

## Trump and strategic change in Asia

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William T Tow

As Donald Trump's administration comes to power in Washington, the postwar security policy of the US is undergoing a monumental transition. The new president's campaign rhetoric strongly intimated that under his self-proclaimed 'America first' posture, traditional American strategy and alliance politics would undergo a major change. Whether through his adoption of 'tweet diplomacy' to provide unprecedented commentary on issues and events over which he would have no control until 21 January 2017, or his many phone conversations with foreign leaders, Trump has arguably been the most active president-elect on foreign and security policy issues that the US has witnessed in modern times.<sup>1</sup> True, his policy style and negotiating behaviour during this time frame have been intensely debated. What's clear, however, is that his approach to dealing with allies and adversaries will be based less on their traditional roles in US foreign policy and more on how he and his foreign and security policy team view other countries' willingness to adjust their own policies to conform with a markedly different set of US economic and strategic priorities.



An employee of a foreign exchange trading company looks at monitors showing US President elect Donald Trump speaking on TV news in Tokyo, Japan, 9 November 2016. © Toru Hanai / Reuters / Picture Media

As part of Trump's revised posture, there appears to be a greater readiness to embed US power and policy within a more multipolar international power structure—albeit with less emphasis on the importance of international institutions to US policy interests.<sup>2</sup> His criticism of the United Nations following the UN Security Council's approval of a resolution criticising Israel's settlement policy in the West Bank and Jerusalem was demonstrative: 'The UN is not living up to its potential and is causing problems rather than solving them.'<sup>3</sup> Notwithstanding reports of Russian cyber-meddling in the American electoral process assisting Trump's campaign victory, the president-elect's desire to seek accommodation with Vladimir Putin's Russia could be reasonably viewed as his effort to defuse a previous intensification of Russian–American rivalry, combined with his admiration for what he sees as Putin's strong leadership style. If such a development were to occur (over likely opposition from key congressional Republicans), it would be nothing less than a radical adjustment to America's position in the world.

The president-elect's cabinet and national security choices point to the adoption of a US foreign policy management style more comparable with that of the business world than with one driven by classic geopolitics.

The incoming administration's geopolitical outlook on the Asia–Pacific is no less seminal. Trump's musings over the utility of the US's longstanding 'one China' policy as the core principle for governing Sino-American relations, and his equally controversial acceptance of a phone call from Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-wen, strongly signalled that no concrete 'grand bargain' would be immediately engineered between his government and the People's Republic of China (PRC). This point has also been underscored in the confirmation testimony of his Secretary-of-State designee, Rex Tillerson, who warned that China must stop its island-building in those waters. He further asserted that the US would seek support from its regional security allies to ensure that China doesn't employ what reclaimed islands it has constructed to disrupt the flow of commerce and trade in the South China Sea.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, the president-elect's cabinet and national security choices point to the adoption of a US foreign policy management style more comparable with that of the business world than with one driven by classic geopolitics. In this context, Trump's campaign threat to slap substantial tariffs on Chinese exports to the US in retaliation for what he viewed to be Chinese currency manipulation, and his appointment of Peter Navarro, a strong critic of China's trade and security policies, as director of the White House's National Trade Council, underscored the contrast in the incoming president's perspectives of China and Russia.<sup>5</sup> Trump has jettisoned President Barack Obama's promotion of the multilateral Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) agreement as a basis for underwriting US trading and commercial interests in Asia.<sup>6</sup> Perhaps most fundamentally, the president-elect's view of how US policy should be managed within the broader international relations and global security arena seems to be shaped by his self-anointed image of being a proven 'winner' in the international corporate environment and his confidence that this background would be readily adaptable to managing an emerging and highly complicated world order. Indeed, his determination to shake up Washington's policy establishment by generating different US geopolitical thinking and behaviour has led him to reject the option of receiving the president's daily intelligence briefing.<sup>7</sup>

