



Dr. Sheila A. Smith
Revisionism, Populism or Nationalism?:
The Political Currents that Shape the
U.S.-Japan Alliance (Q&A)
(Summary)

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Seguchi: Before the presidential election, many people suggested that urbanization and the increase of the minorities in the United States would have a positive effect for the Democratic Party. Why didn't such a structural change impact this election?

Dr. Sheila A. Smith: I think a lot of data would be needed to give a good answer to that question. In the initial polls, it was very clear that several groups who were expected to vote for Hillary, did not. White women were split between Hillary and Trump. It seems there is no real "women's vote," or if there is, it was not happy with Clinton.

The largest demographic change in the United States has been the rise of the Latino population. The Latino vote was split as well. The "Latino vote" is not one voting bloc. There are separate communities in places like California and Florida. These communities are very different. There was an expectation that because Trump had been so overtly hostile towards Mexicans and because of his position on immigration and deportation, that the Latino vote would come together against him. It did not.

There is a narrative going around that Trump was elected by "Angry white men," but I don't think the numbers bear that out.

We don't know yet whether Trump is just one further step in the transformation of the Republican Party from Newt Gingrich, to the Tea Party, to identifying with the KKK and groups like that. Is this just an odd election, or is Trump part of a fundamental shift in the Republican Party? It is too early to know.

Immigration had a major impact on the election. The debate became about two things – immigration and terrorism, and immigration and jobs. This is an issue that has been in the public eye since the Reagan era. It has changed over the years. Reagan focused on making immigrants citizens and a path for that. Obama focused on the children of immigrants with the DREAM Act, which let the children of undocumented immigrants born in the United States be US citizens and go to university in the United States.

Immigration used to be a geographic issue. That is no longer the case. It is a national issue now. Some states feel that immigrants use social services, and treat them as a financial burden. The debate around immigration has become very reactive. Demographics are important, but so too are people's perceptions about why demographics are changing. I think a lot of white Americans feel like their country is being taken over by other people.

Questioner 1: What do you think the impact of this election will be for relations with Russia? How about with the DPRK?

Dr. Sheila A. Smith: There are two pieces of the Donald Trump and Russia story. One is that he thinks Putin is a great guy. I don't know what we should expect. Trump clearly admires Putin.

The second piece of the story is that Trump has said he is going to align himself with Nigel Farage, Vladimir Putin and Bashar Al-Assad. That should give us some pause in terms of thinking about the value of this presidency.

I think it is time for a reset of relations with Russia. Russia and the United States need to get a hold of their relationship before it deteriorates to the point where the START Agreement no longer holds and we are back in a Cold War.

The Russian military behavior towards the United States has been unequivocal and aggressive. There have been a lot of cyber-attacks from Russia and during the election, Russia seemed to be intruding on the electoral process. I don't think there's any reason to be soft on Russia but that doesn't mean that we should not try to stem the deterioration of our relationship, because I think we are really heading towards something serious. Can Donald Trump do that? We must wait and see.

As for the DPRK, I think the United States has tried to move relations forward, but we are not in a very good place. There was some effort to reach out to them after the regime change, and there was the thought that there was some hope for that after the “leap day” arrangement. There is not the appetite for that kind of engagement on the part of the DPRK. What we have seen from the DPRK is a series of demonstrations of increased capabilities, in terms of both missiles and nuclear tests.

Many military people seem convinced that we are approaching a threshold in terms of the nuclear capabilities of the DPRK. There has been a very integrated South Korea-Japan-United States response to North Korea. The USS Ronald Reagan was in the Yellow Sea just a few weeks ago, for instance. This should send a clear message to Beijing and Pyongyang.

We are at a threshold where the DPRK is nearly forcing us to stop and think about how we want to react to them. Some time ago there was a controversy when someone at my organization, the Council on Foreign Relations, suggested that we should recognize

North Korea as a nuclear power. A lot of people took issue with that statement. The intent of the statement was to talk about what we should do on this issue. A military response is one piece of that.

We all must think about what to do about the DPRK. The extension of the current situation will only pose a greater and greater threat to South Korea and Japan. I don't know what the Trump administration will want to do about the DPRK. The DPRK may test the next president. I hope he is up for it.

Questioner 2: If the United States is looking inward more on topics such as trade, is this a chance for Japan to take more of a leadership position in the international community? What is the perception about Japan in Washington DC right now, particularly in relation to the money available for Japan studies programs?

Dr. Sheila A. Smith: As I suggested on TPP, I think Japan has a lot of latitude. I think the TPP still makes sense for Japan without the TPP. I hope that Japan and partners in Australia and other places will find a way forward on the existing agreement.

I also think Japan has a lot of latitude on climate change, and other multilateral issues that the Japanese Government has invested heavily in. I don't think the Alliance is going to suffer if Japan disagrees with Washington DC on these issues. It is not in the self-interest of the United States to ignore some of these issues. Please do not copy us.

