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Revisionism, Populism or Nationalism?:
The Political Currents that Shape the
U.S.-Japan Alliance
(Summary)

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Dr. Sheila A. Smith, Senior Fellow for Japan Studies, The Council on Foreign Relations: I will talk today first about the election in the United States and the new administration. It is much too early to know decisively what the Trump administration will prioritize or how they will go about doing it. There are many questions being asked now about who will oversee what in the new administration that I cannot yet answer.

The US Election

The Electoral College outcome was clear at about 3:30 in the morning on the day after the election. It was a clear Electoral College victory for Donald Trump; there was no doubt about it.

The election came down to three states. There was a huge get out the vote movement in Pennsylvania. Everybody knew that was going to be this election's swing state. What nobody really understood was that Michigan and Wisconsin were also going to be in play. These are the three states that mattered in the end.

This election was interesting in that both the Trump campaign and the Clinton campaign were focused on the same states. One side made their case better than the other. Clinton didn't campaign in Wisconsin, and she should have. She didn't really address Michigan in time, and she should have.

In every campaign, there's a calculation of how you are going to get the Electoral College, and that calculation is different every time. Different states may be important in 2020 for different reasons.

Compared to Barack Obama in 2012 and 2008, and Bill Clinton in 1996 and 1992, Trump's victory was not as big as it ought to have been. This election is more comparable to the George Bush vs. John Kerry election in 2004.

Why did Clinton lose? To answer that question, it is helpful to consider the 2008 and 2012 elections. In 2008, there was large turnout among Democrats for Barack Obama, and not as much turnout among Republicans. In 2012, there was less turn out among Democrats, because Obama was an incumbent President. This year, the Democrats didn't turn up for Clinton. Republican turnout was lower than the previous two elections, but still high enough for Trump to win.

Many people in the United States are questioning what the outcome would have been if Bernie Sanders had been the Democratic candidate, especially given the issues of trade

and the populist feel of this election. In counties where Sanders beat Clinton, 6.8 million people did not come out to vote. In counties where Clinton won the primary, 4 million people did not come out to vote. I think what we saw at the end of the election was the air run out of the bubble in her campaign. Despite all the media commentary, Democrats didn't vote.

The Issue of Free Trade during and after the Election

It is commonly said that foreign issues don't matter that much in US elections, but that was not the case this time. There was a lot of discussion on foreign policy. The entire election was dominated by issues of trade and the global economy, and who benefits from it.

Both candidates hardened their positions on the TPP, for similar reasons. I was quite shocked when Hillary Clinton came out against the TPP, but her campaign read the mood of the country and decided that she couldn't win on a free trade platform. She initially announced a fairly light statement, which was, "As of today, I am not in favor of what I have learned about it. I don't believe it's going to meet the high bar I have set." What that means is that the agreement negotiated between the 12 countries was not as good as she would have wanted, which is not an anti-TPP stance, but by the time of the general election, she was much more definitive in her opposition.

Donald Trump initially said, "The TPP is a horrible deal. It is a deal that is going to lead to nothing but trouble. It's a deal that was designed for China to come in, as they always do, through the back door, and totally take advantage of everyone." In the beginning the "bad guy" was China. By the time of the general election, he was saying, "The Trans-Pacific Partnership is another disaster, done and pushed by special interests who want to rape our country." The "bad guy" then was no longer China; it was American corporations and special interests. He used it to tell his audience that he was not part of the corporate elite, and that he would destroy the TPP for them.

There was a populist turn to the issue of free trade by both candidates throughout the election. On the other hand, polling data suggests that the US public is not as against trade as the candidates ended up being.

Popular Opinion on Foreign Trade in the United States

In March 2016, new data was released from a poll done asking, "Have the free trade agreements between the United States and other countries been good for America or not?" Among people who initially believed in 2009 that free trade was a good thing,

there was a dip in 2011. Opinions went up and then came back down in 2016. Nevertheless, about 50% of the public still thinks free trade is good. Another 39% don't like it.

Trump supporters (67%) view free trade as a bad thing. 53% of Republicans view it negatively. For Democrats, it's the opposite. 38% view free trade as good. We are seeing a switch to Republican-leaning voters being increasingly antitrade and Democrats being increasingly supportive of trade, not the way we traditionally understand the trade vote in the United States.

In the primaries, Trump supporters were much more anti-free trade than Kasich or Cruz supporters, and Sanders voters were more skeptical of free trade than Clinton supporters.

It is interesting to consider the gulf between scholars and the public on this issue. Among international relations scholars, 86% think global engagement is good for the United States. The public does not agree. Either the scholars have been ineffective at persuading the public, or the public doesn't feel the scholars are right. There is a clear difference between the opinions of the informed elites and the public.

Gallup did another poll looking at opinions around trade since 1992. Opinions shift up and down over time; there is no straight trend. The dips in the opinion of the public are clearly related to the performance of the US economy and US vulnerability at these times.

