



CIGS and Stimson Joint Seminar

**The Impact of the Trump Presidency, Year 1:
American and Japanese Perspectives**

EVENT SUMMARY

Date: December 14, 2017

Venue: The Stimson Center, 1211 Connecticut Ave, NW, 8th Floor, Washington DC, 20036

On December 14, 2017, the Stimson Center in partnership with the Canon Institute for Global Studies (CIGS) hosted a panel discussion reflecting on the first year of the Trump administration, with a focus on the geopolitical impact of the administration's foreign policy in Eurasia. The panel was moderated by Yuki Tatsumi and including Kunihiko Miyake from CIGS, Daniel Twining from the International Republican Institute, and Ellen Laipson from George Mason University and Stimson.

Tatsumi opened the panel by soliciting the panelists' thoughts on the Trump administration's foreign and national security policy development so far. Miyake took a relatively pessimistic view, noting that Europeans dislike Trump and some of Trump's policies, particularly his decision to recognize Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, had a destabilizing effect in the Middle East. He viewed Asia as a more stable region in terms of policymaking, but observed that Japan is concerned about the "America First" policy and the Trump administration's tendency to vacillate between reassuring China and reassuring U.S. allies in Asia. Laipson characterized Trump's own measure of success as his ability to be an agent of change, and yet observed that he tends to make provocative statements while allowing existing establishments and processes to continue, such as signing the Jerusalem waiver again and not voiding the Iran nuclear agreement. She noted that North Korea would be a key indicator of the Trump administration's ability to manage a long-term challenge, but also that many of the changes in the world are geopolitical shifts that were underway well before Trump's election. Twining had an optimistic view, given the prospects for an energy-independent U.S. and economic growth in India and Africa. He stressed that members of Congress were supporting American alliances and power projection, and that the speeches of presidents did not necessarily lead directly to policy implementation. He also noted the forthcoming National Security Strategy would focus on addressing governance issues abroad that give rise to threats to global security, and credited the Trump administration with deciding to address the North Korea problem.

Miyake responded to Twining with doubts about the U.S. leadership's ability make the best use of U.S. power, in particular regarding North Korea. Laipson agreed that if American power is not used properly, it can atrophy. Twining argued that the balance of power had already been ceded by the past few U.S. presidents, and that there was a learning curve for each administration.

Tatsumi then asked the panelists what they thought the major issues of 2018 and 2019 would be. Twining observed that several political transformations and upcoming elections in Central and South America would occur in the U.S.'s own region, as well as opportunities in the Middle East to build a Sunni axis against Iranian power. He was hopeful about Europe rejecting populist movements, and doubtful that China would be able to make a successful transition to a slower economy. Laipson saw North Korea as the preoccupying issue in the short-term, but also mentioned opportunities for Japan and France to build more room for independent maneuvering. She worried that Russia might displace the U.S. in some areas of the Middle East, and was pessimistic about the U.S. promoting values and democracy abroad and the development of a Sunni alliance, which she noted was an old idea yet to come to fruition. Miyake noted that while Russia might not be a superpower anymore, with Putin at the helm Russia can still create trouble. He viewed the situation in the Middle East as a process of reorientation or collapse that defied simple characterization. In Asia, he argued that China would be a greater concern than North Korea, since the U.S. and allies have not determined a way to deter Chinese assertiveness.

Tatsumi opened the panel to audience questions. Chris Nelson made a comment about the unnecessary friction between Secretary of State Tillerson's statement on talks with North Korea and the White House's swift criticism. Kevin Maher asked about Japan's view of the U.S. as a reliable partner, if the U.S. recognized North Korea as a nuclear state. Miyake responded that while East Asia could learn to live with North Korea as an acknowledged nuclear state, Japan would not likely try to obtain nuclear weapons. Twining added that sanctions on North Korea needed to be fully implemented, drawing a comparison to the tighter sanctions net on Iran during the nuclear negotiations. Laipson cautioned that Iranians were not as isolated from the world as North Koreans and had greater incentive to cooperate to get the sanctions lifted. She also noted that the U.S. still does believe in trying to stop the expansion of nuclear states, and thought there would be a preference to not acknowledge North Korea as one.

Tatsumi thanked the panelists and the audience for their attendance and participation, and closed out the discussion.