## Revolution or evolution?

One can view these post-election developments as either 'revolutionary' or 'evolutionary'. Those policymakers and analysts embracing the first outlook underscore Trump's stated scepticism about alliance commitments and extended deterrence policy, his evident scepticism of the one China policy and his strategic focus on international terrorism as indicators of a limited US retrenchment.<sup>8</sup> The revolutionary school of thought argues that the new American president is clearly more sceptical than were his postwar predecessors about the US continuing to uphold global security, wealth and order due to the rising costs and risks to an American electorate more concerned about prosperity at home and curbing illegal immigration. Only 3% of American voters surveyed in a quadrennial post-election survey conducted by the Pew Research Center nominated defence policy as their

top priority, while only an additional 3% designated foreign policy as their number one policy concern.<sup>9</sup> Ideally, from the new president's standpoint, US foreign and defence policy over the next four years will be tailored to perceived larger and more urgent tasks of repairing or updating America's prosperity, infrastructure and sense of national purpose.<sup>10</sup>

A contending interpretation favouring evolution would note that there's little concrete evidence of Trump withdrawing from the US's existing Asia-Pacific alliance commitments (Trump having assured his Japanese and South Korean counterparts, since he was elected, that they would remain in place). The potential for hard but ultimately productive Sino-American bargaining to shape future trade and security relations certainly exists. Given the Asia-Pacific's increasingly dominant economic position in the world, that the Trump administration will eventually be drawn to pursue more pragmatic and engaged geopolitics in the region is reasonably certain. This line of reasoning assumes that Trump has been experiencing a steep foreign policy learning curve since his election—a process that has hardly been mistake-free (no incoming presidential activity ever is)—and that this process has been at least partially obscured by his relatively uninhibited tendency to express his stream of consciousness via Twitter. Although he has doubled down on his populist views towards trade protectionism since the election, he'll ultimately need economic and strategic 'wins' in Asia if he's to 'make America great again'. In this context, he'll be required eventually to identify forms of economic interaction other than the TPP and to work with regional allies to neutralise emerging strategic threats from China and North Korea. In the latter context, events beyond Trump's control may well work to alter his original perspectives concerning Asia.<sup>11</sup>

Which of those two perspectives will prove to be more accurate? One respected observer has recently intimated that if Trump and his advisers are determined to stake out a US policy towards Asia in which its regional alliances and traditional approaches to order-building lose their traditional centrality, it may take months for the new administration to fashion an Asia-Pacific strategy. Or, as likely, '[g]iven Trump's devotion to unpredictability, he might not craft such a strategy at all'. The incoming administration could 'instead pick and choose from a neo-Jacksonian, unilateralist buffet, deciding what "America first" means as circumstances change.'<sup>12</sup>

It's argued here, however, that the new president will enjoy neither the luxury of time nor unbridled freedom to choose from a menu of diverse and possibly disparate policy options, such as the above observation implies. He will instead be compelled by events and trends in the Asia-Pacific that are unfolding at breakneck speed, and by his country's own resource constraints, to think and act quickly and coherently if acute regional instability or even widespread regional chaos is to be avoided. What revolutionary paths the Trump administration wishes to follow in reshaping overseas strategic commitments in line with such pressing needs as American job restoration and infrastructure repair must be judiciously balanced with a longer term evolutionary implementation of effective policy instrumentalities.

Two key factors that will test the new administration's ability to combine the old with the new in whatever Asia-Pacific policy positions it pursues are:

- the ongoing and expanded North Korean nuclear threat
- the transition of US alliance politics and multilateralism in Southeast Asia and Australia, potentially leading to a substantial power vacuum subject to Chinese exploitation.

Failure to deal in good time with either of these emerging challenges could substantially erode the Trump administration's foreign policy credibility and permanently undercut the US's national security interests in the Asia-Pacific. Stabilising Northeast Asia and checking Chinese power in an increasingly anarchical Southeast Asia, moreover, may also depend on Trump's ability to 'reset' or synchronise US relations with Russia's increasingly robust geopolitical agenda throughout Eurasia—a quest pursued unsuccessfully by at least two of his immediate predecessors.

