



President Trump's First Visit to Asia: Explaining his Asia Foreign Policy

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Abstract

President Trump spent his campaign denouncing the multilateral trade agreements that the United States has entered into over the past few years and insisted that he would negotiate fair trade deals that will benefit the United States, started his first visit to Asia as President with a focus on strengthening economic relations, promoting fair and reciprocal trade agreements, building a free and open Indo-pacific and building pressure on North Korea to denuclearise. On issues of security, he had been criticised during his Europe trip for not reiterate the United States promise to fulfil its security commitments to its allies. His statements during the Asia visit clearly stated the United States commitments towards its alliance partners. .

The president in his post visit address, hailed the visit a success. He stated that through the visit, the world is once again seeing the strength of the United States. Nonetheless, critics point out that, President Trump failed to denounce the human rights violations or the extra judicial killings in some of the nations he visited. Others point to the more practical aspect that no nation has announced new trade deals with the United States or provided a time-line to start negotiations/rework old trade agreements. It is also being pointed out that by trying to maintain the centrality of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations conference, and the subsequent East Asia Summit, two organisations that working towards multilateral trade partnership, President Trump has realised that in Asia he would have to balance his desire for bi-lateral trade with the region's need for a multi-lateral approach. In these forums also he has been unable to express the relationship that the United States would like to build with the nations of the Indo-Pacific. Nonetheless, all countries support the idea of free and open Indo-Pacific.

On North Korea denuclearisation, he has found support among all nations in the region. However, his repeated hints at the possibility of use of force have similarly alarmed countries who prefer a negotiated end to the impasse.

Thus, one can say that the visit was successful in some measure. President Trump articulated the focus areas of the United States policy in the region for the near future. In keeping with his method of working he has not stated how he will achieve these goals.

Introduction

President Donald Trump in his remarks to the American people at the conclusion of his twelve day five-nation Asia visit stated that he had been able to put American interests first while strengthening United States' ties with its allies and partners in the region. He stated that the trip was undertaken with three primary goals. First, is to unite the world against the nuclear menace posed by the North Korean regime. (He later announced that the United States has declared North Korea as a 'State sponsoring terrorism'.) The second goal was to strengthen American alliances and partnerships in a free and open Indo-pacific. And lastly, the visit was to insist on fair and reciprocal trade between the United States and other nations.¹

The President has termed the visit a great success for American foreign policy and he is confident that the economic relations will strengthen on a reciprocal basis bringing benefits to the American people. He is also confident that he has been able to forge strong defence ties with the nations he visited and they would be in the near future be buying defence equipment made in the United States. The White House and the President have been criticised for not raising the issue of human rights in China and the increasing number of deaths as a result of police action in the Philippine's war against drugs. The visit has been viewed by many as the beginning of President Trump's foreign policy towards Asia. The President has been famous for reversing or being critical of the foreign policy of President Barack Obama. He has stated that the previous administration has not taken a tough stand against North Korea or unfair trade practices that had allowed the situation to become so grave for the United States. However, he has also continued with some of the basic tenants of his predecessor's policies such as building on a dialogue with America's Asian partners and allies, and pushing for a diplomatic solution to the North Korean crisis. On the economic aspect he has continued to stress on the need to build strong bi-lateral relations with the countries of the region. As a member of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) and the East Asia Summit (EAS) both of which were celebrating milestone anniversaries, the United States has to balance its bi-lateral approach to economics with the multi-lateral approach of the APEC and Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).

This paper is an attempt to study the visit of President Trump to Asia based on the key issues raised by him, his joint statements and other speeches. It would also attempt to present views of the Asian nation and their perception of the US president's visit.

| Issues/Country | Japan | South Korea | China | Vietnam | Philippines |
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| North Korea | <p>In his joint statement with Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, President Trump stated, “we're working to counter the dangerous aggressions of the regime in North Korea. The regime continued development of its unlawful weapons programs, including its illegal nuclear test and outrageous launches of ballistic missiles directly over Japanese territory, are a threat to the civilized world and international peace and stability.”</p> <p>He further added, “<u>The era of strategic patience is over...</u> The United States of</p> | <p>President Trump stressed that, “We (the United States and South Korea) cannot allow North Korea to threaten all that we have built “We will together confront North Korea's actions and prevent the North Korean dictator from threatening millions of innocent lives.” “We call on every responsible nation, including China and Russia, to demand that the North Korean regime end its nuclear weapons and its missile programs, and live in peace.”</p> <p>He called on all nations to implement the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) regulations and cease trade and business entirely with North</p> | <p>In his joint statement with President Xi Jinping, he stated that, “<i>We agreed not to replicate failed approaches of the past -- and there were many. We agreed on the need to fully implement all U.N. Security Council resolutions on North Korea and to increase economic pressure...</i>”⁴</p> | <p>In his joint statement with President Quang, President Trump stated, “All responsible nations must act now to ensure that North Korea’s rogue regime stops threatening the world with unthinkable loss of life. Safety and security are goals that should unite all civilized nations. <i>We want progress, not provocation...We want stability, not chaos. And we want peace, not war.</i>”⁵</p> <p>He further stressed the importance of engaging with countries of the region to resolve the “North Korean problem”.</p> | No Reference (N.R) |

