



“When an angry elephant shakes the grassland, it destroys the grassland and its own home. But long before that, other animals will disappear first.” This statement expresses the grave concerns over the influence of Donald Trump’s America on the world. The United States has led the world order for the last seventy years but is now negating its role to ensure security or gatekeeping free trade.

In President Trump’s inaugural address, there was no trace of universal values such as democracy, human rights, peacebuilding, and climate change. There were only slogans of “Buy American, Hire American.” On his first day of work, Trump announced the renegotiation of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and the withdrawal from the Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement (TPP). Some are calling this, “American nationalism on steroids.”

Mr. Trump will focus on eliminating Islamic terrorism, easing China-Russia ties, and reducing US military spending abroad. He will continue his tactics of “winning through intimidation” to achieve his goals quickly. He is rejecting the “one China” principle and planning to impose 45% retaliatory tariff on Chinese products. This is under the belief that once the Chinese economy is weakened by trade sanctions, jobs can return to the United States and the expansion of China’s military might be restrained to make “America great again.”

As part of an effort to contain China, he is making moves to strengthen the alliance network of Japan, Korea, and Australia. At the same time, he is calling for withdrawal of US troops, putting trade pressures and demanding for the US allies to bear the full cost to station American troops on their soils. He is not hesitant to make contradictory policies, such as strengthening alliance while withdrawing from the TPP. Nationalism in China and Japan is on the rise, and especially the emergence of Japan as a “strong normal state” will come closer to reality.

The policy toward the Korean peninsula will be divided into two parts: bilateral issues such as trade, defense spending, arms procurement; and North Korea policy that involves nuclear and missile issues. Trump will want to show the outcome of the foreign negotiations early. There is a possibility of him taking “kill the chicken to scare the monkey” tactics towards Korea—an exemplary case of a state whose security is much more sensitive than Japan or Germany. South Korea will have to negotiate with other countries in a balanced fashion, but it will not be easy to negotiate thoroughly with the US that controls its own army. Nevertheless, the ongoing negotiation for the transition of wartime operational control must take place at an earlier stage.

Two things can be considered for the North Korea policy. One is to negotiate with the United States (“deal” may be a better expression for Trump) and negotiate with North Korea with China’s involvement. Without China’s active participation, it is difficult to make effective sanctions or coercive measures in case of failure of negotiations with North Korea. Even if the US-China relationship is strained, China’s role in the nuclear negotiations is essential. Trump is likely to sit at the negotiation table when it is judged that the North Korea negotiations will help the 2018 midterm elections and the balance sheet for re-election in 2020. The United States is also trying to tie Japan and South Korea to form a missile defense network (MD) in the region as

a part of an effort for greater containment of China. It is South Korea's responsibility to formulate a solution plan by tackling the THAAD deployment issue, which is part of this strategic framework, aligned with the North Korean nuclear issue.

The other option is to keep the current situation and wait for a cycle of crisis management—i.e., 'North Korea provocation – US sanctions – military actions – crisis on the Korean peninsula – negotiation'—to develop. The former requires a huge amount of pre-investment, which encompasses South Korea's diplomatic and security capabilities, while the latter pushes the situation towards a risky post-management stage.

There is also a suggestion for a drastic shift in the North Korean policy to improve the inter-Korean relations first by resuming the Kaesong Industrial Complex and alongside this path approach the tougher nuclear and THAAD issues. The realistic approach is to gradually transform South Korea's North Korea policy by drawing a small but visible move toward the nuclear and missile issues. For North Korea, the US–North Korea relations hold the highest priority. South Korea must pursue its North Korea policy so its influential enough to have an impact on the United States.

Predictions are that the Trump administration is to have a tougher and more worrisome start than any US administration of the past. Not until this summer is the new Trump administration likely to be fully equipped with practical staff and specific policies. So the current/next government of South Korea should pay attention to the following three things.

First, South Korea should not be bounded by its past experiences with the United States—we don't know what the United States will bring to us, as no one knows the US quite that well anymore.

Second, from the onset, South Korea should not make any moves prematurely in line with Trump's moves. The policy direction may be different in a year or two from now. He can always change paths along the way to pursue practical interests.

Third, South Korean government must put a priority on establishing positions based on public opinion. Domestic support must be solid enough to withstand the force and pressure of Donald Trump and [Chinese president] Xi Jinping.

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