## North Korea

In late November 2016, President Obama reportedly conveyed to Trump his administration's view that North Korea's nuclear weapons development and its imminent capability to conduct nuclear strikes against targets in the US and throughout the

Asia–Pacific now constitute the top US national security priority.<sup>13</sup> This was at least an implicit admission that Obama’s ‘strategic patience’ policy of not dealing with Kim Jong-un’s government until North Korea demonstrated a willingness to abandon its nuclear weapons program has failed. A recent North Korean defector (Thae Yong-ho, previously North Korea’s second highest official at its embassy in London) has insisted that North Korea views the presidential transition in the US and domestic political turbulence in South Korea triggered by President Park Geun-hye’s suspension from office as a major opportunity to advance its nuclear weapons program.<sup>14</sup> In a 2017 New Year’s Day address, Kim promised to develop an intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) capable of hitting the US homeland by the end of the year. Trump responded on Twitter, resolving that such a development wouldn’t occur and blaming China for exacerbating the North Korean problem. However, the president-elect didn’t specify how the manifestation of a North Korean ICBM might be prevented.<sup>15</sup> Such ambiguity is unsurprising, given the Bill Clinton, George W Bush and Obama administrations’ failure to prevent Pyongyang’s steady build-up of its nuclear weapons and missile delivery programs over the past 20 years. It’s just as evident that conducting strategic policy by Twitter won’t make the North Korean nuclear problem any easier to address.

Extensive analysis has been offered by US and regional observers on what policy options the US and its Northeast Asian allies, Japan and South Korea, should pursue in response to North Korea becoming a fully-fledged nuclear power.<sup>16</sup> One frequently cited ‘soft’ policy option would be for Trump to revive negotiations with North Korea, China (as North Korea’s only ally and as the one country that might apply effective economic leverage on Pyongyang), or both, to cap or limit North Korean nuclear forces in return for US and allied economic concessions or assistance to North Korea. Such negotiations could also entail the US reducing or withdrawing its 30,000 troops from South Korea and reversing its late-2016 decision to deploy its Terminal High Altitude Air Defence anti-missile defence system in South Korea (thus pleasing the Chinese, who have advanced publicly stated fears that this system would threaten their own nuclear deterrent).

However, North Korea’s historically bad track record in adhering to those commitments that it has previously made during the 1994 Agreed Framework and the Six Party Talks September 2005 joint statement on the Korean Peninsula’s denuclearisation would make any sweeping concessions extended to North Korea by the Trump administration problematic. Both the US Congress and traditional regional security partners would see them as rewarding North Korea’s aberrant behaviour as an unreliable bargaining actor and as a violator of the nuclear nonproliferation regime.

Even Putin’s Russia has found the current North Korean leader to be excessively sensitive. Its invitation for Kim to visit Moscow in May 2015 to participate in celebrations commemorating Russia’s victory in World War II was rejected by the North Koreans at the last moment, at least in part it has been reported, because of a Russian reluctance to sell the S-300 anti-aircraft missile system to North Korea.<sup>17</sup>

Unwarranted US diplomatic concessions to the Kim regime, moreover, could well exacerbate both Japan’s and South Korea’s sense of strategic isolation, prompting those two countries to develop their own indigenous nuclear forces. Although Trump mused about the possible advantages of this scenario during his campaign—including the reduction of US alliance and burden-sharing commitments—he has since backtracked on endorsing any such development. Japanese and South Korean nuclear weapons would be likely to be highly destabilising for a Northeast Asia in which both US allies remain visibly hostile to each other, and China perceives an independent Japanese nuclear deterrent as one of its direst strategic nightmares. Further nuclear proliferation in the subregion would only intensify the geopolitics of brinkmanship in that part of the world, rather than underwrite new forms of local nuclear deterrence.

