



CIGS East Asian Security Quarterly

Views from Tokyo and Washington, D.C.

Kuni Miyake, Ken Jimbo and Yuki Tatsumi

SPECIAL EDITION

November 25 2016

Days after the surprising election of Donald Trump as next U.S. President, the “TORANPU SHOKKU” has discredited most pundits on U.S. Politics in Tokyo and the soul-searching in Washington, D.C. continues in an attempt to comprehend how they could get it so wrong. In the meantime, the president-elect moves full speed ahead in the transition period. He quickly started to fill three key positions in the Trump White House. Reine Prebis, the incumbent Republican National Committee (RNC)’s chairman, will serve as his Chief of Staff; Steve Bannon, who is said to have been behind Trump’s sometimes controversial comments during the campaign, will be his “Chief Strategist” or whatever he might be called. And Michael Flynn, a retired Army general who served as director of Defense Intelligence Agency, will be his National Security Advisor. Over the next few weeks, more appointments will be made public for the key cabinet positions, providing better sense of how the Trump administration will look like on January 20, 2017.

US Presidential election: Why did everyone get so wrong?

Seen from Tokyo, this year’s presidential election began, unfolded and ended unexpectedly. When all the campaigning was done and the ballots were cast, Donald Trump, a real estate mogul who was described as an underdog from the day he announced his candidacy for U.S. president, ran against former First Lady, Senator, and Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, and finally won. Defying media speculation and the results of opinion polls as late as a couple of days before the election day, Trump won more than 290 electoral votes vis-à-vis Clinton who won 232. While Clinton wins so-called “popular votes” by getting 47.9% of the total votes cast (while Trump received 46.7% of the total votes), Trump’s victory shocked almost everyone in Tokyo as well.

How could everyone—media, pundits, literally EVERYONE with possible exception of filmmaker Michael Moore who predicted Trump’s ascent and those who believed what Mr Moore said —get it so wrong? What was particularly surprising in Tokyo was that Trump defied the myth about the profile of his supporters—they are mostly uneducated while male—and won votes of white female, and even votes of the minorities—the poll conducted immediately after the election by Pew Research suggest that Trump received a slightly stronger support from the minorities including

Hispanics and African Americans compared to Mitt Romney in 2012, Clinton's support among the minorities was not as strong as the support Obama received in 2008 and 2012.<sup>1</sup> While more women supported Clinton, the post-election analyses shows the margin Clinton had over Trump was not significantly different from the advantage Obama had over McCain in 2008 and over Romney in 2012.

In terms of electoral politics, it ultimately came down to a handful of states that determined the election result. Michigan, Wisconsin, Pennsylvania, Florida and Ohio—all of these are the states where Clinton was reported to lead Trump, or close enough to win but in the end Trump won. The biggest surprise was in Michigan, Wisconsin and Pennsylvania. Barack Obama won all these three states in both the 2008 and the 2012 elections, and the media more or less considered them “blue” states. Trump, by tapping into the frustration felt by the voters in the Mid-Western states that have seen its best days from manufacturing industry (the Rustic Belt, they were collectively called) that include these states, successfully turned these states “red” and won the election.

Ultimately, though, the biggest question about this year's presidential election is not “why Trump won”. Rather, it is much more about “why Clinton lost”. Indeed, throughout the campaign period, Trump was never popular—his unfavorable ratings in opinion polls was always higher than his favorable rating. He was also a divisive figure in the Republican party whom, in particular, moderate Republicans were thoroughly disgusted with. So great was their dislike for Trump that so many major Republican leaders—the Bush family, Mitt Romney, John McCain, to name a few—made a conscious decision not to attend the Republican national convention where Trump was nominated to be their party's presidential candidate. Clinton was considered “a winner” in all three presidential debates before the election. Even if the polls showed that it will be a close race, pre-election poll—as recent as the data released on the morning of the election—showed that Clinton maintained the lead of 3% over Trump.

However, as the votes were counted, it is clear that the national poll data was misleading at best. Clinton received approximately 2 million votes less than Obama did in 2012—since she did win Trump in popular vote by 1.5 million, the absence of the 2 million voters who voted for Obama four years ago but did not go out to vote for Clinton in 2016, could have cost her the election. Clinton also lost in 7 states that Obama won in 2008 and 2012 elections.<sup>2</sup> These election results spoke loudly to Clinton's inability to capture not only the disenchanted Republicans and independent voters and the so-called “Trump Democrats”, but also those core Democratic supporters who

---

1

<http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/11/09/behind-trumps-victory-divisions-by-race-gender-education/>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.pbs.org/newshour/updates/voter-turnout-2016-elections/>

supported Obama in the past elections. In a nutshell, many Americans, as always, wanted to change and were never hesitant to change the status quo.

With the Trump administration to be inaugurated on January 20 next year, Tokyo's biggest question about the incoming administration is how much of the campaign rhetoric President Trump would hold onto, and on how many issues on which he would shift his positions. If his behavior since the election is any guide, there are many issues that Trump touted during the campaign that he would simply not deliver on. For instance, despite his campaign promise that he would repeal the Obamacare on his first day as president, he now talks about "amend and replace". Despite his call for appointing an independent investigator to look into Clinton's inappropriate use of her private email during her tenure as the Secretary of State and possibly put her on trial, he now talks about how he does not want to "hurt the Clintons". Having said that, other issues may be greatly affected. For example, the TPP will be put to rest, if not killed. The U.S. Policy vis-a-vis Tehran will be tougher and the U.S.-Israel and U.S.-Saudi relations may be reconciled. The appointments Trump has announced so far also make it clear that Trump is seemingly trying to shift gear from "campaigning" to "governing." Tokyo sincerely hopes so, too.