Furthermore, I think that Abe has a diplomatic style that is highly attuned to the particular geostrategic moment that we are in. Whether he is meeting with Trump, Putin, Modi, or anyone else, he should make use of that skill. Frankly, there are a lot of coalitions that Japan could build around the issues we have talked about today.

As for the opinion on Japan in Washington DC right now, I think there is a lot of investment being made into producing future Japan scholars. That is part of a long trend. The United States needs to invest more in future scholars. Our intellectual infrastructure needs attention.

The Japanese Government has spent a lot of money on this issue, and I think it is money well spent. There is an active environment now in Washington DC for Japan issues.

Questioner 3: If you were Prime Minister Abe, what key questions would you ask Trump with regard to trade and security?

Dr. Sheila A. Smith: The next Abe-Trump meeting, to my understanding, is just going to be 1 hour. I suspect that Abe wants to make a personal connection during that time. If I were to advise Abe about it, I would like to see him come out of this meeting with a very clear and definitive statement on the value of the US–Japan partnership. Right now, I think getting Trump to say publicly that the United States and Japan are partners and will remain partners is very important. I think the only risk for the upcoming meeting is if Trump misbehaves.

Questioner 4: I think the election of Trump is a disaster. Could you speak more about the reasons that the United States elected Donald Trump and is turning away from free trade? Does disparity have something to do with it? We must know exactly what made this man President.

Dr. Sheila A. Smith: As an American, I feel the disaster deeply. It is the responsibility of American citizens to make sure that our government is a government that responds to the American people.

I feel sorry in some ways for some of the people who gathered at Trump rallies – not all of them, but for some of them who are distressed and who don't have jobs and are looking to Trump to build a brighter future for them and their families. I don't think they're going to get it. He may prove me wrong. I am quite happy to come back here and be proven wrong. I hope I am wrong.

I think we have a lot of work to do in the United States that's not going to rely on Trump. It's going to rely on civil society. Some of that is reconciliation. We have a lot of social issues to tend to. There are a lot of people who are concerned about our global role and the future of that. People are going to have to advocate inside the country for the kind of choices we want to make. People here should advocate outside the country for the kind of America you want to work with.

Questioner 5: Could you please give your view on how the US military will be realigned under the new administration?

Dr. Sheila A. Smith: On military realignment, I have heard a lot of people ask about what Trump is going to do about Okinawa. I don't think Trump is looking at Okinawa to be quite honest. I suspect if we can get the US-Japan official conversation on the alliance to firmer ground, once he is president, then this question of realignment will

continue to be a serious issue. However, for the time being, I don't think you are going to see him pay a lot of attention to it.

On the overall situation in Okinawa, there is a court case underway and I am told that court case is kind of finished. I don't think our government is going to say anything about it. That process will be respected. The issue is in the hands of the bureaucrats.

Questioner 6: What do you think will happen related to nepotism with Trump?

Dr. Sheila A. Smith: Trump is already trying to get security clearances for his children. Our government has institutional checks and balances. Our constitution makes sure that we have those. I don't think that just because the Congress is in Republican hands that you should expect to have the Congress turn a blind eye to what is unconstitutional or unlawful behavior.

Anybody who occupies an appointed position in the American Government will need to go through severe security checks and FBI clearances. Any kind of position that's given to companies or people outside government will be scrutinized. This is the same scrutiny that Hillary Clinton was subjected to. It's part of our political discourse. It is not going to go away in the Trump administration. There is a lot of concern in the United States about Trump's business dealings and how those business dealings will affect his judgment.

He will be under high scrutiny for a while. His instinct is to keep the people loyal to him around him and close. I think we are going to see that continue.

Questioner 7: I believe that Trump won on an anti-Washington DC platform. Trump has talked about freezing government hires. Will this apply to people working in intelligence or foreign affairs?

Dr. Sheila A. Smith: The American voter is absolutely anti-Washington DC. People like agents of change. They want Trump to "drain the swamp," as he put it. Obama put restrictions on federal employees and lobbying firms as well. That was very much a part of the Obama administration at the beginning.

There is going to be an assertion of executive power over civil servants in the Trump administration. Abe also has instituted some changes here in Japan about tempering the

bureaucracy too. These are domestic power plays as much as they are about cleaning house.

Newt Gingrich, another Republican politician who is likely to advise Trump on this issue, has long been an advocate of civil servant oversight and limiting the ability of civil servants to stay too long in Washington. Trump has begun to talk about term limits for Congress as well. I think we will see a lot of discussion on these issues. I don't know how sustained it's going to be; it's hard to tell.

I think that people working in the State Department, the Department of Defense and other places are now considering what this will really mean for their careers and their futures. Is this issue going to be an instrument of political influence? Or is this going to be rationalizing people who have been around for too long and making them more accountable? I am hoping it's the latter and not the former. I think there is some concern about that. I think the freezing will apply to diplomats, intelligence officials and everyone else across the board.

I suspect this will happen because I suspect Newt Gingrich has a very firm sense of what he wants to accomplish and he will likely be advising the White House on some of these issues.