Imposing or hardening sanctions against North Korea, China or both is no more promising. North Korea has disregarded successive UN Security Council resolutions censuring it for past nuclear weapons and missile testing and shows no sign of buckling under to future international condemnation or sanctions until it achieves its goal of becoming a full-fledged nuclear power. North Korea remains a critical buffer zone between US military power and China’s territory that Beijing values highly despite its repugnance for the Kim regime. American efforts to compel China into adopting a more forceful posture towards North Korea by pressuring it to assume a firmer posture in enforcing sanctions are likely to backfire. Given president-elect Trump’s initial outreach to Taiwan’s

leadership and his public criticism of China for not doing enough to pressure North Korea, it's unclear what diplomatic leverage he could now apply against China that would result in Beijing adopting a tougher stance on implementing or enforcing North Korean sanctions.

With the evident failure of Obama's 'strategic patience' posture, 'harder' US policy responses are emerging as a possible course of action for the incoming Trump administration. This is particularly true if the new administration concludes that the development of a North Korean nuclear strike capability against the US is unacceptable and deterrence is no longer effective. One such response may include the US using existing missile defences or other means (such as laser-armed drones) to intercept a North Korean test ICBM after it's launched. However, even if that could be done successfully, which is by no means certain, that move would introduce serious crisis escalation in Northeast Asia and possibly elicit only lukewarm South Korean support (Park's most likely successors are reportedly more amenable to negotiating with Kim than confronting him).<sup>18</sup> Alternatively, the US may elect to conduct a pre-emptive strike against North Korean targets if it becomes evident that the North Koreans are about to attack South Korea, Japan, or both. However, various analysts (including former US Secretary of Defense William Perry) have warned that the collateral damage US allies such as South Korea and Japan would incur via an inevitable North Korean military retaliation under such circumstances, and the prospect of China intervening on North Korea's behalf, constitute excessive risks compared to any strategic benefits that might be gained from any such US action.<sup>19</sup>

How the Trump administration manages the North Korean nuclear problem will be a key test for the overall credibility and effectiveness of its strategic approach in managing US security interests in the Asia-Pacific.

The North Korean nuclear problem remains intractable. Short of inciting war in Northeast Asia, or in the absence of US capitulation to North Korea's demand to be viewed and dealt with as a fully legitimate nuclear weapons state, there appears to be no obvious short-term policy solution for Washington without inviting commensurately high levels of risk. How the Trump administration manages this issue will be a key test for the overall credibility and effectiveness of its strategic approach in managing US security interests in the Asia-Pacific.

## Southeast Asia

During President Obama's second term in office (2013–2016), his highly touted rebalancing or pivot strategy towards Asia announced in 2011 has fallen into unexpected disarray. This has especially been the case in Southeast Asia, but less so for Australia. Rebalancing was designed to reassure regional actors—and especially the ASEAN member-states—that the US would sustain and strengthen its strategic, diplomatic and economic presence in their subregion as a logical geopolitical complement to American commitments and endeavours in Northeast Asia.<sup>20</sup> It was simultaneously intended to modify what was viewed as China's potentially hegemonic strategy and to gradually ease the PRC into a region-wide system of regional order.

Recent developments have worked to largely undermine those objectives. This is particularly the case with Washington's alliance politics directed towards Southeast Asia. The US's two formal security alliances with Thailand and the Philippines have become visibly strained. The Obama administration's relations with Thailand's military junta deteriorated visibly in the aftermath of the May 2014 coup against Yingluck Shinawatra's democratically elected but inept government and the subsequent American condemnation of the junta's human rights record. Meanwhile, the election of Rodrigo Duterte to the Philippines presidency in May 2016 signalled the introduction of a more 'nonaligned' Philippines foreign policy. This was predicated on Duterte's view of his country's historically excessive strategic dependence on the US and justified as a legitimate sovereign response to US human

