The U.S.-Japan-China Triangle in the Trump Era

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Summary

Donald Trump, a billionaire entrepreneur and celebrity, was elected the 45th U.S. President in November of 2016, after a strong populist appeal during a very divisive presidential campaign. In a surprising upset, the Republican Presidential nominee Trump won the electoral vote and the Democratic President nominee and former U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton the popular vote.

With the unexpected changeover from the Democratic administration of President Barack Obama (2009-2017) to the Republican administration of President elect Donald Trump (2017- ), it is a good time to analyze how his framing of the U.S. global role and involvement in the Asia Pacific region will impact on the U.S.-Japan-China Triangle. Although the triangle is not a formal one, the relationships among the three powers, who are also the world’s

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top three economic powers, also impact greatly on dynamics in the region. So how can a Trump presidency contribute to constructive relations among the three powers with a divided America and increasingly complex global community. In order to link these questions, this paper will examine the impact of Trump’s populism; rebalancing U.S. leadership and future challenges.

**Key words:** America first, civic nationalism, ethnic nationalism, progressive internationalism, isolationism, populism, post-America era, protectionism, U.S. rebalance policy, TPP, transactional diplomacy, trilateral relations

**Introduction**

This year’s race for the U.S. presidency has been long, hard and divisive with originally seventeen candidates on the Republican party side and six on the Democratic party side. Third parties also fielded candidates. The final race for the general election pitted Donald Trump, a billionaire entrepreneur and TV celebrity, against Hillary Clinton, a former First Lady, N.Y. State Senator and third female Secretary of State. Both candidates lacked popularity and had to deal with various scandals throughout the race from alleged past abuse and discrimination of women in his case to her handling of classified e-mails on a private server while U.S. Secretary of State which resulted in F.B.I. investigations. Mutual mudslinging continued as well over issues such as distrust; alleged foreign cyber attacks interfering with the U.S. electoral process and discriminatory statements about different minorities. Meanwhile the U.S.’ image as a world leader was diminished by the level of negative campaigning, the questioning of the U.S. democratic system as well
as many Americans’ ambivalence about who could become the next U.S. President.

On November 8, 2016, Donald Trump won the electoral vote and Hillary Clinton the popular vote. The dramatic outcome of the election was a surprise to both camps. Many pundits throughout the campaign were critical of Mr. Trump’s character, capacity to lead and lack of policy detail. However, as Mr. Trump assumes office as the 45th U.S. President, the world order grows increasingly complex including perceptions of U.S. decline; Brexit; terrorism; cyber attacks; China’s assertive actions in the East and South China Seas; North Korea’s fifth nuclear test as well as various missile launches; Middle Eastern conflicts and an antagonistic relationship with Russia. Moreover, although the U.S. unemployment has dropped from around 9% in President Obama administration’s first term to 4.9%1 in 2016, many Americans are still experiencing economic hardship. In addition, citizens are angry over various issues including government regulation, the breakdown of law and order in different communities and rising health costs.

It is against this backdrop, I would like to examine how Trump’s framing of the U.S. global role and involvement in the Asia Pacific region will possibly impact on the U.S.-Japan-China triangle. How can a Trump presidency contribute to constructive U.S.-Japan and China relations? In order to analyze these questions, I will link three themes –the impact of populism, rebalancing U.S. leadership and future challenges.

The Impact of Trump’s Populism

While thinking about what would inform President Donald Trump’s outlook on U.S.-Japan-China trilateral relations, it is important to contrast the progressive internationalism that informed not only the Obama administration but also many of his Democratic predecessors’-Presidents Woodrow Wilson, Franklin D. Roosevelt, Harry Truman, John F. Kennedy, Jimmy Carter and Bill Clinton-administrations. If Hillary Clinton had become the 45th President of the United States, her outlook concerning trilateral relations would have been shaped by this progressive internationalism as well.

One of the key documents that explains the world view of progressive internationalism is the *Progressive Internationalism: A Democratic National Security Strategy*.

“Progressive internationalism stresses the responsibilities that come with our enormous power to use force with restraint but not to hesitate to use it when necessary, to show that the Declaration of Independence called “a decent respect for the opinions of mankind, “to exercise leadership primarily through persuasion rather than coercion, to reduce human suffering where we can, and to create alliances and international institutions committed to upholding a decent world order. We must return to four core principles that have long defined the Democratic party’s tradition of tough minded internationalism — national strength, liberal democracy, free enterprise and world leadership.”2
In line with those beliefs, President Obama and Democratic Presidential nominee Hillary Clinton can be seen as internationalists not isolationists and supporters of globalization. They also advocated the use of “smart power” as important part of U.S. foreign policy. Under the Obama administration’s rebalance policy, they both placed importance on the U.S. continued commitment to the Asia Pacific region.

In contrast to past democratic administrations as well as Presidential nominee Hillary Clinton’s support of international progressivism, President elect Donald Trump’s embraces populism. “Populism itself can be found on the right and the left in America.” Indeed, Democratic presidential nominee Hillary Clinton was pitted against fellow Democratic Presidential nominee Bernie Sanders, a populist on the left and Republican presidential nominee Donald Trump, a populist on the right. In the end, the populist on the right won.

“Presently, there are two different strands of populism which have thrived in the U.S. The first type of American populist directs his or her ire

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3. The concept of “smart power” was developed by Professor Joseph Nye in 2003 “to counter the misperception that soft power alone can produce effective foreign policy.” Smart power combines hard and soft power as an integrated strategy. Hard power refers to military and economic capacities. Soft power include a country’s “culture (when it is pleasing to others), its values (when they are attractive and consistently practiced), and its policies (when they are seen as inclusive and legitimate).” Joseph S. Nye Jr., “Get Smart Combining Hard and Soft Power,” *Foreign Affairs*, no. 4 (2009): 160.

exclusively upward at corporate elites and their enablers in government who have allegedly betrayed the interests of the men and women who do the nation’s essential work. These populists embrace a conception of the people based on class and avoid identifying themselves as supporters or opponents of any particular ethnic group or religion. They advance a version of “civic nationalism.”

“The second populist tradition—the one to which Trump belongs—also blame elites in big business and government for undermining the common folk’s economic interests and political liberties. However, their definition of the people is narrower and more ethnically restrictive basically looking towards citizens of European heritage as real Americans. They support racial nationalism.”