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| | <p>America stands in solidarity with the people of Japan against the North Korean menace.” He stated, “<i>American and Japanese military personnel train together, work together, and will stand together to defend the security and sovereignty of both of our countries.</i>”²</p> | <p>Korea.</p> <p>He stated, “<i>As we work together to resolve this problem using all available tools short of military action, the United States stands prepared to defend itself and its allies using the full range of our unmatched military capabilities if need be.</i>”³</p> | | | |
| Economic Relations | <p>In the joint statement, President Trump stated “America is also committed to improving our economic relationship with Japan. As President of the United States, I am committed to achieving a fair, free, and reciprocal trading relationship. <i>We seek equal and reliable access for American</i></p> | <p>In his joint statement with President Moon Jae-in, President Trump stated that, “we are looking at ways of improving our economic relationship. I would like to thank President Moon for instructing his trade negotiators to work closely with us to quickly pursue a much better deal -- a deal that, frankly, has been quite unsuccessful and not very</p> | <p>President Trump stated that while the United States is open to improving economic relations with China, <i>it wants a fair and reciprocal one.</i></p> <p>He stated that he had raised the issue with President Xi, and the two nations would jointly take steps to solve the matter of “massive trade distortion by addressing China’s market access</p> | <p>President Trump reiterated his views when he said, “We look forward to achieving a bilateral trade agreement with partners who abide by the principles of <i>fair and reciprocal trade -- two very important words: fair and reciprocal.</i> ... For trade to work, all countries must play by the rules.”</p> | <p>In his speech at the ASEAN summit, President Trump stated that, “we (the United States) also seek economic partnerships on the basis of fairness and reciprocity.”³</p> |

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| | <p><i>exports to Japan's markets in order to eliminate our chronic trade imbalances and deficits with Japan."</i></p> <p>He stated that closer economic ties between the two nations "will create new and exciting opportunities to achieve greater prosperity in both of our nations and to advance new frontiers in science, medicine, and technology."⁶</p> <p>Speaking at the United States and Japanese Business Leaders meeting he stressed that, "We believe that a balanced economic partnership will unlock new frontiers for discovery, unleash</p> | <p>good for the United States."</p> <p>He also said, "I feel confident that we'll be able to <i>reach a free, fair, and reciprocal trade deal</i> as we renegotiate our current five-year-old trade document."⁸</p> | <p>restrictions and technology transfer requirements, which prevent American companies from being able to fairly compete within China. The United States is committed to protecting the intellectual property of our companies and providing a level playing field for our workers."⁹</p> | <p>He further stated that the United States applauds the efforts of Vietnam to implement economic reforms and increase Vietnam's trade and investments in all directions. In this the United States looks to the Vietnamese middle class as a key market for American goods and services. President Trump was encouraged by the possible flow of American goods and services into Vietnam.</p> <p>He further welcomed Vietnam's commitment to lift trade barriers for agricultural products from the United States. He also stated that he would work with</p> | |
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new prosperity for our citizens, and improve the lives of millions and millions of people all around the world.”⁷

Vietnam to overcome the regions unfair trade practices.¹⁰

In addressing the countries of the region at the APEC CEO Summit at Da Nang, he stated that America seeks to build a partnership with the all the nations of the Indo-Pacific “rooted in the principles of fairness and reciprocity.” He stated that, “When the United States enters into a trading relationship with other countries or other peoples, we will, from now on, expect that our partners will faithfully follow the rules just like we do. We expect that markets will be open to

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| | | | | <p>an equal degree on both sides, and that private industry, not government planners, will direct investment.”¹¹</p> <p>In continuing with his push for bi-lateral trade deals he said, “ I will make bilateral trade agreements with any Indo-Pacific nation that wants to be our partner and that will abide by the principles of fair and reciprocal trade.”¹²</p> | |
| Indo-Pacific | In his meeting with the business leaders of the US and Japan, President Trump states that, “...in partnership with the United States, the sovereign nations of the Indo-Pacific will work together to | President Trump stated, “...Our alliance is more important than ever to peace and security on the Korean Peninsula and across the Indo-Pacific region. That is why Vice President Pence, Secretary of State Tillerson ... and Secretary | N.R. | In his joint statement he stated, “the United States is committed to a free and open Indo-Pacific, where strong, independent nations respect each other’s sovereignty, uphold the rule of law, and advance responsible | In his speech to the ASEAN member States he pointed out that the United States remains committed to the ASEAN and its central role of providing a platform for |

