

**What will/should Trump's Asia policy look like?** By Ralph A. Cossa

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Like most American Asia-watchers, I have no clue what the basic tenants of the incoming Trump administration's Asia policy will be. I have learned from experience to discount at least half of what is said during presidential campaigns: Reagan was going to recognize Taiwan; Carter was going to withdraw US troops from the Korean Peninsula; etc., etc. The challenge is knowing which half not to believe.

While I don't know what Trump's Asia policy will be, I have a pretty good idea what it SHOULD be, so allow me to offer some unsolicited advice.

*The pivot is dead, long live the pivot.* The "pivot" or "rebalance" toward Asia is an Obama slogan which will leave with him – it likely would have even if Clinton was elected – but America's focus on Asia as a national security priority has been a bipartisan constant since the end of the Cold War and the centrality of the US alliance system in Asia (with Australia, Japan, Korea, the Philippines, and Thailand) – as in Europe (NATO) – has likewise been a bipartisan constant since the 1950s. The going in assumption seems to be that a Trump administration is less committed to maintaining the alliance system as a vital component of America's security (as well as the security of our allies). If he truly believes this, he needs to say so and address the alternatives and consequences. What he SHOULD do is to reaffirm the centrality of both Asia and the US alliance system to America's continuing commitment to sustaining peace and security in Asia and beyond. George H.W. Bush and Bill Clinton did this by producing overarching East Asia Strategy Reports; a new one is sorely needed.

*Nuclear nonproliferation must remain a goal.* Another bipartisan constant in US foreign policy has been America's firm commitment to nuclear nonproliferation. The going-in assumption is that a Trump administration does not discourage – perhaps even encourages – allies like Japan and Korea to go nuclear. Again, if he truly believes the world is a safer place and US interests are best served by having more nuclear weapons states in Asia, he needs to say so. What he SHOULD say is that America's commitment to nonproliferation remains strong and our security umbrella – nuclear and conventional – over our friends and allies remains firm. The US military is not a mercenary force available to the highest bidder; it is a partner in assuring peace and stability with those who share America's values and long-term security objectives. Current Japanese and Korean host nation support needs to be recognized and appreciated, not demeaned.

*Dialogue with denuclearization remains the goal on the Korean Peninsula.* At one point, candidate Trump said he was open to discussions with North Korean leader Kim Jong-Un. Obama was equally committed to "extending a hand to those who would unclench their fist," as you may recall. Dialogue with Pyongyang is solely needed, but Trump should make it clear that denuclearization must remain on the table if relations are to ever improve between Pyongyang and Washington and that the road to Washington continues to run through Seoul. South Koreans are understandably nervous (especially during this period of internal political turmoil); President-elect Trump needs to reassure our ROK allies and disabuse the DPRK of any illusions regarding Washington's views toward Korean Peninsula denuclearization.

*Personalities also matter.* Almost as important as having the right policies is having the right personalities to explain and implement them. Who President-elect Trump selects as his secretary of State will send a clear and important message to both our friends and allies and potential adversaries. Several names have already appeared in the press. Most qualified among them is Sen. Bob Corker (R-Tenn), chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. While Mr. Trump is clearly indebted to former House Speaker Newt Gingrich, his strength is more on domestic issues, not foreign policy. Other, more hardline candidates have also been suggested. Such a choice would send a strong signal that America's bipartisan history of constructive engagement with China is being replaced by an unyielding containment approach. If this is the signal Trump wants to send – and it SHOULD NOT be – it is important to think through the consequences before making such an ideological choice. Alternatively, picking someone like former World Bank president and former deputy secretary of state Bob Zoellick, who coined the phrase "responsible stakeholder," would signal the desire for a continued constructive relationship with China, as long as Beijing in fact acts responsibly.

I would also suggest that naming an old Asia hand like former Deputy Secretary of State Rich Armitage as Ambassador to Japan would do wonders as far as reassuring this vital US ally, while also signaling a desire to heal the deep fissures within the Republican establishment. The Republican Party has a deep bench of Asia security specialists, most of whom were either silent about a Trump presidency or expressed concern about its implications. They and President-elect Trump both have a moral responsibility to put the good of the nation first. Without the involvement of these seasoned veterans, it will be difficult to craft and implement a sound American foreign policy, or to respond effectively to the challenges that will inevitably come.

*Reaffirm ASEAN centrality and focus on reassuring Southeast Asian friends and partners.* Washington's

commitment to the Association of Southeast Asian Nations as an institution goes all the way back to its beginning in 1967. Its enhanced partnership with ASEAN began with George W. Bush and was continued and strengthened by President Obama. Fortunately, Southeast Asia has not been an issue in the recent presidential campaign; as a result, reaffirming America's commitment to ASEAN and to ASEAN's centrality in promoting constructive multilateral security cooperation should be easy (but should not be overlooked).

Relations with the individual ASEAN members is potentially more contentious. One of the Obama administration's biggest successes in Asia has been its constructive engagement with Myanmar; this needs to be recognized and sustained. The Trump administration also needs to express its sympathies to the Thai people for the loss of their beloved king and assure the current government that it will be patient but nonetheless committed to the return of full democracy to our long-standing Thai ally. Trickier yet will be dealing with the Philippines under President Duterte (often described as the Trump of Southeast Asia). Given their respective temperaments, it would be easy for the two to get off on the wrong foot and sustain and magnify the damage that several of Duterte's pronouncements have already inflicted. Trump needs to commend Duterte for persuading Beijing to honor (at least temporarily) the findings of the Hague Tribunal as far as Philippine fishing rights in its own waters are concerned, and expressed sympathy toward Duterte's stated goal of eradicating the Philippines drug problem, even while expressing America's commitment to due process and the rule of law, especially given the (hopefully misguided) concerns of many regarding Trump's own commitment to these principles.

*Reassure countries like Australia and India of their vital role in promoting East Asia security.* America's security ties with Australia are long and deep. With India, they have been the product of hard work by at least the last two administrations. These relationships need to be constantly reaffirmed, not as checks against China, but as vital links in promoting East Asia peace and stability.

*Fix TPP, don't scrap it.* If the Congress were finally prepared to put the economic and strategic interests of the US above partisan politics, it would pass TPP during the upcoming lame duck session. The odds of this happening, however, appear slim, even though Democrats in particular should realize that no agreement or a new Republican-negotiated one is more likely to disregard their concerns than the current hard-fought agreement. If Mr. Trump really plans to scrap the current agreement and start all over, rather than agreeing to "fix it" – the approach Obama took after campaigning against KORUS (negotiated by George W. Bush) and that Bill Clinton took after condemning NAFTA (negotiated by George H.W. Bush) – it will be seen, rightly or wrongly, as a sign that the US is abandoning its commitment to free trade; this will have important economic and security implications.

*Avoid a trade war with China.* There is no question that the US should and must hold China accountable when it comes to honoring its international trade commitments. The

use of existing World Trade Organization mechanisms to settle such disputes remains preferable to the initiation of a bilateral trade war which both would inevitably lose. It's also useful to remember that taking a firm stand with China (and Russia for that matter) is a lot easier when one's alliance network is credible and secure.

America's commitment to Asia is not new. We had a presence in Asia even before we had a west coast and the region continues to grow in importance to the US, politically, economically, and strategically, with every passing year. In his victory address, President-elect Trump said "it's time for America to bind the wounds of division." US policy toward Asia, including its commitment to its allies, has always been bipartisan and must remain so. He also said "we will get along with all other nations willing to get along with us." To make this possible, clarity regarding the new administration's policy toward Asia is critical and is needed now.

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