rights criticisms of his aggressive anti-drugs campaign. Duterte has also downplayed the significance of a July 2016 finding by the Hague Permanent Court of Arbitration supporting the Philippines' position in its territorial claims vis-à-vis China in the South China Sea. The Philippines president also warned that joint US–Philippines maritime surveillance of his country's exclusive economic zone in the South China Sea would soon be terminated to avoid alienating Beijing.<sup>21</sup> Duterte also initially threatened to render inoperative the April 2014 US–Philippines Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement, which facilitates the presence of US forces in the Philippines for cooperation on maritime surveillance, counterterrorism, military exercises and the purchase of US weapons systems.<sup>22</sup>

In the meantime, both Thailand and the Philippines have moved to establish closer defence and economic ties with China, while the Philippines is also exploring closer strategic cooperation with Russia. Thailand's military has upgraded and expanded military exercises with China's People's Liberation Army and has announced the purchase of three Yuan-class S26T diesel submarines. The overall trend of closer Sino-Thai security collaboration in the aftermath of the Obama administration's lectures to the Thai military about human rights and a return to what Washington would view to be a democratic government is clear: outside criticism from various Western sources has been viewed as an effort to destabilise a fragile Thai polity and as supporting disruptive Thai opposition forces at a critical time in that country's history.

President Duterte visited Beijing in October 2016 to sign US\$13.5 billion worth of deals and announced that the Philippines would 'separate' from the US by realigning itself with China and Russia. The US Embassy in Manila was reportedly 'baffled' by the president's declaration. As is the case with Thailand, the Philippines has moved quickly to underscore its growing independence from its traditional American security tie. Notwithstanding what was reported to be a highly cordial telephone conversation between president-elect Trump and Duterte in December 2016, the Philippines president boarded a visiting Russian warship early the following month and expressed his hope that Moscow 'would become his country's ally and protector'.<sup>23</sup> In December 2016, Duterte announced that the Philippines would 'set aside' the arbitration court ruling due to what he viewed as the changing geopolitics of Southeast Asia and to Manila's strategic reorientation away from the US. In a subsequent 'clarification', Duterte's spokespersons indicated that the Philippines wouldn't unilaterally 'give up' on its territorial claims in the South China Sea but would work with China on joint resource development projects and in other ways to defuse bilateral tensions.<sup>24</sup>

It's not clear that the incoming Trump administration has any recipe for improving relations with Bangkok and Manila. Moreover, uncertain about the incoming administration's strategic intentions, other traditional ASEAN security partners of the US are now feeling more vulnerable. They may contemplate the need to distance themselves from the American strategic orbit, which has been the basis for their own regional power balancing calculations and institution building—especially if Washington signals that it expects them to take care of their own maritime security, terrorism and defence issues. ASEAN has been visibly unsuccessful as an institution in dealing with the South China Sea issue.<sup>25</sup>

Singapore recently came under pressure from China when the latter intercepted nine Singapore Armed Forces infantry carrier vehicles that had been deployed in Taiwan for joint Singapore–Taiwan military exercises and claimed that such exercises violated the one China principle.<sup>26</sup> In the face of such uncertainty, China appears all too willing to induce or coerce ASEAN into complying with a new regional economic and security order more in accordance with its own preferences. How well it does in attracting meaningful support and participation from its regional neighbours for the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership initiative as an alternative to the now almost certainly morbid TPP will be a benchmark for the success of Chinese order-building strategy and diplomacy.