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| | <p>achieve a future of security, prosperity, and peace. We will have more trade than anybody ever thought of under TPP, that I can tell you. TPP was not the right idea.”¹⁴</p> | <p>of Defense Mattis, who was here just a short time ago, have all travelled to Seoul in the first year of my administration. It was very important to me that they did.”¹⁵</p> | | <p>commerce. We want our partners in the Indo-Pacific to be proud and self-reliant, not proxies or satellites.”</p> <p>In his remarks on the dispute in the South China Sea he stated, <i>“If I can help in any way, I’m a very good mediator and a very good arbitrator. I have done plenty of it from both sides. So if I can help you, let me know.”</i>¹⁶</p> <p>He further stated in his APEC CEO summit that, “APEC,...was founded to help achieve that very purpose (of a free and open Indo-Pacific). America stands as a</p> | <p>regional cooperation.</p> <p>He further stated, the diplomatic partnerships advance the security and prosperity of the American people and the people of all Indo-Pacific nations.</p> |
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| | | | | <p>proud member of the community of nations who make a home on the Pacific.” He spoke about the history of the United States relations with the countries of the region from 1784 when the first American ship sailed to China to the 1900s when the United States pushed against the imperialist powers. He stated, “We have been friends, partners, and allies in the Indo-Pacific for a long, long time, and we will be friends, partners, and allies for a long time to come.” He further elaborated that, “In the broader region, countries outside of APEC are also making great strides in this new chapter for the Indo-Pacific... this entire region has</p> | |
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| | | | | <p>emerged — and it is still emerging — as a beautiful constellation of nations, each its own bright star, satellites to none — and each one, a people, a culture, a way of life, and a home.”⁷</p> <p>“...we must uphold principles that have benefitted all of us, like respect for the rule of law, individual rights, and freedom of navigation and overflight, including open shipping lanes. Three principles and these principles, create stability and build trust, security, and prosperity among like-minded nations.”⁸</p> | |
| Defence Relations | President Trump stated, “American and Japanese military | In his joint statement President Trump made it clear, “As we (the United | N.R. | In his statement with President Quang, President Trump | N.R. |

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| | <p>personnel train together, work together, and will stand together to defend the security and sovereignty of both of our countries.”</p> <p>In his answer to the questions raised by the press, President Trump said, “the Prime Minister of Japan is going to be purchasing massive amounts of military equipment, as he should. And we make the best military equipment, by far. He’ll be purchasing it from the United States. Whether it’s the F-35 fighter ... or whether it’s missiles of many different kinds, it’s a lot of jobs for us and a lot of safety for</p> | <p>States and South Korea) work together to resolve this (nuclearisation of North Korea) problem <u>using all available tools short of military action</u>, the United States stands prepared to defend itself and its allies using the full range of our unmatched military capabilities if need be.”²⁰</p> <p>Replying to questions by the press, President Trump said, “We make the greatest military equipment in the world, whether it’s planes, whether it’s missiles. No matter what it is, we have the greatest military equipment in the world. And South Korea will be ordering billions of dollars of that equipment, which, frankly, for them makes a lot of sense. And</p> | | <p>stated that he was sure that American defence products would be able to meet <u>all</u> of Vietnam’s many needs.</p> | |
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| | Japan and other countries that are likewise purchasing a lot of military equipment from us... ¹⁹ . | for us, it means jobs; it means reducing our trade deficit with South Korea." ²¹ | | | |
| Terrorism/Afghanistan | N.R. | N.R. | In the joint statement, President Trump stated, "In order to create a more secure future for all and to protect our citizens from extremism and terrorism, President Xi and I also committed to working toward a peaceful future for Afghanistan. Terrorists are a threat to all of humanity, and we will stop radical Islamic terrorism." ²² | On security issues, we continue to work with our Vietnamese partners and with partners across the region on a range of challenges, including maritime security, counterterrorism, human and drug trafficking, cybercrime, and disease prevention. ²³ | N.R. |
| Drug Trafficking | N.R. | N.R. | It was also mentioned in the joint statement that the two nations would "enhance coordination to better counter the deadly drug trade and to stop the lethal flow of poisonous drugs into our countries and into our communities." ²⁴ | In his joint statement he did mention that the United States and Vietnam would work together to address the issue of drug and human trafficking. | N.R. |

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| | | | | <p>At his speech at the APEC CEO's summit he stated, "We must also deal decisively with other threats to our security and the future of our children, such as criminal cartels, human smuggling, drugs, corruption, cybercrime, and territorial expansion. As I have said many times before: All civilized people must come together to drive out terrorists and extremists from our societies, stripping them of funding, territory, and ideological support. We must stop radical Islamic terrorism."²⁵</p> | |
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PERSPECTIVES FROM ASIA ON PRESIDENT TRUMP'S VISIT

Japan and President Trump's Promises

Diplomatic relations between Japan and the United States took on a renewed strength during this visit. President Trump, in his speech to the defence forces at the Yokota Air Base hinted that Japan may acquire new military equipment from the United States. The following are some of the important issues that were discussed between the leaders of the two nations.

North Korea

Prime Minister Abe's political mandate before the snap elections in November 2017 was focused on the threat posed by North Korea. His uncompromising approach towards the issue along with his victory in the elections gave him a renewed drive to confidently engage in dialogue with the United States. President Trump expressed similar sentiments when he reiterated his own stance towards North Korea by condemning its nuclear tests and expressing the 'American resolve' to seek peace and stability for the region. It would seem that President Trump is eager to let Japan have a greater role in the region to "counter the dangerous aggressions of the regime in North Korea". Prime Minister Abe also mirrored these thoughts by remarking that the situation called "for applying maximum level of pressure on North Korea". Both leaders were appreciative of the fact that other world leaders had taken measures to downscale diplomatic and economic ties with North Korea. They affirmed the full implementation of the relevant UN Security Council resolutions on North Korea and also encourage other countries to do the same.

