

## **At Risk: America's Strategic Leadership in Asia**

By Desaix Anderson

Two of Donald Trump's foreign policy pronouncements during his campaign – his cavalier comments about American alliances in Europe and Asia, and his Asia-Pacific economic strategy – are cause for deep concern.

The President-elect calls NATO “obsolete,” questions the validity of the NATO alliance to the Baltics, praises the Brexit crack in European Unity, exhibits an alarming infatuation with Russia, ignoring subversion in the Ukraine and intrusion in U.S. elections. Trump's views on NATO, and his casual suggestion that Japan and South Korea should consider building nuclear weapons, questions the U.S.' commitment to alliances and principles that have promoted post-World War II peace and prosperity. Trump's cabinet nominees are questionably credible.

In Asia, where I worked as a diplomat for forty years, Trump's phone calls and tweets have shaken our stable relations with China, our bedrock alliances with Japan and South Korea, and is a matter of deep concern to all our friends in Asia. The challenges to our economic health and national security posed by a rising China are real, but we cannot manage our complex relationship with Beijing as transitory commercial transactions. We need a sustainable strategy, rooted in economic reality. And we need partners.

Opening markets for U.S. exports is a good place to start. Some two million jobs were lost in the nineties, coinciding with China's joining the World Trade Organization. Workers in the industrial upper mid-West suffered greatly. But as Brookings Institution scholar Mireya Solis, as other serious economists, has found, “the predominant force behind losses in manufacturing employment has been technological change (85 percent), not international trade.”

Sadly, during the campaign, both Trump and Clinton wrongly attributed sectoral job losses to trade agreements like NAFTA, and both opposed the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP). TPP actually improves upon all previous trade agreements by including enforceable provisions on labor rights and preserving the environment. TPP also includes the strongest provisions ever negotiated to protect U.S.-origin intellectual property. TPP would bind twelve nations representing \$28 trillion of economic output, roughly 40 percent of global G.D.P. and one-third of world trade, to open their markets and adhere to high standards. This would truly level the playing field for U.S. workers and companies.

The biggest loser if Washington abandons TPP will likely be the United States worker, especially those engaged in agriculture or automobile manufacturing. China would be the biggest winner. Seeing a possible U.S. retreat from East Asia, Thailand, Cambodia, and the Philippines have already started moving closer to Beijing. If we reject TPP, others, including TPP partners Japan, Vietnam, Malaysia, Singapore, Australia and New Zealand, will likely choose to join the Chinese-led alternative Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP). RCEP excludes the United States, and does not include the safeguards on labor rights, food safety, the environment, government procurement in TPP. Our TPP partners are dismayed. Vietnam,

particularly, feels betrayed, since it has pinned its fundamental reform and strategic hopes on links to the U.S. via TPP.

By contrast, saving TPP, or improving it, would give the U.S. new leverage to use with China. Beijing would come under pressure to allow independent labor unions and protect the health of its workforce. Economic competition fostered by TPP would provide a more effective response to unfair trade practices than imposing a 45% tariff on Chinese goods. Such a tariff would only initiate a trade war neither country can win. A Trump tariff would hit the American poor and middle class the hardest, raising prices on staple goods like clothing and consumer electronics, and disrupt the supply chains of American companies. The impact on our East Asian allies would undermine the prosperity that has been fundamental to regional stability, and, in effect, turn Asia over to China. This would be a phenomenal strategic mistake for the United States

Rather than protectionist measures, we should embrace globalization, and deal with it - by strictly enforcing trade agreements, encouraging small scale enterprise development, retraining workers, expanding vocational schools, strengthening our public education system, and repairing our crumbling infrastructure. We can compete through strength, not weakness.

Our next President should reconfirm immediately and unequivocally America's commitment to our alliance partners and our mutual obligations. He should pledge joint work to integrate the global economy, including passing TPP, rather than retreat behind walls. That would be the best way to keep America great, preserve our values, and keep faith with our allies. To fail to do so will launch America on a steep decline in our global strategic stature and imperil America's leadership.

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