#### Abe-Trump meeting: A beginning of a beautiful friendship, or...?

As the world stands in shock, Shinzo Abe traveled to New York and met with Donald Trump on November 17 on his way to attend the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) 's summit meeting to be held in Peru. Surprisingly, he was the first foreign leader to do so. Abe was also among the first ones to congratulate Trump on the election night. Who could predict that a Japanese Prime Minister would be the first foreign head of government to meet with "the Donald" in less than 10 days after the election day?

Both Trump and Abe remain silent on the substance of the meeting. Abe's comments—he simply said he found Trump to be someone that can be trusted—, however, suggest that the two leaders seem to have begun to develop a friendly rapport in their first meeting. In fact, setting aside whatever policy differences they may have, the two men may share many common qualities as a leader. Both men are pretty decisive in their decision-making style. They both rely on a small circle of loyalist advisers. And they both can be intuitive as well. Despite the lack of any substantive progress, many in Tokyo consider, with much relief, that the meeting was a successful first step forward in the Japan-U.S. relations.

For Abe, however, the real test of whatever the personal relationship he may have begun to build with Trump will come in coming months. Defying Abe's hope, it is looking near certain that Trump will move to declare U.S. withdrawal from the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), which is so

critical for Abe and his government's economic agenda at home. While Trump has talked about increasing U.S. defense budget, it is uncertain whether such increase is possible to begin with, and if it is indeed increased, how the increased defense resources might be allocated. Having spoken up against "free-riding", it is also possible that the Trump administration will begin to push Japan harder on the issues such as the stalemate in the relocation of the Marine Corps Air Station Futenma.

What should be most concerning for Abe is to what degree the U.S. under President Trump will be pulled inward. Even with a Hillary Clinton administration, Asia would have likely seen another rebalance of "the Asia-Pacific Rebalance", reprioritizing between the more immediate security concerns in the Middle East/North Africa or the European continent and a long-term and less kinetic security concerns in the Asia-Pacific. With the Trump administration, the concern is simpler but more stark: how willing the Trump administration would be to see the U.S. Forces stay actively engaged overseas. Should a much less engaged U.S. become a reality, Japan may find itself in the region where China continues to grow assertive, North Korea more reckless, South Korea increasingly less politically stable, and Southeast Asia trying to pursue closer relationship with China at an expense of greater distance from the US.

Prior to the election, two Trump advisors published an article entitled "Donald Trump's peace through strength vision in the Asia-Pacific" in *Foreign Policy*. In the article, Obama administration's Asia-Pacific rebalance was criticized as a "case of talking loudly but carrying a small stick", arguing that President Trump would work with Congress to repeal the sequestration, increase defense spending, and rebuild American military. However, Trump's own words and behavior after the election suggestion that he is fundamentally more focused on "putting America first", focusing on domestic issues. A case in point, while he is moving relatively quickly on nominating Secretaries of Commerce, Treasury, Health and Human Services, and Transportation, but none of his national security nomination is coming after the nomination of Michael Flynn as the national security advisor and Mike Pompeo as the CIA director. In the post-election interviews with media, Trump has spoken about his strong interest in investing in national infrastructure, energy, or immigration reform, but has said very little on foreign and national security policies beyond generality.

In fact, if he is indeed serious about investing in infrastructure, modify Obamacare in the way that keeps what has been positive about the changes that have been made under the Affordable Care Act, he may very well find that he has very little fiscal margin to increase defense spending beyond what is currently being projected unless he is willing to further increase U.S. national debt. Also, how much impact Asia, in particular, will feel, will also depend on what President Trump and his national security team would want to do in the Middle East. Then what Asia will more likely see the continuation of the current policy—stronger rhetorical commitment to continuous engagement

coupled with a modest increase in presence, with a stronger request to the allies to do their share in the efforts to maintain peace and stability in their own neighborhood, although it will be given a different name.

South Korea: GSOMIA with Japan gets signed as President Park fights for her political survival.

On November 23, Japan and South Korea signed the General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA). Once botched at the 11<sup>th</sup> hour of the negotiation, this overdue agreement finally allows Tokyo and Seoul to share military intelligence, greatly facilitating the US-Japan-South Korea tripartite security cooperation.

In a sense, it was almost a miracle that the GSOMIA was signed as President Park Geun-hye fought for her political survival after the scandal broke out about her confidant Choi Soon-il. Three people, including Choi and Park's former aide in the Blue House, were already indicted, and South Korea's prosecutors office expanded their raid to Lotte and Samsung Groups, two of the major business conglomerates in South Korea.

The scandal involving Park and Choi took a dramatic turn when Park announced that she would leave the ultimate of her presidency, including resignation before her term expires in February 2018, in the hands of National Assembly. In the statement issued on November 28, Park made it clear that she would follow the National Assembly's direction and step down once National Assembly reach an agreement on the process of political transition, including scheduling presidential election earlier than it was originally planned in November 2017.

There is already a growing concern in Tokyo of what a new South Korean Administration's positions will be on the agreements that Japanese government reached with the ROK government, including the one on the resolution of comfort women issues. For the moment, though, the officials in Tokyo (and probably in Seoul, too) should count their blessing. Park's scandal has already put pressure on the candidates for South Korea's presidential election, to force them to differentiate themselves from Park on major policy issues, both foreign and domestic. In foreign policy, Park's hard stance against North Korea (including her decision to deploy THAAD despite China's opposition) and her government's effort to strengthen Seoul's ties with the U.S. and pursue pragmatic approach vis-à-vis Japan will certainly to be placed under scrutiny. Had Tokyo and Seoul failed to sign GSOMIA before Park leaves, the officials of both governments would have had to wait at least for a couple of years until the next window of opportunity to sign such agreement comes.