We are in a moment where more Americans are thinking that foreign trade is bad for the country, but that doesn't mean opinions are not going to change over time.

An important issue for understanding the situation right now is what has happened to Democrats and Republicans over time. Since 2011, opinions on trade have fallen among Republicans, and then flattened out slightly. The Democrats show great change. Democratic opinions drop dramatically from 2005, but then jump back up.

Popular Opinion on Alliances in the United States

Trump has fairly strong positions on US alliances. What does the US public think? The Chicago Council did a poll on this. That poll asked, "How effective do you think each of these things are to achieving American goals? Maintaining US military superiority; maintaining existing alliances; building new alliances with other countries;

strengthening the United Nations; and signing international agreements.” The poll found that most Americans believe that maintaining US military superiority is the best way of achieving American foreign policy goals, but you may be happy to see that second is maintaining existing alliances. The least popular selection was signing international agreements. That said, 71% still believe that international agreements are a good thing. This is heartening because even if Donald Trump is saying things about alliances, his supporters are not actually wanting those alliances to be over or wanting American commitments to be vanish.

If we add up the numbers for Trump supporters, 88% think that military superiority is the best way of protecting US goals, but 84% believe that existing alliances are good for the United States. I don't think there is a lot of public support in the United States even among the Trump supporters for abrogating treaties or ending the alliances that we already have.

On the other hand, when polled, people in the United States also responded that European alliances are more important than Asian ones. This has been the case since 2010. It may be that Asia began to look more dangerous at that time.

Trump's Position on Japan

Trump made some distressing statements about Japan on the campaign trail. The most distressing one was that Japan should deal with North Korea by itself, and it should have nuclear weapons. He said that in the *New York Times* in March 2015.

He has since tweeted that he never said anything like that at all. “I never said that. That's made up,” but it is in print. He did say it. Clearly, he didn't mean it. That is not something that was said with a lot of deliberation. I don't think anything will come of it.

Attention will be focused on the issue of reciprocity. In March 2015, Trump said, “...if we're attacked, they do not have to come to our defense, if they are attacked, we have to come totally to their defense and that's a problem.”

In fact, the only time Article 5 Protections have been invoked in the NATO Alliance was when the Europeans came to help America after 9/11. We have never had to send our military to defend NATO, Japan, or South Korea. Nevertheless, the lack of reciprocity in the security treaty with Japan is sometimes criticized in the United States.

In August 2016, during a rally, someone told Trump, “Japan pays 50% of the cost of basing US troops in Japan.” To which he asked, “Why don’t they pay 100%?” I think we will see a burden-sharing conversation between our two governments. How we end up talking about burden-sharing I think will be very important. I don’t think there is a lot of support even in the United States for the idea that our troops are for hire.

Another time when Trump has mentioned Japan was in July, when he criticized Clinton for saying that the United States will never leave Japan. He took issue with that. He argued that once we say that, we can no longer negotiate. He has a very transactional approach to issues. I think we will see more of that going forward.

I imagine that the Japanese Government will be more interested in having a conversation about capabilities rather than money. It may come to pass that the conversation between the United States and Japan focuses on roles, missions, and capabilities – what the Self-Defense Forces can do to allow the United States military to do other things in the region. This would fit very well with Prime Minister Abe’s focus on collective self-defense.

The good news is that the US and the Japanese governments concluded a 5-year agreement on host nation support last year, so this issue won’t come up soon. Hopefully by that time, the Trump administration will have learned a few lessons. The unfortunate recipient of Trump’s burden-sharing approach is probably going to be South Korea because the host nation support agreement with South Korea comes up there for renegotiation in 2017.

Predicting What the Trump Administration Will Do – Domestic Policy

It is hard to tell what the Trump administration will do when it is in power. First, we should wait and see who Trump puts in charge of what. I am not terribly confident that we are going to see a coherent strategy evolve around foreign policy or security given the initial conversations that have been going on about who might oversee these issues. We have another two months to watch and see who Mr. Trump picks to populate his cabinet.

Another indication of what Trump might do initially is the speech he gave in Gettysburg on what he intends to do in his first 100 days. I think we should expect him to move on those issues.

In terms of domestic issues, he will focus first on Obamacare. He and the Republican Congress will want to get rid of it. Then again, after Trump met with Obama he was very explicit about two good things that Obama pointed out – one was that people with previous health problems could not be denied insurance; and the other was that parents could keep young people on their insurance plans up to the age of 26.

What is not palatable to the Republicans I suspect is the state-level offering of insurance on market exchanges. Some states love it and have embraced it. Other states have not.

Trump has also said that he wants to get rid of Medicare, which is an insurance program for senior citizens. I doubt that will happen. In the United States, we have a lot of elderly people, and they vote. Taking on senior citizens is not a smart idea. It can't be assumed that he will be successful on these issues, but these are things he has said he will work on.