On November 20, 2017 President Trump announced his decision to relist North Korea as a state sponsor of terrorism. This move was much welcomed by Prime Minister Abe who remarked, "We welcome and support the act as it is expected to raise the pressure on North Korea." However, Kuni Miyake, a former diplomat and current president of the Foreign Policy Institute in Tokyo remarked, "Of course it's great to see that North Korea is listed as a state sponsor of terrorism. We welcome that. But is it a political victory for Mr. Abe? No, that's probably not the main point of this issue." Defence Minister Itsunori Onodera also lauded the designation, but warned that Kim's regime would likely lash out "strongly" in response.

Indo-Pacific

President Trump's commitment to Japan was directed not merely against the DPRK leader but, in all probability, also toward China's aggressiveness in the East and South China Seas when he referred to the "other challenges". The two leaders stressed the importance of the Indo-Pacific region, which is the core of the vitality of the world with its vast population and economic dynamism.

In addition, both leaders affirmed that Japan and the United States will work together to promote peace and prosperity in the region by developing the Indo-Pacific as a free and open region. They directed relevant ministers and institutions to flesh out detailed cooperation in the following areas:

- Promotion and establishment of fundamental values (rule of law, freedom of navigation, etc)
- Pursuit of economic prosperity (improvement of connectivity, etc) and
- Commitment to peace and stability (capacity building on maritime law enforcement, etc).

Both leaders reiterated that they will cooperate with any country that shares this vision of a free and open Indo-Pacific. Their bilateral cooperation was reflected in moves by the United States Trade and Development Agency (USDTA) and Japan's Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI) when they signed a Memorandum of Cooperation to help bring high-quality energy infrastructure solutions to the Indo-Pacific on November 6, 2017.

Economic Ties

On the economic aspect, President Trump called Japan, one of the United States' "closest and most cherished allies" and expressed his pleasure at discussing avenues to strengthen and improve economic ties between the two nations. Nonetheless, he expressed concern over the unequal trade between Japan and the United States. He stated that the United States exported goods worth US \$63.3 billion to Japan in 2016 while imports from Japan totalled US \$132.2 billion. President Trump stated that the two nations have to ensure that the trade between them is more free, open and reciprocal. The two leaders welcomed that Deputy Prime Minister Aso and Vice President Pence confirmed the importance of strengthening bilateral economic, trade and investment ties at the second round of the Japan-U.S. Economic Dialogue held on October 16.

Memorandums of Understanding were signed between the Overseas Private Investment Corporation (OPIC) and the Japan Bank for International Cooperation (JBIC) and Nippon Export and Investment Insurance (NEXI) highlighting their commitment to tackling development challenges and bolstering investment in infrastructure, energy and other critical sectors throughout Asia and the Indo Pacific, the Middle East, and Africa.

Pertaining to President Trump's clear messages on the need for balanced trade and greater market access commitments from Japan, Toyota and Mazda announced a US\$1.6 billion investment in a new manufacturing plant in the United States which has the potential to create more than 4000 jobs. The two leaders also reaffirmed their cooperation in cyber security and space explorations. In the field of motor vehicles, it was decided that the United States' safety standards will be deemed to meet the corresponding standards of Japan, and that imported motor vehicles under the Preferential Handling Procedure will be provided with equivalent opportunities to be eligible for government financial incentives.

Security Relations

The two leaders shared the view that they intend to continue to work toward enhancing the deterrence and response capabilities of the Japan-U.S. alliance amid an increasingly severe security environment in the region. Both leaders reconfirmed that the relocation of Marine Corps Air Station (MCAS) Futenma to Henokosaki is the only solution that avoids the continued use of MCAS Futenma and called for the steady implementation of the construction plan of the Futenma Replacement Facility (FRF). The Yomiuri Shimbun reported on November 20, 2017 that the

ministry of defence plans to add ground-fighting capability to anti-ship missiles and planned to start research from FY 2018. This is the first time for Japan to develop such full-fledged cruising missiles. Although the main purpose is to recapture remote islands occupied by enemies, attacks on enemy bases are also possible which is expected to lead to the deterrence of North Korea.

Regarding the purchase of defence equipment from the United States, Japanese chief cabinet secretary Yoshihide Suga took a cautious stance toward buying more equipment not already scheduled in the National Defence Program Guidelines and the Mid-Term Defence Program which decides the general framework for the budget and equipment purchases every five years. Japan's military and defence purchases have been on the increase ever since Prime Minister Abe came to power. Between 2008 and 2013, equipment purchases were 364.7 billion yen with 1.624 trillion yen between 2013 and 2017 under Prime Minister Abe.

Golf diplomacy was also another area where the two converged and forged warmer personal ties over and above diplomatic relations. On his visit to the Royal Akasaka Palace, President Trump was also invited to feed the koi fish. Trump's exchanges with the families of the abductees of 1970s also connoted significant focus on the issue of North Korean abductions of Japanese citizens in 1977. These informal gestures and engagements are bound to further strengthen the relationship which appears to be at a peak. That Trump chose Tokyo, and not Beijing or Seoul for his first stop also sends an important message to the international community on the strength of the relationship.