Historically, American populism has not only focused on domestic policy but also foreign policy. In Trump’s case, this includes an America First philosophy. His America First concept was emphasized in his first foreign policy speech “My foreign policy will always put the interests of the American people and American security above all else. It has to be first. Has to be. That will be the foundation of very single decision that I will make...America first will be the major and overriding theme of my administration.”

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6 Ditto.
on other Trump campaign statements as well, his America First also embodies a kind of isolationism and trade protectionism. Specifically, during the presidential campaign, Trump spoke about cancelling trade deals like NAFTA and TPP as well as asking allies to pay more for defense in Asia and Europe to pay more for their defense. He has also spoken about the U.S. pulling out of the Paris Agreement under the United Nations Framework on Climate Change as well as the pact with Iran.

Although the new President emphasizes America First, Donald Trump does not really consider himself a “hard core isolationist.” As the so-called “CEO of America”, he is interested in getting a fair deal for America he says out of America’s agreements and commitments. Trump has said in the past, for example, “we need tougher negotiations not protectionist walls around America.” Moreover, Trump has stated rather than “turning away from the world and hoping for the best, we have to strike the right balance between idealism and practical good sense....You’ve got to know what’s doable and what isn’t. You have to know how to bargain.” Thus, Trump has said he admires Ronald Reagan, Richard Nixon and Franklin D. Roosevelt because of their deal making capacities. In addition, Trump also indicated that if he were ever to become President, he would also like to be designated at the country’s top trade negotiator. Although these views were expressed

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10 Ditto, 116.
11 Ditto, 112 & 116.
years ago when Trump was toying with the idea of a run for the U.S. Presidency, the essence of these comments also underline Trump's 2016 presidential campaign. Given Trump's faith in the art of beneficial deal making, we can expect him as President to link his foreign policy initiatives to 'transactional diplomacy.' At the same time in this globalized world, making the right deal beneficial to U.S. interests will not be the only determinant of successful U.S. foreign policy.

Trump's brand of populism brought him to the White House and will characterize his policy directions. However, President Trump will have difficulty walking back multilateral trade pacts and challenging allies to foot larger bills. And at the same time, President Trump, in his effort to make America Great again, will need to unite the U.S. behind him; avoid alienating key allies; foster the protection of human rights and remain committed to the global system. How Trump's populist tendencies play out remain to be seen. He has already appointed a controversial senior White House Counselor – Stephen Bannon, a populist and Chief of the Breitbart News Empire, who was behind Trump's successful bid for the White House. Bannon is “considered to be the champion of the alt right, anti-global movement that attracts support from white supremacists.”

Hopefully, the incoming Secretary of State and other top government officials will help temper President Trump's foreign policies and not hasten the development of the post America era.

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12 Ditto, 146.
Rebalancing U.S. Leadership

President elect Donald Trump assumes office as the world order grows increasingly complex. This year England decided to leave the EU. Terrorism and cyber attacks are flourishing in various places around the globe. While the U.S. rebalances to the Asia Pacific region, China continues to assert its power in the East and South China seas. North Korea has made a 5th nuclear test and launched various missiles in 2016. The U.S.-Russia relationship remains tense over such issues as cyber hacking the 2016 U.S. elections, Syria and the Ukraine. And the Philippines, an important U.S. ally, after insulting the U.S. President, is now leaning towards China.

There are perceptions not only in Japan and China but elsewhere in the Asia Pacific region that U.S. power is declining. For example, President Obama, who has also been called a “reluctant warrior,” has been criticized about leading from behind. Moreover, “China is expected to surpass the US in terms of nominal GDP by 2026.” Added to these perceptions, the U.S. model of democracy and image as a world leader came under attack due to the nature of the 2016 presidential campaign which included negative campaigning; claims that the democratic process was rigged; alleged foreign intervention through cyber attacks; F.B.I investigations about the improper

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handling of classified e-mails by one presidential candidate and alleged abusive or discriminatory treatment of women and minorities by another.

After the 2016 Presidential race, the Republicans now control the White House and the Republican party will continue to dominate the Congress.\textsuperscript{16} Moreover, President Trump will have the opportunity to create a conservative leaning Supreme Court by filling the present vacancy on the Court as well as others which could come up during his term. At the same time, this situation, however, does not guarantee that the new President will be able to rally all of his party members in Congress around his policies. Before winning the Presidential election, indeed many of his fellow Republicans repudiated him or stated they would not support him. Many Republicans did not consider Mr. Trump to be a true Republican nor a good representative of the party.

How will Donald Trump the candidate vs. Donald Trump the President command respect? The day after his victory, thousands came out to protest. President elect Trump will need to demonstrate that he will govern ‘of the people, for the people and by the people.’ It is from this base, he will also be able to show strong U.S. moral leadership. Besides domestic opposition to a Trump presidency, the U.S. has also increasingly experienced international challenges to or push back against U.S. leadership. If fear and lack of trust in the Trump administration persist as well as challenges to U.S.’ global leader-

\textsuperscript{16} In the 115\textsuperscript{th} U.S. Congress, the Republicans hold 52 seats out of 100 Senate seats and 241 seats out of 435 seats in the U.S. House of Representatives. “115\textsuperscript{th} United States Congress,” 

\textit{Ballotpedia}, https://ballotpedia.org/115th_United_States_Congress

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ship, how will these trends impact on the new administration’s power to balance its responses to domestic and international issues?

Balancing these issues will also influence the U.S. presence in the Asia Pacific region. Will the new administration maintain a strong U.S. presence in the Asia Pacific region as well as in the global community? Importantly, how will President Trump’s brand of populism impact on the U.S.-Japan-China triangle in the Asia Pacific region? Considering various challenges in the region, will President Trump build on the rebalance policy initiated by the Obama administration or support a kind of U.S. retrenchment?