## Australia

As a presidential contender, Donald Trump—hypercritical about most US alliances—had little to say about Australia. This wasn't a bad sign, according to Kim Beazley, the recently departed Australian Ambassador to the US. He observed that America's alliance with Australia was the only one not criticised by 'candidate Trump' and that this reflected an awareness by the Republican candidate's policy advisers that they understood 'both the value of past and current [Australian] commitments in military

campaigns but also the importance to the US of facilities we share, capabilities we're acquiring from American industry, and mutually embedded military and intelligence personnel'.<sup>27</sup> Despite a warm congratulatory telephone call from Australian Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull to the US president-elect, Trump's election was a shock to Australian political leaders, including those who had labelled him 'terrifying', 'barking mad' or a 'dropkick' prior to his election victory.<sup>28</sup>

Assessments leading up to Trump's presidential inauguration have pointed to several central security challenges that Australia will face in dealing with the Americans once he assumes office. They include (but are not limited to) avoiding a 'Chinese wedge', calibrating changes in Australian domestic politics to sustained Australian-US security cooperation, managing future defence costs generated by alliance collaboration, and adjusting to US 'strategic distractions' originating from other regions, an intensification of international terrorism or gradual US strategic decline.<sup>29</sup> Trump's scepticism about Chinese trading behaviour flies in the face of Australia's intensifying trading relationship with China. An American request for Australian naval units to assist in American freedom of navigation operations to challenge Chinese-imposed restrictions on passage in the South China Sea's international waters and to preserve a 'rules-based' maritime order such as that envisioned in Rex Tillerson's congressional testimony relates to the first contingency.<sup>30</sup> This would test the Turnbull government's geopolitical fibre, especially if China follows past precedent in linking behaviour it doesn't like with threats of retaliatory action. A surge of populism, neo-isolationism or both in the Australian body politic precipitated by continued refugee crises or opposition to the forces of globalisation, an explosion of cost over-runs in the development of American weapons systems that Australia is committed to buy (Trump has already decried over-runs for the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter) and concerns that a Trump administration might request Australian 'boots on the ground' to support future American operations against the Islamic State in the Middle East (a group Trump has pledged to 'crush and destroy' with substantial international cooperation) are illustrative of the other security challenges cited above.<sup>31</sup>

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Despite these challenges, there are abundant opportunities for alliance cooperation between Australia and the US if policymakers in both countries work together to delineate strategic priorities that will strengthen mutual security. In the Asia-Pacific, the two countries' major common interest is to promote and preserve regional stability and wealth. Internationally, it's to safeguard Western ideals and norms in a world where economic and technological change threatens to topple the postwar liberal international order. If it truly does enjoy a status as America's 'favoured ally', Australia can press the new administration to deepen what is already wide-ranging cooperation in the defence and intelligence areas via an increased US naval presence in Australian ports, greater interaction in the fields of cybersecurity and quantum computing, and renewed promotion of trilateral or quadrilateral coordination with other regional allies and partners.<sup>32</sup> Perhaps even more urgently, Australia will need to convince the Trump administration that American participation in some form of regional trade mechanism is needed to avoid a regional default to China's version of an Asia-Pacific economic order.

### Region-wide concerns

During his presidential campaign, Trump made it clear that he was sceptical of multilateralism in general and of the TPP more specifically. Asserting during a major foreign policy address in April 2016 that the US couldn't surrender 'to the false song of globalism' and couldn't 'spread "universal values" that not everyone shares', Trump vowed to withdraw the US from the TPP—the world's largest regional trade deal—on his first day in office.<sup>33</sup> Exiting the TPP conforms to the sentiment of a Republican majority in the US Congress. Yet, as asserted above, the US can't afford economically or strategically to revert to a neo-isolationist posture in the Asia-Pacific. The region is currently the recipient of 60% of US exports (and 72% of agricultural exports) and is slated to host

two-thirds of the world's middle class by 2030, growing at around 4.5–5% annually over the past few years.<sup>34</sup> US foreign direct investment in the region continues to outpace China's and Japan's quantitatively (US\$620 billion in investment stock was directed towards the region in 2013) and qualitatively (reaffirming the value of the so-called 'American brand' in goods and services).<sup>35</sup>