South Korea and President Trump

President Trump became the first American President to make a state visit to South Korea in the last 25 years. President Trump's stop in Seoul included a visit to Camp Humphreys, newly-built United States military base in South Korea, summit meeting with President Moon Jae-in and a speech in the Korean National Assembly. In view of the heightened security situation in Korean peninsula, North Korea's nuclear and missile programme remained the focus of President Trump's visit to Seoul.

North Korea

During the summit meeting, President Trump and President Moon pledged to maintain close consultation, coordination and cooperation on North Korean policy. Both leaders agreed to maintain maximum pressure and sanctions on North Korea. President Trump supported the Moon administration's principle of a peaceful resolution of the North Korean problem. In Seoul, President Trump, did not stress on the military option. At the joint press conference he said, "as we work together to resolve this problem using all available tools short of military action". However, he hinted that the military option is not off the table by saying that "the U.S. stands prepared to defend itself and its allies using the full range of our unmatched military capabilities if need be." President Trump reaffirmed that South Korea is an "important ally" and there will "no skipping South Korea". ("Skipping South Korea or "Korea passing" is an expression that articulated Seoul concern about South Korean being bypassed by the United States in its approach to North Korea.)

In his speech at the South Korean National Assembly, President Trump adopted an eloquent and restrained language in criticizing North Korea. President Trump stated that his mission in Seoul was to deliver two messages, one to the international community and the other to the North Korean leader Kim Jong-un. To the international community President Trump declared that the “time for excuses is over, now is the time for strength” and “the world cannot tolerate the menace of a rogue regime that threatens with nuclear devastation”. He urged all nations “to isolate the brutal regime of North Korea” and categorically said “you cannot support, you cannot supply, you cannot accept”. He called out to China and Russia in particular “to fully implement U.N. Security Council resolutions, downgrade diplomatic relations with the regime, and sever all ties of trade and technology”. Despite all the crimes that the regimes had committed President Trump offered an alternative path for a better future of North Korea. Trump declared that Washington is “prepared to discuss this brighter path for North Korea if its leaders cease their threats and dismantle their nuclear program.” In his joint press conference with President Moon Jae-in President Trump urged “North Korea to come to the table and to make a deal.”

Defence Ties

A significant outcome of the Summit meeting was in the defence sector. President Trump and President Moon agreed to step up “collaboration to enhance Korea’s self-defence capability to unprecedented levels”. The summit announced three initiatives. First, Seoul and Washington agreed to immediately start deliberations on South Korea’s acquisition and development of the state of the art United States military equipments. Second, both leaders agreed to completely eliminating the limits on the weight of South Korean missile warheads. Third, they announced rotational deployments of United States strategic assets in and around Korean peninsula. Among the three initiatives, more attention was given to the deliberations relating to Seoul’s acquisition of United States strategic military assets including nuclear-powered submarines and reconnaissance asset.

According to South Korean presidential office, deliberations are underway on the mechanism of procurement; direct buying or joint development. Either way, the process of acquisition is going to be complex and time consuming, given the fact that the United States has never exported a nuclear power submarine nor has it transferred that technology to any country. Media reports suggest that South Korea wanted to acquire E-8 Joint STARS, United States Air Force’s command and control aircraft tasked with ground surveillance and battle management. At the summit two leaders also adopted the 2017 revised missile guideline, which completely eliminated the restriction on the weight of South Korean missile warhead. The United States-Korea bilateral missile treaty which was signed in 1979 and revised latest in 2012, restricted South Korea to develop ballistic missiles with a range of up to 800 kilometres and a payload weight of up to 500 kilograms.

At the summit President Trump and President Moon reaffirmed their pledge to boost trilateral security cooperation with Japan for enhanced deterrence and defence against North Korean aggression. While South Korea has committed a trilateral coordination on dealing with North Korean provocation, however, they are cautious of the idea of a trilateral alliance.

At the summit, Seoul and Washington also agreed to share the cost of the alliance burden at an “adequate and reasonable level”. Resource burden sharing and trade are important issues raised by President Trump during his campaign and after he became president. Currently South Korea is contributing USD 867 million a year for the upkeep of US forces in Korea. The Special Measure Agreement, which deals with the financial aspect of the US-Korea military alliance, is due for revision in 2019.²⁶

President Trump’s deal making approach was very much at work at the summit. During the visit, President Trump promoted his “America First” strategy through arms sale and committing Seoul to invest in America and purchase more American products. Another factor was Seoul’s delicate diplomatic manoeuvring of the “China card”. A week before President Trump’s visit, Seoul and Beijing agreed to normalize their relationship which was hampered by Seoul’s decision to deploy THADD missile system.

Indo-Pacific

Seoul was also cautious about President Trump’s “free and open Indo-Pacific” initiative. In the joint press release they stated, “President Trump highlighted that the United States-Republic of Korea Alliance, built upon mutual trust and shared values of freedom, democracy, human rights, and the rule of law, remains a linchpin for security, stability, and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific”. However, the office of President Moon after President Trump’s departure stated that, “South Korea did not agree on the plan”. According to the presidential office, “The free and open Indo-Pacific concept, which the U.S. is recently suggesting, is in line with our effort to diversify diplomatic ground to some degree, but we concluded that more discussion is required about whether the concept is appropriate in carrying out our joint strategic goal. That’s why we wrote in the joint statement that Trump stressed the initiative, not that the two leaders agreed on it.”