The election of Donald Trump, an atypical candidate for U.S. President with no government service or real foreign policy experience, represents a shift from the progressive internationalism espoused by Hillary Clinton and President Obama. It also represents, if President Trump follows through on his campaign assertions, an overturning of Obama policies concerning for example, health care, trade pacts, the opening to Cuba, the pact with Iran and climate change accords. Moreover, under a Trump administration that espouses a transfer of more costs for U.S. defense to allies; closing U.S. borders to illegal immigrants; enforcing restrictive measures against Muslims, stronger anti-terrorism measures and trade protectionism, we can anticipate a large investment in transactional diplomacy, less involvement in multilateral mechanisms and more support of America First. This would satisfy some of Trump’s political base while short changing America in some cases on longer term goals for prosperity and a securer Asia Pacific region. Finally, a divided electorate, challenges to U.S. leadership as well as perceptions of a
U.S. decline all present challenges for the new President.

Although President Obama left the White House with a high support rating, there are lingering issues, such as, North Korea nuclear tests as well as missile threats; the U.S.–Russia relationship; China’s assertive actions in the East and South China Seas; ongoing Middle Eastern conflicts; traditional and non-traditional security threats including terrorism and cyber attacks. At the same time, additional measures are needed to further grow the U.S. economy, create new jobs and respond to the needs of disgruntled citizens who form a key group among Trump’s supporters. At the same time, President Trump’s lack of trust in U.S. mass media; penchant for not showing his hand; his pushing aside of bureaucrats; not playing by diplomatic rules as well as lack of political and foreign policy experience could foster obstacles for constructive U.S.-Japan-China relations in the Asia Pacific region, ‘the leading destination for U.S. exports, various key alliances and partnerships’ as well as many multi-culturally diverse communities.

The U.S.-Japan-China Triangle

In part I of this paper, I have discussed the rebalancing of U.S. leadership, President elect Trump’s populism and possible engagement in transactional diplomacy. I also discussed some perceptions concerning U.S. leadership and how this in turn will influence President Trump’s effectively carrying out his foreign policy agenda. All of these trends will in turn impact importantly on U.S.-Japan-China relations. This triangle, with no trilateral official mechanism,17 is composed of a key group of nations who represent the world’s top
three economic powers. All three powers, with different levels of interdependence and influence, have important impacts on the global economic order, as witnessed for example, by the Lehman Brothers Shock, the Japanese bubble economy and the devaluation of the renminbi. The U.S., Japan and China’s respective national interests – politically, strategically and economically-are closely connected to the Asia Pacific region.

The U.S. and China, with close to 40 years of normalized relations, are engaged with each other through many government and private mechanisms or organizations including the U.S-China Strategic and Economic Dialogue (S & ED) in the first instance and in the second U.S. China Business Council. Japan and U.S. are strongly connected by their alliance as well as a global partnership based on similar values. In 2017, China and Japan mark 45 years of normalized relations. Moreover, the U.S., Japan and China are all involved in different capacities in ASEAN and dialogue partners, APEC, the East Asia Summit, the G-20 and the Asian Development Bank (ADB). However, there are times that the U.S. and China are not involved in key networks by choice or by exclusion. The Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) presently does not include China. And the U.S. is not a member of the RCEP. China wanted to exclude U.S. at first from the East Asia Summit but eventually U.S. was admitted as a member. All three powers are involved in other key trilateral relations. For example, there are the following official trilaterals - U.S., Japan and

\[17\] Although there is no official U.S.-Japan-China trilateral relationship, there are Track 1.5 and Track 2 mechanisms like The Forum on Asia-Pacific Security (FAPS) of the National Committee on American Foreign Policy and the Pacific Forum CSIS U.S., Japan, and China Conference on Trilateral Security Cooperation.
India; U.S.; Japan and Australia and U.S. as well as South Korea, Japan and China.

The triangle is asymmetrical in terms of hard and soft power. At the same time, the triangle needs to move beyond the concepts of U.S. hegemony, the China threat and possible Japanese remilitarization to tackle common issues, such as economic stability, the aging of society, environmental degradation, terrorism, cyber attacks and maritime security. Although China is rising, the U.S. still remains the pivot in the U.S., Japan and China triangle. Moreover, both China and Japan place more weight on their relationship with the U.S. than they do with each other.

U.S.

Concerning the Asia Pacific, Secretary Hillary Clinton stated “the 21st Century will be America’s Pacific Century of unprecedented outreach and partnership in this dynamic, complex and consequential region.”18 A reflection of this emphasis was the Obama administration’s introduction in 2011 of the pivot or later so-called rebalancing policy which focused on enhancing diplomacy, security and economics in the Asia Pacific region.19

We saw the Obama administration reaching out, diplomatically, for example to Laos, Cambodia, Myanmar, Vietnam and Thailand through the Lower Mekong\textsuperscript{20} Initiative. The U.S. has also joined the East Asia Summit; signed the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia and inaugurated the U.S.-ASEAN Connect Initiative.\textsuperscript{21} In addition, the Obama administration worked with China on participation in different climate change accords including the Paris Agreement under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.

Concerning the rebalance, on the economic front, for example, the U.S. successfully concluded the United States-Korea Free Trade Agreement (KORUS-FTA).\textsuperscript{22} And the Obama administration as well as the Abe admin-

\textsuperscript{20} "The Lower Mekong Initiative (LMI) is a multi national partnership effort initiated by the United States in 2009 to promote greater cooperation in the Mekong sub-region. The effort is focused on agriculture and food security, connectivity education, energy security, environment and water, gender, health and other cross-cutting issues." United States Agency for International Development, \textit{Lower Mekong Initiative (LMI)} (Washington, DC: USAID), 1, http://www.usaid.gov/asia-regional/lower-mekong-initiative-lmi


stration were both involved in TPP negotiations and signed the agreement in 2016. The TPP agreement is a key part of the rebalance to the Asia Pacific region and Prime Minister Abe’s Abenomics. Both countries billed the TPP as way to revitalize the 1\textsuperscript{st} and 3\textsuperscript{rd} top economies. Moreover, the U.S. and Japan negotiated motor vehicle trade non-tariff measures\textsuperscript{21} which later became a part of the TPP Agreement. In spite of this movement forward on TPP, the Democratic Presidential nominee Hillary Clinton later opposed TPP as did the Republican Presidential nominee Donald Trump.