Asia–Pacific prosperity, moreover, has been underwritten by American power, as epitomised by its regional bilateral security alliances. Trump's precipitation of greater tensions with China (even before his inauguration) through his threats to launch a trade war against what he has deemed to be Chinese currency manipulation and exploitive trade practices, combined with growing domestic political chaos in South Korea, Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's frustrations over the incoming Trump administration's decision to scuttle the TPP, and prospects of a more transactional US approach to alliance politics could all work to undermine Washington's regional allies' confidence about the future stability of their region and the ability of the US to facilitate it.<sup>36</sup> Reports of Trump's intent to build up the US Navy from its current strength of 274 ships to 350 ships (in line with a recent recommendation by the bipartisan National Defense Panel) fits with the notion of the US exercising a form of highly calibrated 'offshore balancing' strategy to prevent regional dominance by a hostile hegemon in Northeast and Southeast Asia, but with commensurately greater efforts by regional allies to strengthen and coordinate their own regional defence strategies.<sup>37</sup> Critics of this approach point to Trump's planned tax cuts as undercutting the US's ability to field such a large navy over a short period of time and as relying upon oversimplistic calculations about numbers instead of clearly formulating US threat assessments and defining US strategic priorities at a time when Asia and other regions are undergoing immense structural change.<sup>38</sup>

## Conclusion

If Donald Trump is to succeed in managing US geopolitics in the Asia–Pacific, he'll need to strike a reasonable balance between what may be his 'revolutionary' and 'evolutionary' policy objectives directed to the region. Reaching what Trump views as fairer trade deals with China, reconstituting bilateralism as the best means for conducting trade deals with other Asia–Pacific states and supporting regional allies' efforts to invest in building stronger (and more interoperable) militaries to support strategic objectives compatible with those of the US would be path-breaking accomplishments in their own right. But they must be matched by credible American efforts to reinforce extended deterrence and to deploy robust defence systems (missile defences, 5th- and 6th-generation fighter jets and emerging exotic military technologies), which are inherently evolutionary. Current US regional security alliances in Northeast Asia and with Australia could also evolve over time into tacit rather than formal minilateral or multilateral instruments that will confirm America's geographical advantage of being the dominant offshore power in an Indo-Pacific theatre that's predominantly a maritime theatre of operations.<sup>39</sup>

It may well be that, confronted with resurgent US power, over time China, Russia or both may be inclined to pursue a 'grand bargain' with a 'greater America', Japan, India and the ASEAN members for long-term regional order-building. That scenario seems a distant prospect in 2017, however, as Trump will apparently be preoccupied with repairing US domestic infrastructure and further resuscitating the US's economic growth. Nevertheless, while Trump postulates an 'America first' posture, that hardly represents an 'Asia last' prescription. Above all else, Trump's history is shaped by his reputation in the business world for hard but fluid bargaining to derive optimal results for interest-based objectives.

## Notes

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## Acronyms and abbreviations

ASEAN Association of Southeast Asian Nations

ICBM intercontinental ballistic missile

PRC People's Republic of China

TPP Trans-Pacific Partnership

UN United Nations

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## About the author

William Tow is Professor of International Relations at the Australian National University's Coral Bell School for Asia and Pacific Affairs. He was Head of the School's Department of International Relations from 2011–2015. Tow has authored/edited over 20 volumes and 100 journal/book articles on alliance politics, Asia–Pacific security issues and regional order-building. He has been principal investigator in two major projects for the MacArthur Foundation's Asia Security Initiative. He has also been the editor of the *Australian Journal of International Affairs* and has served on the Foreign Affairs Council, Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, and the National Board of Directors, Australian Fulbright Commission. Professor Tow has been a Visiting Fellow at Stanford University, IISS London and both the ISEAS Yusof Ishak Institute and Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS) in Singapore.

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## ASPI

Tel +61 2 6270 5100

Fax + 61 2 6273 9566

Email [enquiries@aspi.org.au](mailto:enquiries@aspi.org.au)

Web [www.aspi.org.au](http://www.aspi.org.au)



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