Economic Ties

During the visit to Seoul, President Trump has also used measured terms in criticising South Korea on matters of trade. President Trump has been very critical of the United States-Korea Free Trade Agreement, calling it “horrible” and an agreement that has left America “destroyed”. He has spoken critically about trade issues in the past and had declared that he will “find a fair and reciprocal” deal. During the visit South Korean companies announced USD 74.8 billion worth business with the United States, which includes USD 17.3 billion investment in the United States by 42 companies and 24 companies have plans to purchase US goods worth USD 57.5 billion over the next five years. President Trump also mentioned during the joint press meet that “we have the greatest military equipment in the world and South Korea will be ordering billions of dollars of that equipment, which for them makes a lot of sense and for us means jobs and reducing our trade deficit with South Korea.”

President Trump’s visit to China

Donald Trump visited China as part of his first East Asia visit that also included visits to Japan, South Korea, and Vietnam. This visit was significant given the shrill noises on China during the Trump campaign with reference to the US economy, jobs and China’s alleged lack of adherence to rules of fair trade. The fact that President Trump became the first foreign leader to dine inside the

Jianfu Palace Forbidden City in China's modern era caught much attention. Receiving President Trump in the symbolic sanctum sanctorum of the Middle Kingdom underscores the importance China attaches to the United States and to the stable and predictable relations that it seeks.

Trade and Economic Issues

During his visit, the issue of trade imbalance appeared to be one of the central issues. In the joint statement, President Trump said, "We want a vibrant trade relationship with China. We also want a fair and reciprocal one. Today, I discussed with President Xi the chronic imbalance in our relationship as it pertains to trade, and the concrete steps that we'll jointly take to solve the problem of the massive trade distortion." The Trump administration has followed up on this point of massive trade distortion soon after the visit, when a new set of investigations into trade issues were authorised.²⁷ During the visit, the two sides entered into MoUs/ agreements worth US \$250 billion. These ranged from mobile phone chips to aircraft orders and if implemented would give significant support to President Trump's promises of job creation within the United States.

North Korea

The second and more critical recent issue that formed the backdrop to President Trump's visit were recurring North Korean missile tests and use of threatening language towards not only the United States but also its allies, South Korea and Japan. The United States administration has consistently believed that China has to do more to stabilise the Korean peninsula by using all the leverage that it believes China has vis-à-vis North Korea. China, on the other hand, has been advocating double-freezing. Wang Yi in his speech in New York in April 2017 had said that to resolve the nuclear issue on the Korean Peninsula, China has already proposed a "dual-track approach" to promote denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula and establish a peace mechanism in parallel. As the first step, China has put forward the "suspension-for-suspension" proposal, namely the suspension of nuclear activities and missile launches by the DPRK and the suspension of large-scale joint military exercise targeting the DPRK by the Republic of Korea (ROK) and the US".²⁸ However, this has not gained much currency from either side as both the tests and exercises have continued after a brief lull.

In the statement on this issue President Trump said, "We agreed not to replicate failed approaches of the past -- and there were many. We agreed on the need to fully implement all UNSC resolutions on North Korea and to increase economic pressure".²⁹ He added that "All responsible nations must join together to stop arming and financing -- and even trading with -- the murderous North Korean regime. Together, we have in our power to finally liberate this region and the world from this very serious nuclear menace. But it will require collective action, collective strength, and collective devotion to winning the peace." This indicates that the US would continue to push China into cutting off its financial line with North Korea and cut down Pyongyang's access to China's financial markets and banking system as a way of pressuring it to denounce nuclear weapons.³⁰

President Trump's Visit to Vietnam

Vietnam was the first Southeast Asian country that President Trump visited during this trip. Symbolising his closeness with the nation by wearing a Vietnamese shirt after reaching Hanoi,

President Trump was candid in his bilateral statements with his Vietnamese counterparts. Though both the leaders came out with their joint statements in support of strengthening the relations further, the visit was more on regular lines than being groundbreaking. No major trade agreements were discussed nor a time frame sought for. It was stated that US-Vietnam relations continue to strengthen and expand their current comprehensive partnership, rather than elevating it to a strategic partnership.

Bi-lateral Ties

Though there was reference to the need to enhance the volume of trade between the two countries, there was no mention of opening any negotiations for forging a bilateral trade agreement to achieve this goal. President Quang stated that there is still much room for further expansion of bilateral relations, and the two leaders discussed ways and means to further strengthen cooperation in a more substantive and effective manner in the time to come. He stated that the two sides will also promote the momentum for development of the economic and trade investment relations on the basis of mutual interest, minimize trade investment disputes, and continue to effectively implement the economic and trade agreements signed during the visit. Both leaders recognized the importance of protecting and promoting human rights. President Quang while replying to a question in the press conference stated that he has made known the Vietnamese stand with regard to the South China Sea issue, along with recent developments in this area. He reflected that it is our policy to settle disputes in the South China Sea through peaceful negotiations, and with respect for diplomatic and legal process, in accordance with international law, including the 1982 U.N. Convention on Law of the Sea.

The United States signed an agreement with Vietnam to acquire land in Hanoi to build a new embassy.