Although Japan is still working towards its ratification of TPP, U.S. ratification is also needed for the Treaty to come into force.\textsuperscript{24} However, already, one of the tasks included in Trump’s first 100 days in office plan included the filing of an intent to withdraw from TPP and replace it with the negotiation of bilateral trade deals. After hearing this, PM Abe at APEC last year stated “The TPP without the U.S. is meaningless.”\textsuperscript{25} As Trump is against this agree-


\textsuperscript{21} ‘If all TPP 12 countries have not ratified the TPP within two years of the TPP’s signing (i.e., by February 4, 2018), the TPP will come into force 60 days later if at least six of the original signatories that account for at least 85% of the combined GDP of the original signatories have ratified. If this deadline is missed, TPP can still come into force sixty days later, if the same conditions mentioned here exist. However, as the U. S. represents nearly 62% of the GDP of the bloc of TPP countries and Japan 17%, if would be very difficult for the TPP to come into force without the U.S.’ Jones Day, “TPP Ratification and Potential Expansion.” \textit{Lexology}, http://www.lexology.com/library/detail.aspx?g = 4a075f60-638c-4a38-a6c5-b6faba 04007d

ment and there was no chance of ratifying the treaty in lame duck Congress under President Obama, this turn of events has the potential to impact negatively on U.S.-Japan relations as PM Abe has already invested a lot of political capital to move TPP ahead. Moreover, the U.S., after many years of difficult negotiations among 12 member nations, could lose an important opportunity to carry out rule making regarding trade in the Asia Pacific. In addition, China now has an opportunity to take the lead through the RCEP,\textsuperscript{36} another grouping of nations for trade with less stringent standards than TPP.

Concerning security under the rebalance, the U.S. has strengthened its alliances and partnerships in the region. For example, the U.S. is also working closely with two allies-South Korea and Japan to create stronger trilateral relations for security in N.E. Asia. Recently, in line with this dynamic, the U.S. has announced it is planning with South Korea to introduce the THAAD (Terminal High Altitude Area Defense System) there given the North Korea threat. And in 2014, it signed the Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement with the Philippines. In addition, it is also investing in stronger ties with Southeast Asia and India. The Obama administration has also advocated for non-proliferation of nuclear weapons through its Nuclear Summit initiative.

\textsuperscript{36} “As the East Asia Summit (EAS) concluded in late November, regional leaders formally agreed to launch negotiations on the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP). The RCEP aims to be the largest free-trade bloc in the world, comprising all 10 ASEAN nations and the 6 other countries with which the group has free-trade agreements (FTAs)—China, India, Japan, South Korea, Australia, and New Zealand.” Hiebert Murray, “ASEAN and Partners launch Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership,” \textit{CSIS Critical Questions} (2012): par. 1, https://www.csis.org/analysis/asean-and-partners-launch-regional-comprehensive-economic-partnership

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The U.S. too is scaling up its military capabilities and strategies in the region such as “increasing the number of surface ships, making each of them lethal, investing in Virginia class-submarines, advanced undersea drones, the new B-21 long-range strike bomber, and state-of-the-art tools for cyberspace, electronic warfare and space.”

The U.S. rebalancing policy connects all sides of the U.S.-Japan-China triangle and sustains U.S. leadership in the Asia Pacific region. Given the focus of the Obama rebalance policy which also includes addressing China’s rise and showing strong U.S. commitment to the region, it is important to stress some key points about the U.S. and Japan as well as the U.S. and China relations that impact on the U.S- Japan-China relations.

Importantly, the U.S.-Japan alliance remains an important “cornerstone” in the U.S.’s security network in the Asia Pacific. The alliance continues to be strong and its importance of it has been emphasized repeatedly by the Obama administration and all of the Japanese administrations over the past eight years; namely, those of PM Taro Aso, PM Yukio Hatoyama, PM Naoto Kan, PM Shinzo Abe, PM Yoshiko Noda and now once again PM Shinzo Abe. Indeed, U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton during her first visit to the Asia Pacific region, visited Japan first before going to China to signal to the former its importance to the U.S.

Under PM Yukio Hatoyama, however, the U.S.-Japan relationship was

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tense over the transfer of the Futenma base problem. Also, PM Hatoyama initially spoke about the formation of a East Asian Community excluding the U.S. In addition, the Hatoyama administration leaned at first towards China over the U.S. The resulting drift in relationship was reversed later on during the same administration. A true test of the alliance’s interoperability then came during Japan’s 3.11 triple disaster in Northeast Japan. U.S. forces in and around Japan as well as civilian experts from the U.S. played key roles in recovery from the nuclear plants meltdown as well as the search, rescue and recovery efforts in that region.

The U.S. has welcomed Japan’s shift under the present Abe administration to allow limited collective self-defense28 and its promotion of proactive pacifism29 to expand Japan’s regional and global security contributions. Moreover, frictions between Japan and China over the Senkakus, Chinese ships’ incursions in the Japanese EEZ, China’s establishment of an ADIZ over the East China Sea and build-up of Chinese artificial embankments on alleged South China Sea territories along with aggressive North Korean actions are some of the reasons that the U.S. and Japan upgraded the 1997 Guidelines for Japan-U.S. Defense Cooperation30 in 2015. The U.S. has now recognized

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28 ‘Some of Japan’s Legislation for Peace and Security limited collective defense scenarios include “protection of weapons/other equipment of U.S. and other countries’ armed forces; internationally coordinated operations for peace and security (Multinational cooperation outside UN PKO framework), support activities (including logistics support) to armed forces of foreign countries in situations where the international community is collectively addressing for international peace and security and response to an armed attack against a foreign country resulting in threatening Japan’s survival.’ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan. Japan’s Legislation for Peace and Security Seamless Responses for Peace and Security of Japan and the International Community (Tokyo: GOJ, 2016), 7, http://www.mofa.go.jp/files/000143304.pdf
clearly as well that the protection of the Senkakus falls under the jurisdiction of the U.S.-Japan alliance. A stronger U.S.-Japan alliance is also an important part of U.S. strategic presence in the area as well as connected to both countries’ national interests.

During his presidential campaign, Donald Trump displayed a readiness to withdraw troops stationed overseas in the case of Japan and Korea, for example, if they respectively do not pay more for U.S. bases. He has also encouraged both nations to obtain nuclear weapons. These kind of pronouncements do not bode well for U.S. expanded engagement in the Asia Pacific region or reassure U.S. allies. And recently, Presidential elect Trump unprece-dently took a call from the President of Taiwan upending the established U.S. policy of recognizing officially of one China. These kind of policies could encourage a more assertive China as well as North Korea.

