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## Japan's New Leader Reassures U.S. on Alliance

By MARTIN FACKLER

TOKYO — Scrambling to mend fences with his country's biggest ally, Japan's next leader, Yukio Hatoyama, told President Obama and the United States ambassador on Thursday that the American alliance was the basis of Japanese foreign policy.

In a phone call Thursday with the White House, he reassured Mr. Obama that he would not change the alliance with the United States, Mr. Hatoyama said. It was his first conversation with the president since his party defeated Japan's long-governing incumbent party in Sunday's landmark election.

"We reaffirmed that the Japan-U.S. alliance is the foundation" of Japanese foreign policy, Mr. Hatoyama told reporters.

Mr. Hatoyama was seeking to quell worries that his slightly left-of-center government — elected after an almost uninterrupted half-century of rule by the conservative, pro-American Liberal Democratic Party — would pull Japan away from the United States.

During the campaign, his party, the Democratic Party, promised to seek a more "equal partnership" with Washington and build closer ties with China and other Asian countries. But the biggest problems were caused by an essay by the Stanford-educated Mr. Hatoyama, published in The International Herald Tribune and on the Web site of The New York Times, that called Japan's ailing economy a victim of American-led globalization.

The resulting stir in Washington presented Mr. Hatoyama's inexperienced government-in-waiting with its first crisis. American criticism of the essay was front-page news in Japanese newspapers on Thursday, reflecting the still widely held sentiment here that Japan must stay close to the United States, especially with a fast-rising China and nuclear-armed North Korea nearby.

Mr. Hatoyama has tried to control the damage in recent days, stressing that he has no intention of fundamentally altering the alliance, although his party wants some minor changes to agreements covering the 50,000-strong American military presence. He has also said the essay was misunderstood, and not intended to be anti-American.

Still, Japanese political analysts have been sharply critical of Mr. Hatoyama for failing to manage his image, and for letting the essay be an early statement of his views to the world.

"The article itself is minor," said Koji Murata, a professor of international relations at Doshisha University in Kyoto. "But the sense of timing of Mr. Hatoyama and those around him raises substantial doubts about his diplomatic sense."

According to Mr. Murata and others, the matter also reflected the lack of information about Mr. Hatoyama and his party in Washington, which had grown used to decades of dealing with the Liberal Democrats, while largely ignoring the opposition.

Mr. Murata also faulted American officials for their immediate negative reactions to the Democrats' campaign pledges, like re-examining an agreement to relocate the Marine Corps airfield at Futenma to another site on the Japanese island of Okinawa.

"If they say things like Futenma is not negotiable this will just make the Democratic Party become more obstinate," Mr. Murata said.

Mr. Hatoyama met for 45 minutes on Thursday with the new United States ambassador, John Roos, a California lawyer who was a fund-raiser for Mr. Obama.

"We spent a lot of time talking about how to enhance and deepen the relationship across a broad range of issues, not only strategic issues, but scientific issues, cultural matters," Mr. Roos told reporters.

Mr. Hatoyama said that he told Mr. Roos that the alliance "should be further strengthened in a constructive, future-oriented manner."

Mr. Hatoyama described his 12-minute phone conversation with Mr. Obama as friendly and constructive.

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