North Korea

Leaders of the two nations committed to each other their support to the global 'Maximum Pressure Campaign' to bring North Korea back to the path of denuclearization. President Quang stated that Vietnam is committed to seriously observing all the relevant resolutions of the UNSC.

Economic Relations

Both President Trump and President Trần Đại Quang agreed on the importance of the ASEAN-United States strategic partnership contributing to strengthening ASEAN-U.S. relations for peace, stability, cooperation and development in the Asia-Pacific and the world. On the bi-lateral front, the two nations pledged to deepen and expand bilateral trade and investment relations—in line with the commitment to pursue fair and reciprocal trade with key trading partners. They also signed USD \$12 billion in commercial agreements, which when implemented will include USD \$10 billion in United States content.

It should be noted here that on 05 December, the United States has imposed huge duties on some steel imports from Vietnam. The products will be subjected to punitive duties, which will be 265 percent of their value, as they were accused of being produced with Chinese materials, which were already subject to retaliatory penalties. The duties imposed are a preliminary finding

in the complaint filed by six US steel manufacturers, and the department will announce a final decision in February 2018.

Defence Cooperation

Within the spectrum of defence cooperation the United States formally transferred the first United States Coast Guard cutter to the Vietnamese Navy, enhancing Vietnam's maritime security and domain awareness capabilities. It was also announced that a US aircraft carrier will visit to Vietnam in 2018. This would be the first time a US aircraft carrier would visit the country. It would not only allow the United States to build its cooperation with the Vietnamese navy it would also have symbolic significance as the United States become more engaged in the water of the region with its allies and partners in an effort to contain North Korea and prevent China from expanding its sphere of influence. This was further cemented when the two sides reaffirmed the importance of freedom of navigation, over flights, and unfettered commerce in the South China Sea and their commitment to a rules-based approach to resolving maritime disputes. The United States also committed to a joint effort to clean dioxin-contaminated soil and sediment in Danang, Vietnam, and reaffirmed its commitment to contribute to remediation at Bien Hoa Airport.

President Trump at the APEC Summit

During his speech at the APEC CEO's summit the importance of the Indo-Pacific for the future United States foreign and economic policy became prominent, as President Trump stressed on building a free and fair economic ties with the region while strengthening security. In his speech he stressed that the United States was committed to building ties with the countries of the region based on mutual respect that was directed at mutual gain. While has been critical of multi-lateral trade grouping President Trump did praise the World Trade Organisation (WTO) and stated that the United States would adhere to the principles of intellectual property rights, free and equal market access as promoted by the WTO. Critical of the subsidies that are provided to state enterprises, he encouraged all nations to speak out against the practise which he felt was against private enterprises. He also stated that the United States was willing to do its part by reforming its development finance institutions so that they better incentivize private sector investment in the economies of the countries of the Indo-Pacific, and provide strong alternatives to state-directed initiatives that come with many strings attached. He pointed out that economic security was not related to national security but is national security and vital to the United States national strength.

President Trump in the Philippines

During his visit to Manila, President Trump participated in the 50th anniversary of ASEAN and the 5th ASEAN-US Summit to commemorate the 40th Anniversary of ASEAN-US Dialogue Relations. President Trump met with President Rodrigo Duterte on the sidelines of the ASEAN Summit, where both leaders while acknowledging their 70 years of partnership, reaffirmed their commitment towards strengthening their bi-lateral alliance which according to them ensured mutual security and contributes to regional peace, stability, and economic prosperity. The two sides reaffirmed their commitment to the Mutual Defence Treaty of 1951, as reinforced by the Enhanced Defence Cooperation Agreement. They also discussed proposals to support America's efforts to help modernise the Armed Forces of the Philippines and develop the capacity and

capability for maritime security. Further, both sides reiterated their commitment to uphold their principles including the freedom of navigation and over flights, and the exercise of self-restraint. They stressed the importance of peacefully resolving disputes in the South China Sea, in accordance with international law, as reflected in the Law of the Sea Convention.

While congratulating the armed forces of the Philippines for its success in liberating Marawi, President Trump vowed continued US support and assistance for the fight against terrorism and the rehabilitation of Marawi. Earlier on October 2, 2017, the US and Philippines troops launched a new joint counter-terrorism exercise. The week-long joint operation involved live-fire training, rescues in combat situations, and mass-casualty situation aboard ships. According to the United States Embassy, the drills will increase the overall US-Philippines readiness, improve bilateral responsiveness to crisis in the region, and further reinforce the decades-old alliance. On the economic front, both sides agreed to further deepen their extensive economic relationship. This included ways to expand their mutual commitment to free, fair, and balanced trade that increases economic opportunity for all. The two leaders recognised the importance of regular discussions under the US-Philippines Trade and Investment Framework Agreement to strengthen the trade relationship including making progress in the areas of market access related to agricultural products, intellectual property, customs and labour.