Although the Obama administration ‘welcomed the rise of a China that is peaceful, stable, prosperous and a responsible player in global affairs,’

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\text{\textsuperscript{31}} “Proactively Contributing to Peace” based on the principle of international cooperation. Furthermore, this entails, ‘building a comprehensive defense architecture and strengthening its system for the preventing and responding to various contingencies; strengthening the Japan-U.S. Alliance; actively promoting security cooperation with other countries and building a highly effective and integrated defense capability based on an exclusively national defense oriented policy under the Constitution and not becoming a military power that poses a threat to other countries while observing the principle of civilian control of the military and the Three Non–Nuclear Principles.’ Ministry of Defense, \textit{National Defense Program Guidelines for FY 2014 and beyond (Summary)}, 2013 (Tokyo: MOD), 2, http://www.mod.go.jp/j/approach/agenda/guideline/2014/pdf/20131217_e.pdf

tions between the U.S. and China during the Obama administration over the past eight years, spanning the presidencies of both Hu Jintao and now Xi Jinping respectively, were not always smooth. At the same time, President Xi emphasizes a new kind of major power relationship beyond conflict and confrontation with mutual respect and win-win cooperation. Although the U.S. was at first receptive to this concept, the Obama administration subsequently veered away from this emphasis.

At the same time, the Obama administration’s U.S.-China Strategic and Economic Dialogue (S & ED) with China replaced the U.S.-China Strategic Economic Dialogue (SED) and the U.S.-China Senior Dialogue established under the George W. Bush administration. Both the SED and then the S & ED allowed top level officials on both sides to relate to each other on a wide variety of economic as well as traditional and non-traditional security issues of concern. The S & ED not only further upgraded the U.S.-China partnership but also deepened bilateral cooperation on such areas as terrorism, climate change, Iran, global development and tourism. In addition, both nations continue to engage in multilateral military exercises and military to military talks. Friction, however, remains concerning, for example, China’s trade barriers; cyber security; human rights violations; heightened nationalism; arms sales to Taiwan; the Dalai Lama’s U.S. visit; Chinese actions in the South and China Seas; U.S. joint military exercises near areas of interest to China and

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32 Ditto.
lack of stronger actions against North Korea’s nuclear proliferation as well as missile launches.

Presidential elect Donald Trump has largely made aggressive statements during his 2016 presidential campaign about China concerning trade, such as its ‘raping our market,’ currency manipulation and unfair trade. Subsequently, Trump has stated that he plans to impose high tariffs on Chinese imports. Sixteen years ago, Trump also expressed negative views towards China. At that time, he criticized both the George W. Bush as well as the Bill Clinton administrations’ “constructive engagement” with China approaches. He stated:

“How is this policy working? It isn’t. China has been helping itself to top-secret American technology, spying on the American military, supplying nuclear technology to American enemies like Iran and Iraq, threatening American allies like South Korea and Taiwan, breaking one agreement after another (from arms control to copyright protection), compromising America’s political campaign laws, flooding American markets with cheap goods produced by forced labor, and pouring $80 billion a year into a world-class military machine that includes nuclear missiles aimed at America....Let’s also operate with the understanding that China doesn’t aspire to a strategic partnership. It sees us as a rival in its ambition to dominate Asia.”

33 Donald J. Trump and Dave Shiflett, The America We Deserve (Los Angeles: Renaissance, 2000), 120-121.
The Trump administration will need to go beyond his past and present rhetoric on China to create ways to work with China. As both economies are importantly linked, this kind of rhetoric could trigger a trade war or encourage displays of national power by China. In the future, the Trump administration should not overlook or overturn the Obama administration’s efforts to co-operate with China bilaterally and multilaterally. Rather these past initiatives should be used as a platform to further build up constructive U.S.-China relations. Finally, what Chinese President Xi Jinping told President Obama on the sidelines of the APEC summit in Lima, Peru last year (November 19-20, 2016) is also an important message for the incoming administration: “I hope the two sides will work together to focus on cooperation, manage our differences and make sure there is a smooth transition in the relationship and that it will continue to grow going forward.”

The President Trump’s take on the Obama’s administration’s rebalancing policy will have a great impact on U.S., Japan and China relations as well as other key relations in the region. A renewed U.S. commitment to Asia Pacific multilateral mechanisms and “strategic co-ordination” with key partners in the region including China and Japan will help to stabilize anxieties and concerns regarding future U.S. leadership in the region. Moreover, U.S. presence is still desired by key actors in the region. This presence in turn brings political, economic and security benefits. As the President goes through briefings and preparations of his advisers, Trump will need to learn more

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about the dynamics of U.S. alliances in the Asia Pacific including the delicate balance between reliance on the U.S. military and resentment towards U.S. presence on its allies’ sovereign territories. Hopefully, what he learns will temper his transactional view of U.S. commitments to alliances in the region. Also, while avoiding a combative U.S.-China relationship over trade or China’s “core issues,” such as Taiwan\(^{35}\), the Trump administration also needs to maintain its balance between a strong U.S.-Japan alliance and “a strong cooperative relation with China.”\(^{37}\)

**Japan**

Presently, Japan, the third largest economy and once the world’s top creditor, is the U.S. 4\(^{th}\) largest trading partner. Without a doubt the U.S.-Japan relationship remains one of the U.S. most important bilateral partnerships in spite of frictions and or public backlash over such matters as criminal incidents related to U.S. base personnel; the still large presence of U.S. military in Okinawa; the ongoing battle over the transfer of the Futenma base opposed by local government and local citizens; environmental degradation


\(^{36}\) Already President elect Trump has overturned the status quo by accepting a congratulatory call from the President of Taiwan in December of 2016, violating the U.S.’ official recognition of the One China policy. This has possible fallout implications for not only U.S.-China relations but also for Japan-China relations as well as Taiwan’s relations with all three powers.

\(^{37}\) Donald J. Trump and Dave Shiflett, *The America We Deserve* (Los Angeles: Renaissance, 2000), 121-123.
and noise pollution. At the same time, both nations share similar democratic values, economic interests, an over 60 year old alliance and a global partnership. As developed nations, the U.S. and Japan are also facing similar challenges – large national debt, care of an aging society, a slow growth rate and income inequality.

