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## Clinton's Overseas Trip Asserts Asia as Priority

By JAY SOLOMON in Washington and IAN JOHNSON in Beijing

During Hillary Clinton's failed presidential run, she cited the China relationship as Washington's most important.

As secretary of state, she is moving to establish China as a priority, making her first trip abroad to China and three other Asian nations. It's a break with the tradition among secretaries of state of visiting Europe first.

In Beijing, Mrs. Clinton is expected to discuss a gamut of economic, security and environmental issues with her hosts, including China's response to the global financial crisis and its role in curbing North Korea's nuclear program.

While officials in Washington don't plan dramatic shifts in Asia policy, Asia experts see opportunities for advancing U.S.-China relations during Mrs. Clinton's Beijing trip.

Among them is resuming military-to-military talks frozen by Beijing last year after the Bush administration approved new arms sales to Taiwan.

The U.S. and China are also expected to outline a joint strategy to address global warming and other environmental issues. Mrs. Clinton may announce U.S. funding of green projects in China, such as environmentally friendly buildings, according to people familiar with the discussions.

Mrs. Clinton is expected to build on the Bush administration's foundations in dealing with China. Under President Bush, the U.S. established two formal engagement channels with Beijing -- the "senior dialogue" focused on security issues and a "strategic economic dialogue" led by former Treasury Secretary Henry Paulson.

Mrs. Clinton has said the Obama administration will seek "a more comprehensive approach" to engaging Beijing, without specifying the issues to be addressed. China analysts said these comments have piqued the interest of Chinese leaders who fear they could signal more U.S. attention to Chinese human rights, Tibet and Beijing's support for dictatorial governments in Myanmar and Sudan.

Trade is another potential flash point. During the campaign, President Barack Obama was critical of some Chinese trade practices, and his treasury secretary has accused China of manipulating its currency.

Chinese officials are seen as interested in learning who in the Obama administration will be driving China policy.

Mrs. Clinton's trip to China is also stoking speculation that she intends to take the lead in overseeing U.S.-China relations. Some U.S. officials have said Vice President Joe Biden could also emerge as the official to take that role.

Mrs. Clinton will need to balance the advancement of U.S.-China relations during her trip with reassuring Washington's traditional Asian allies, Japan and South Korea, that their interests are being protected by Washington. Tokyo and Seoul are her first stops on the seven-day trip, which starts Sunday.

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