Predicting What the Trump Administration Will Do – Foreign Policy

On foreign policy, Trump's priority is going to be to renegotiate NAFTA. Second will be to take the United States out of the TPP. Third will be to declare China a currency manipulator. Those are the first three things and those are things that under executive authority he can do without a problem.

Prime Minister Trudeau in Canada has already publicly stated, "Absolutely happy to talk to Mr. Trump about renegotiating NAFTA." What is not so clear is why Trump wants to negotiate it. What does he want to change? The networks of production in NAFTA could gut our manufacturing industry. If the United States takes on Mexico and cross-border trade with Mexico, then the US automobile industry is in trouble. Still, it's possible there could be some dissembling of NAFTA.

The TPP is over for the United States. It doesn't have to be over for Japan. I hope that all the other countries in the TPP move forward with it. It is America's loss. I suspect that the United States will eventually return to the TPP under a different government and once it is palatable to workers in the United States. Another option for Japan is a bilateral trade agreement with the United States. That could work alongside the efforts with the TPP.

On currency manipulation, whether that will be an important issue or not depends on how Trump pursues it. If he goes through the WTO, there won't be any problems. If we use this claim to try and renegotiate trade terms with China, then I suspect Beijing will

have a response to that. I don't know what the impact will be regionally and globally. In such a situation, there would be serious trade tensions.

Outside of trade, there are other issues Trump might pursue that could affect Japan. On the campaign trail, he was very clear about the Iran nuclear deal. He doesn't like it. He wants Israel and the United States to think about other ways of punishing the Iranians. That's going to have tremendous implications on the Middle-East. He's also made it clear that he is not interested in working on climate change, or with the United Nations.

The United States under Trump is going to be partly isolationist, partly neorealist. I think we will see a government that will use force more readily than the Obama administration. On trade and economic policy, Trump will be much more isolationist and protectionist. US leadership under Trump in the global economy is likely going to change. US leadership in international security issues will be unpredictable.

The Impact of a Trump Presidency on US Society

Lastly, I think that some of the most important implications of the Trump presidency will be for politics and society in the United States.

The Trump transition team is largely comprised of the people that were closest to him in the campaign, his children, and his family. Trump's son-in-law will have a major role in the White House. Trump has asked apparently for his children to get security clearance. It seems like it will be a sort of banana republic situation, frankly. It will not be business as usual at the White House. Trump relies on a very small team of people who are absolutely loyal to him. It will be interesting to see how he expands that team.

Trump has come to peace somewhat with the Republican National Committee and Republican leadership. Mike Pence will continue to have a very central role. Reince Priebus is now the Chief of Staff. Priebus will be the glue between the Republican Party and the Trump White House.

On the other side, however, Trump has put Steve Bannon from Breitbart in the position of Chief Strategist of the White House.

Steve Bannon is a white supremacist, unapologetically so. He is not okay. This is the first time that we have had somebody like that in a position of power in the White House.

Already on the conservative right and the progressive left, there has been a very severe reaction to the appointment of Bannon. We've had protests in most of our major cities against the Trump administration. It is unclear whether those protests are important. A little more surprising than the protests is the fact that there have been some serious hate crimes committed since the election. If there is more of this kind of activity, I think we are going to have a question about who is running the Department of Justice. Are they going to prosecute hate crimes? How are they going to proceed in making sure that people are safe in our country and that civil liberties are protected?

After the inauguration, things may calm down; or it could go in the other direction, I am not sure. Over the last couple of years, the United States has seen some very high-profile killings of African-Americans at the hands of law enforcement. There already is some social tension in the United States on the interactions between law enforcement and our young men. That remains unresolved. It remains to be seen how the Trump administration will deal with these tensions. Trump campaigned on a very strong law enforcement platform. I think people are very sensitive to this issue inside the United States.

Countries around the world seem to be watching the United States very closely. A poll of the Australian public reported that many would like to see their country distance itself from Trump's America. The day after Trump won the election, the German Chancellor Angela Merkel made a very pointed comment that the basis of the German-American relationship was our common values and our protection of democracy. All around Europe, there are many rightist groups that seem to be gaining more power.

It may be that the populism, nationalism, and revisionism we see now in the United States is a part of changes to the international order. New challenges are emerging. Issues that used to be domestic are now international. Just calling these issues "populism," won't help us to understand them. We need to focus on the linkages between how events in one country inform events in others. I think that will provide a better sense of the complexion of the changes that we will see ahead of us.

I tend to reject the use of the "fascism" to describe Trump and his supporters, but I do think that we should not underestimate some of the ways in which Trump and some of his supporters use race, or religious identity, or gender, to whip up sentiments that we previously thought did not have a place in the United States. We should not

underestimate the divisions in the United States over Trump's presidency. They will affect his ability to govern the United States.

We have a new reality. The challenges we face may settle down. Tomorrow could be much brighter than I suspect. For the time being, I still feel that many people in the United States continue to be sensitive to the future and fearful about what it might bring and how it might damage our democracy.