Presently, Japan under Prime Minister Abe is trying to restore Japan’s economic health through Abenomics. Abenomics, however, has drawn mixed reviews and success. Fiscal restructuring, job creation, womenomics, for example, have not really taken off and now TPP is facing a difficult impasse with the U.S.’ withdrawal. At the same time, the Prime Minister is also looking forward to the Tokyo Olympics in 2020 to contribute to the recovery of the Japanese economy. A stronger Japanese economy will also help to keep a healthy balance among Japan, U.S. and China.

While working towards Japan’s economic recovery since the end of its bubble economy, Japan has continued to build up its defense capacity. Moreover, PM Abe’s administration is continuing that trend with his proactive pacifism, for example, by fostering an increase in various defense agreements not only in the Asia Pacific but also with European nations; transferring of defense technology; investing in the capacity building of Southeast Asian countries; supporting the passage of legislation or signing of agreements like the

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38 “Abenomics is the name given to a suite of measures introduced by Japanese prime minister Shinzo Abe after his December 2012 re-election to the post he last held in 2007. His aim was to revive the sluggish economy with “three arrows”: a massive fiscal stimulus, more aggressive monetary easing from the Bank of Japan, and structural reforms to boost Japan’s competitiveness.” Financial Times, ft.com/lexicon. http://lexicon.ft.com/Term?term=abenomics
Legislation for Peace and Security⁴⁰ in the former case and the signing of an updated logistics pact-Acquisition and Cross-Servicing Agreement (ACSA) (September 26, 2016) with the U.S. in the latter case as well as expanding the SDF presence in southern part of the country to address China’s assertiveness in the South China Sea.

This proactive pacifism while emphasizing the importance of the U.S.-Japan alliance also recognizes that growing threats in the Asia Pacific region can not be solved solely by the U.S.-Japan alliance. Thus, Japan continues to build up other networks in the region through bilateral, trilateral and multi-lateral agreements and mechanisms. Japan is involved, for example, in the U. S. Japan and South Korea trilateral relationship. Recently, the relationship has been strengthened by Japan and Korea’s agreement in December of 2015 concerning the comfort women issue and by the two nations signing of a General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA)⁴¹.

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⁴⁰ ‘This refers to developed countries’ efforts to support developing countries build their own coping capacity to handle non-traditional security issues such as humanitarian assistance/disaster relief (HA/DR) and anti-piracy activities through continued human resource development, technical and other support. In turn this kind of initiative promotes actively and proactively regional stability. Japan is primarily carrying this out in Southeast Asia.’ Ministry of Defense. About “Capacity Building Assistance” (Tokyo: MOD), 1, http://www.mod.go.jp/e/d_act/exc/cap_build.htm/

⁴¹ “This legislation will enable seamless responses to any situations to secure the lives and peaceful livelihood of the Japanese people. Japan will be able to contribute more pro actively to the peace and stability of the international community under the policy of “Proactive Contribution to Peace” based on the principle of international cooperation. ... The legislation will enhance the deterrence of the Japan-U. S. Alliance for the peace and Stability in the Asia Pacific region. It will also help to deepen trust and cooperative relations with other partners both within/ outside the region. Government of Japan, Legislation for Peace and Security, Tokyo: GOJ, 2016, 1, http://www.mofa.go.jp/files/000143304.pdf
All of these changes work towards building up the capacity of the Self Defense Forces in the event of an contingency that impacts on Japan’s national interests or impinges on the rights and liberties of Japanese citizens. They also allow Japan to work with other nations per limited collective self-defense scenarios. Moreover, these shifts not only help to bolster Japan’s roles in the alliance but also to remind others in the region Japan is an important actor for the region and beyond.

Recently, PM Abe, in his call to President elect Trump soon after the latter’s election victory, emphasized that a strong U.S.-Japanese alliance is linked to the peace and stability in the Asia Pacific region. In addition, PM Abe met with President elect Trump at Trump Towers to further emphasize this connection. Finally, PM Abe’s Pearl Harbor visit in December of 2016 was yet another way to signal to the incoming Trump administration Japan’s importance as an ally. Indeed, Japan is strongly supporting the rebalance not only through the alliance but also through various multilateral mechanisms.

In the future, how much further will the nationalist Abe administration build up Japan’s hard and soft power respectively? His brand of nationalism, which includes historical revisionism, colors his reframing of Japan’s security agenda.⁴² Although PM Abe’s nationalism is favorable towards the U.S.-Japan

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⁴² GSOMIA=General Security of Military Information Agreement; Japan and South Korea finally signed this agreement on November 23, 2016 “to share sensitive information on the threat posed by North Korea’s missile and nuclear activities.” Reuters, “South Korea, Japan agree intelligence-sharing on North Korea threat,” November 23, 2016, par. 1, http://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-southkorea-japan-military-idUKKB13106M

(27)
alliance, it is more antagonistic towards China. Presently, however, the Japan and China relationship, based initially on a joint communique (1972) and then a Treaty of Peace and Friendship (1978)\footnote{Specifically, these kinds of nationalists or revisionists `are the new conservative mainstream who are less apologetic about the past and more willing to pander to those who feel nostalgic about it. They also stress the importance of the U.S alliance and see China as a potential threat. The revisionists want Japan and the U.S. to build a more equal security relationship and do not lean towards Japan’s independence from the U.S. They are also comfortable with the idea that a Japanese military might have to use force as a means of settling international disputes. Finally, they support constitutional revision as well as incremental improvement of Japan’s military.’ Richard J. Samuels, Securing Japan (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2007), 124-132.}, is bolstered by both nations investment in the global and regional order dominated by the U.S. Japan also avoids a Japan threat by aligning itself presently with the U.S., carrying out confidence building measures as well as actively promoting proactive pacifism.

