

U.S. Leadership in Northeast Asia: An Opinion from Japan

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THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA IS A CRITICAL PART OF THE ASIA-PACIFIC REGION. It has been a trusted and respected ally, and a strong partner and friend to Asian countries for many years. Asians appreciated the U.S. rebalance, which reflects the U.S. recognition of its interests in Asia, and of the challenges we must all tackle together.

Over the past several decades, the United States has contributed greatly to regional peace and prosperity. On the security front, the United States has provided stability through its hub-and-spoke security arrangements. The U.S.-Japan alliance, in particular, has become the cornerstone of Asia's security and serves as a critical pillar for regional peace and stability. The strength of this alliance reflects a deep bond based on shared beliefs about democracy, rule of law, freedom of speech, and human rights. I hope the incoming administration will continue to strengthen our alliance going forward.

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The United States has also played a vital role in building prosperity. The post-war liberal international economic order, which the United States helped establish, has facilitated increased trade, investment, and technology flows and created strong interdependence between countries in the region. All of us—the United States, Japan, and others—have benefited greatly from this order. None of this prosperity would have been possible without the peace and stability the U.S. presence has provided.

This is why regional countries are now so concerned about potential shifts in U.S. foreign policy under a new administration. **The Trump team could help reduce uncertainty for its regional partners by imparting a message of “continuity.”** Asian partners are waiting to hear that the mutually beneficial relationships we have enjoyed with the United States for many years—relationships that are based on interdependence and respect—will continue, and hopefully, be strengthened further.

The direction the Trump administration takes in Asia will be significant because the Asia-Pacific region faces a growing array of challenges, many of which require U.S. leadership. One such challenge is China's assertive actions in the South and East China Seas, which are inconsistent with the rule of law and suggest to some observers that it may not be committed to upholding the current international order. While China's rise is an important opportunity for the world, especially in the economic domain, countries including Japan are concerned about Chinese efforts to unilaterally change the status quo through coercion or the use of force. Likewise, there are concerns that China only selectively accepts the present international governance framework, as seen in its reaction to the recent ruling by the Permanent Court of Arbitration on the Philippines' South China Sea case. The United States and the international community should oppose such actions. In Japan and elsewhere, we are looking for strong U.S. leadership in upholding the principles and standards of the international order, on which we all depend.

One such area where U.S. actions will be particularly important to Japan is the issue of the Senkaku Islands. **I urge the new Trump administration to make clear that U.S. commitments under Article 5 of the U.S.-Japan Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security extend to all the territories under the administration of Japan, including the Senkaku Islands. I would also urge President-elect Trump to reaffirm that the United States opposes any unilateral action that seeks to undermine Japan's administration of the Senkaku Islands.**

The Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK) is another issue that needs U.S. leadership. With its nuclear weapon and ballistic missile tests; infringement on human rights, including abduction of Japanese and other citizens; and dictatorial decision making, the DPRK is becoming an increasingly dangerous threat for all the countries in the region. Japan would like to see the United States and China work together on this issue. **My hope is that President-elect Trump will move quickly and determinedly to stop the advance of the DPRK’s nuclear and missile programs and to restart the Six-Party Talks.**

Of course, the U.S. strength also comes from its soft power, in addition to its strong economic and military power, and we will look for continued U.S. leadership here as well. The United States has an unparalleled capacity to maintain international public goods and to protect the shared principles that are the foundation of the international order.

On the economic front, this means maintaining and deepening the liberal economic order, which is of paramount importance for the continued prosperity of the Asia-Pacific region. Asia’s growing economic interdependence is not just important for Asians—it has greatly benefited the United States.

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U.S. businesses have benefited from regional investment and trade, as well as the tremendous market opportunities provided by Asian consumers. Should President-elect Trump follow through with his plans to withdraw from the Trans-Pacific Partnership, the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership will likely set new standards for trade in Asia. Notably, this agreement will be concluded without U.S. participation. **For prosperity to continue, the Asia-Pacific region needs to continue to pursue high standards for trade and economic cooperation, and we need U.S. partnership to achieve this goal.**

Similarly, on the climate front, I hope that President-elect Trump will reconsider his stance on the Paris Climate Agreement. The Paris Agreement is invaluable; it provides for a sustainable earth, our most treasured international public good, and creates a new model for positive U.S.-China cooperation. Both countries, as the world’s two largest emitters, need to adhere to the agreement’s provisions to protect the progress that has been made.

U.S. leadership, partnership, and friendship have been essential elements of life in the Asia-Pacific region for decades. I hope that President-elect Trump and his administration will maintain this tradition and strengthen these relationships in the years ahead.