purposes. First, Obama intended to deny that the United States has declined or begun to move toward isolationism as indicated by its withdrawal from Iraq and Afghanistan and to declare that Washington will build a new U.S.-led international order in Asia. Second, he planned to indicate that the United States will shift a focus of its dual (engagement and hedging) strategy over China to hard-line policies using even military power. As China's neighbors have all felt China's dangerous rise instead of what China claimed to be its "peaceful rise," a new U.S.-led balance of power is about to emerge.

U.S. to station Marines in Australia

Demonstrating the Obama administration's firm determination to build a new U.S.-led order in Asia was a U.S.-Australia agreement to station 200 to 250 U.S. Marines in Darwin, Australia. They plan to establish a U.S. military base at the geopolitically important point facing the East Timor Sea, the South China Sea and the Indian Ocean and increase the number of Marines there 10-fold to 2,500 in the future. This plan is of great strategic significance.

Then, President Obama decided to sell 24 F-16C/D fighter jets to Indonesia, although the U.S. government has refused to sell the modified version of the F-16 to Taiwan as requested by Taipei over the past four years. Indonesia now has only 10 outmoded F-16A/B fighters. The Obama administration plans to train Indonesian Air Force pilots in the United States and provide Indonesia with coastal surveillance radar systems.

Japan needs international insight

After his Asian policy speech at the Australian Parliament, President Obama made a phone call to Myanmar democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi and told her Secretary of State Hillary Clinton would visit Yangon in December. Thein Sein, who became Myanmar's president last March after serving as prime minister in its military junta, has made policy shifts to promote the nation's positive participation in the international community. He has unilaterally told China of his decision to freeze a China-led Myitsone dam construction project that had started on the upper Irrawaddy River in northern Myanmar. Myanmar people pursuing their autonomy may not support the project where 90% of hydroelectric output had been planned to go to China.

Waves of a new international order are emerging. Unless Japan acknowledges the significance of the planned Trans-Pacific Partnership free trade agreement in this context, it may lose sight of its position in the international situation. Japan should advocate its national interests as a matter of course. If lacking international insight, however, Japan could be trapped into parochial nationalism. This must not be forgotten.

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