Along with these trends, China is Japan’s strategic rival and economic competitor in the region. China is also Japan’s top trade partner and Japan is China’s 2\textsuperscript{nd} largest trade partner after the U.S. In addition, China is Japan’s 3\textsuperscript{rd} largest FDI market. Moreover, Japan vies with China for influence in the Asia Pacific region. This rivalry is played out for example, in the conclusion of separate FTAs with ASEAN; the formation of the EAS; involvement in the G-20 as well as investments in the Mekong region. Both nations, for example, with conflicting stories of history; up and down frictions over past transgressions; trade disputes; disagreements over the Senkaku islands; in-

cursions in the Japanese EEZ, at times, have an ambivalent and politically cold relationship. This was clearly evidenced during PM Junichiro Koizumi’s administration (2001-2006). Towards the end of that administration and the beginning of the first PM Shinzo Abe administration (2006-2007), a rapprochement between the two powers gradually unfolded, culminating in the visit of President Hu Jintao to Japan in 2008. Importantly, at that time, Japan and China agreed to a “Mutually Beneficial Relationship based on Common Strategic Interests.”

In spite of this positive step forward, China stepped up its aggressive actions under President Hu Jintao over the Senkakus or the Diaoyutai Islands as they are called by China. An incursion by Chinese ships in the Japanese EEZ, led to the Japanese arresting the captain of the ship for a few days before releasing him. The Chinese retaliated by stopping temporarily exports of rare earths to Japan. The Japanese purchase of two Senkaku islands from private owners in 2012 under PM Noda’s Administration also triggered outrage and economic backlash in China. In November of 2013, China controversially declared an East China Sea Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ). And since 2014, China started to strategically create man made islands in the South China Sea.

After another period of ups and downs including the devaluation of the

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reminibi, President Xi and PM Abe, who have not met in 17 months, held a Japan-China summit on the sidelines of the G-20 Summit in September 4-5, 2016 in Hangzhou, China. Although new ground was not really covered since the leaders last meetings in 2014 and 2015, Abe continued to stress five areas of cooperation and common challenges. The leaders also agreed as they did last time that a hotline mechanism is needed to prevent accidental collisions between the two powers. Also, President Xi emphasized the need for ‘caution in words and deeds’ vs. PM Abe’s emphasis on “negotiation not force” concerning the Senkakus dispute.\textsuperscript{45}

While reconciliation between Japan and China ‘remains slow and a lack of mutual trust’ underlines the relationship, at least there are still areas on which they can work together like protection of the environment, maritime cooperation, cyber security, terror, trade and disaster.\textsuperscript{46}

China

 Whereas President elect Hillary Clinton “was not seen as someone always favorable to China,” Donald Trump was viewed as “unpredictable.” In any event, President Xi, during his telephone call to the President elect,


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stated “cooperation was the only choice for relations between the world’s two largest economies.” Presently, China sees that America’s power is in decline due to its economy and management of its foreign policy. At the same time, a Chinese scholar has stated that China is not yet a great leader and that it still needs U.S. presence in the region to keep growing its economic potential. One U.S. scholar has also stated that China is still “a partial power.”

In any event, China is rising. However, what kind of role will China play in the future is not clear. What is clear is that throughout the two terms of the Obama administration, China continued to hit very important milestones. In 2010, it surpassed Japan as the second largest economy and also became the largest auto market. And in 2013, China surpassed the U.S. as the largest trading nation. And in 2015, China passed Canada to become the U.S. number one trading partner in goods. And although the U.S. still remains the prime power and a principal guarantor of peace in the Asia Pacific region, China’s rise reflects a new normal in the region. China, for example, is already expanding its economic influence in the region through different mechanisms like the RCEP, The Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), One Belt,

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One Road (OBOR)\textsuperscript{53}, the G-20 and the China-Korea FTA.

At the same time, China is always concerned by strategies carried out to contain China. Some Chinese scholars view the U.S.-Japan alliance as well as the Obama administration’s rebalance as “classical power politics” or as “a peaceful containment strategy.”\textsuperscript{54} Other Chinese scholars emphasize in spite of these trends, the U.S. would not “seek a direct confrontation with China.” At the same time, President Xi also aims for cooperation. Already before his visit to the U.S. in 2015, he stated importantly “we welcome a constructive role by the U.S. promoting peace, stability and prosperity in the region. We also have hope that the U.S. will respect and accommodate the major interests and legitimate concerns of the Asia Pacific countries.” Concurrently, China’s foreign minister has stated the “Pacific Ocean is vast enough to accommodate co-existence and cooperation between the two powers of China and the U.S.”\textsuperscript{55}.

\textsuperscript{52} The Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank was set up by the PRC. The bank “will focus on the development of infrastructure and other productive sectors in Asia, including energy and power, transportation and telecommunications, rural infrastructure and agriculture development, water supply and sanitation, environmental protection, urban development and logistics, etc.” AIIB, \textit{What is AIIB} (Beijing: AIIB, 2014-2015), 1, http://euweb.aiib.org/index.php?m =app_web&a=index&a=about_us&catid=67

\textsuperscript{53} OBOR=“One Belt, One Road” or the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road initiatives proposed in 2013 “refers to a trade and infrastructure network connecting Asia with Europe and Africa along with the ancient trades routes.” \textit{China Daily.com.cn}, “Vice Premier urges efforts to promote Belt and Road Initiatives,” September 12, 2016, par. 4, http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/business/2016-09/13/content_26787155.htm


Beyond these perceptions, while the Trump emphasizes “Make America Great Again,” President Xi talks about the Chinese Dream. President Xi also speaks about the U.S. and China ‘working together to build a new model of a major country relationship based on mutual respect and win-win cooperation for the benefit of the Chinese and American peoples, and people elsewhere in the world.” At the same time, China advocates a New Security Concept which promotes Asians for security in Asia. Against this backdrop, the U.S. will need to continue to find productive ways to cooperate with China. If the U.S. resorts to increased protectionism in a global economy, it will end up damaging its own economy as well. Trump’s aggressive China stance plays to well his domestic audience. However, the new President needs to think about how to build on previous improvements in the U.S.-China relationship to foster future constructive U.S. China relations including win-win trade and investment opportunities. One Chinese scholar points out the U.S. should think about three positive Cs—“coordination, cooperation and compromise” and avoid three negative Cs—“competition, conflict and confrontation” with China.  

Chinese conglomerate Alibaba CEO Jack Ma stated in a CNN interview, if Donald Trump doesn’t work with China, it is going to be a disaster.”

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56 “During his meeting with President Obama at Sunnylands in early June 2013, President Xi extended the grand vision of the “Chinese Dream” from the rejuvenation of the Chinese nation and accomplishment of the vast public’s happiness” to “the realisation of the common dreams for peace and prosperity through win–win cooperation with other nations of the world,” Zhixin Zhang, “China’s International Strategy and its Implications for Southeast Asia, "Southeast Asian Affairs (2016): 56-57.

57 Ditto.
further advised that the President elect ‘should focus on trade, improve globalization and improve understanding the relationship between the U.S. and China to foster job creation, entrepreneurship and small business.’ Chinese state media has warned the U.S. president-elect against isolationism and interventionism, calling instead for the United States to actively work with China to maintain the international status quo.” This advice should not be ignored but taken seriously as a means to promote a constructive balance in the U.S.- Japan-China triangle.

Besides it economic rise, China has also invested in the expansion, restructuring and modernizing of its forces. Although China’s military power has yet to overtake that of the U.S., it can still pose a threat, for example, through its asymmetrical strategies including anti-access/anti-denial practices, cyber hacking as well as territorial expansion and or buildup of military installations in the East and South China Seas.

China continues to build up its military hard power that benefits a great power, while aiming to protect its core interests – “maintaining its political system, defending its sovereignty claims, territorial integrity and economic development.” To avoid the perception of threat, China like the U.S. and Ja-

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\[^{50}\] Ditto.

Japan is also involved in not only bilateral but also multilateral relations and or mechanisms related to security. China too is engaged in confidence building measures. Specifically, for example, it has joined the Treaty of Amity & Cooperation in Asia and ASEAN-ARF, created FTAs, and engages in military diplomacy. At the same time, it is also creating its own pockets of influence, for example, through The Shanghai Organization, and Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia (CICA).

Historical differences between the two top Asian powers-China and Japan-have not been completely resolved. Nationalism on both sides including politically divisive statements made by Japanese politicians about Japan’s actions in China during World War II; visits to the Yasukuni shrine by government officials; trade frictions; Japanese textbooks framing of Japanese involvement in China and territorial disputes continue to foster distrust between Japan and China. Adding to this distrust is Japan’s relations with Taiwan. Japan like the U.S. recognizes mainland China as the one China. At the same time, both Japan and the U.S. still maintain unofficial but good relations with Taiwan. Concurrently, China is vigilant over close Japan-Taiwan relations as well as U.S.- Taiwan relations which could in anyway overturn the status quo between Taiwan and China.

At the G-20 meeting in September, President Xi stated, 'the two nations should propel their relations back on the track of normal development as soon as possible.' Along with this line of thinking, it will also be in the U.S.

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national interest to preserve economic prosperity and stability in the Asia Pacific by fostering not only good bilateral relations between China and Japan, U.S. and China and U.S. and Japan but also stronger trilateral relations.

If the Trump presidency becomes combative towards China over trade or its core interests such as Taiwan, this will create another negative impact on not only the U.S.-Japan-China triangle but also strain the U.S.-Japan relationship as well as the Japan-China relationship. This kind of conflict could encourage China to become more aggressive in the protection of its core interests. These kinds of situations could further fuel nationalistic fires in either the U.S., Japan and or China. It could also encourage China to extend even further its territorial claims and or expand its present networks in the region.

Future Challenges

Entrepreneur Donald Trump assumes the U.S. presidency at time when a U.S. firm commitment to the Asia Pacific region is still very much needed. President George W. Bush left a legacy of two Middle Eastern wars and an economy reeling from the Lehman Brothers Shock. Subsequently, President Barack Obama made it one of his key foreign policies to rebalance U.S. diplomatic, economic and security policies in the Asia Pacific region in order to protect U.S. interests, contribute to regional prosperity and security as well

as contend with the rise of China. At the same time, one of the key trilateral grouping of powers in the area – U.S., Japan and China – has a great impact on regional trends. It is clear that various threats in the region – North Korea’s missiles and nuclear weapon development; maritime disputes, territorial claims, environmental degradation, trade conflicts, natural disasters and so on – require the cooperation and contributions of all three top economic powers towards peaceful solutions to these problems.

Alternatively President elect Trump’s brand of populism fosters isolationism and trade protectionism. It is unclear how much the Trump administration will roll back President Obama’s rebalance policy in the region. As President, Trump has now repudiated the long negotiated TPP agreement. TPP would have lent the U.S. an influential tool in trade rule-making as well as increased gains in goods and service trade in a very economically strategic area. Presidential nominee Trump’s statements which emphasized the paying more for defense by America’s allies like Japan and South Korea did not reflect careful study of the alliances’ sensibilities and already important financial contributions. All of these directions in turn impact on the balance of the U.S.-Japan-China triangle.

Not only Japan and China are looking at America’s new leadership, other nations in the Asia Pacific region are doing so as well. It is important for the U.S. to signal quickly that the new President is dealing from a position of strength which includes a united America. Moreover, the U.S. must not retreat from the global system. Trump himself in his book The America We Deserve recognized that if America retreats, when it returns the problems
will be worse than before.\(^6\)

As the world moves away from a unipolar world, a strong American presence in the Asia Pacific region including balanced U.S.-Japan-China relations is very important. As the new president, who has no political, foreign policy or military experience, comes into the White House, he will have to handle conflicts impacting the U.S.-Japan-China triangle as well as other problems outside the triangle, such as the Israel-Palestine impasse, the North Korea nuclear proliferation and missile development, the Syrian crisis, U.S.-Russian relations, ongoing U.S. military involvement in Afghanistan and Iraq and terrorism.

Many nations including Japan and China feel that America is in decline. Trump’s slogan is to Make America Great Again. While Trump reorganizes America, he will also need to have clear foreign policies including how to strategically handle U.S.-Japan-China trilateral relations. It is not in the interest of the U.S. to have a combative relationship with China over trade, allow the U.S.-Japan alliance to drift nor encourage allies like Japan and South Korea to acquire nuclear weapons. Moreover, building on the Obama rebalance policy including already negotiated trade agreements will contribute to the rebuilding of the U.S. economy. Depending too much on transactional diplomacy could end up harming U.S. interests more than benefiting them. The incoming Secretary of State and other top government officials will also need to temper President Trump’s populism, helping to create a viable Trump Doc-

trine which does not create frictions inside the U.S.-Japan China triangle or precipitate a post American era.
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