This year also marks the 40th Anniversary of ASEAN-US Dialogue Relations and during this period, ASEAN member-states together rank as the fourth largest export destination for US companies and 4th largest supplier of imports to the US, with a total two-way trade of \$211.8 billion in 2016. At the 5th ASEAN-US Summit on November 13, 2017, a joint statement released stated that ASEAN and the US supported mutual respect for the sovereignty, territorial integrity, equality, and political independence of all nations, according to the UN Charter, ASEAN Charter and based on international law. The joint statement shared commitment to peaceful resolution of maritime disputes without resorting to the threat or use of force and in compliance with the 1982 UNCLOS. In this, both sides recognised and supported ASEAN centrality and ASEAN-led mechanisms in the evolving regional architecture. The joint statement also mentioned the ASEAN-US Strategic Partnership and its implementing Plan of Action (2016-2020) in five priority areas of cooperation: economic integration, maritime cooperation, transnational challenges including climate change, emerging leaders, and women's opportunities. The ASEAN-US partnership is playing an increasing role in addressing transnational challenges while seeking to enhance cooperation in non-traditional security issues through the framework of the various ASEAN-led mechanisms such as curtailing the threat of terrorism and violent extremism through information sharing and law enforcement cooperation. The joint statement highlighted the strategic framework for economic engagement in which initiatives like the US-ASEAN Connect, and development programmes such as US-ASEAN Connectivity through Trade and Investment, would help deliver shared prosperity based on sustainable, inclusive economic growth and mutual benefits.

The Outcome of the President Trumps Visit to Asia

On some of the issues that he had stressed, President Trump was able to achieve some success in his meetings with the leaders of the five Asian nations.

One, the first priority area of countering the threat from North Korea, President Trump was able to get most nations of the region to support the full range of sanctions applied by the United Nations. However, this cannot be called a success as most countries had already applied UN sanctions. He also tried multilateral diplomacy to isolate Pyongyang. Along with military manoeuvres in the region, the United States is building on its trilateral cooperation with Japan and South Korea. During the visit, President Trump called on all “responsible” nations to fully implement U.N. Security Council resolutions, downgrade diplomatic relations with the regime, and sever all ties of trade and technology. It remains to be seen if Russia and China will continue to support United States backed sanctions in the UN. The two countries are opposed to regime change or collapse, or acceleration of unification of the Korean peninsula. President Trump has not found many supporters for his statements and tweets indicating that the United States was willing to exercise the military option against North Korea. The countries of the region as well as Russia have appealed for a more measured response. Perhaps, in view of this, one finds that during his visit he started on a collective view on the issue and did talk about the need to exercise all options, apart from the military with respect to North Korea. He was much more restrained in his views and it needs to be noted that North Korea did not test any missile system during his visit to the region.

One of his key objectives was fair and reciprocal trade for the United States. He had made it the centre-point of all his dialogues with the leaders. He put the blame on the previous administration for the imbalanced trade relations and for not doing enough to protect American interests. It was pointed out that his efforts to ensure security of the region was maintained especially in view of the threat posed by North Korean missiles; he called on nations to buy American defence hardware. He also pointed out that this would create more jobs in the United States while fulfilling the security needs of the countries in Asia. It was pointed out that he was a ‘transactional President’, nonetheless, if viewed from the perspective that he is the leader of the United States and he made his statements in the interests of the country he represents, then his visit can be called a success. He stated that, “Japanese companies have announced investments in the United States worth more than \$8 billion -- 17,000 jobs. Japanese manufacturers, Toyota and Mazda, announced that they will be opening a new plant in the United States that will create 4,000 jobs.... 42 South Korean companies announced their intent to invest in projects worth more than \$17 billion dollars in the United States, and 24 companies announced plans to purchase \$58 billion dollars in American goods and services.... In China, we also announced \$250 billion worth trade-investment deals that will create jobs in the United States....The United States and Vietnam recently announced \$12 billion in commercial agreements, which will include \$10 billion in U.S. content.”³¹ If all these investments and agreements do bear fruit, then President Trump would have achieved one of his major campaign goals of creating more jobs for the American people.

The third objective of the visit was to strengthen the United States economic partnerships and alliances in the Indo-Pacific. One could say that even in this aspect he was successful. His measured talks on security issues and his clear statements that the United States would stand by its allies in the region was seen as an assurance of United States commitment to the security of the region. He also stressed on the need to have a free and fair Indo-Pacific, a view that is shared by a number of countries of the region as they face growing assertiveness by China. President Trump also stated during his tour that he was willing to mediate in the South China Sea dispute if

it was so desired by nations, indicating that the United States would continue to be engaged in the region. The United States was unable to announce any new trade agreement at the end of the visit or propose alternatives to the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP). President Trump also decided to miss the East Asia Summit (EAS). It was stated that President Trump's return to the United States was schedule driven. It was reported by some newspapers that due to delays in the summit programme he delivered his prepared remarks to the leaders during lunch. The United States was represented by Secretary of State Mr. Rex Tillerson.

President Trump has also not stated how he plans to achieve fair trade with each of the United States' trading partners. On the other hand, the 11 countries (Australia, Brunei Canada, Chile, Japan, Malaysia, Mexico, New Zealand, Peru, Singapore and Vietnam) of the TPP reached an agreement to bring the alliance into force without the United States. The Trade ministers from the countries nations officially agreed on key aspects of the trade pact. The ministers agreed to suspend 20 provisions from the original TPP agreement, 11 of which are related to intellectual property. This includes provisions concerning the data protection period on new biologics (medical products derived from natural sources) and an extension of the copyright period. The new pact, after changes were made to the original TPP text, can take force 60 days after at least six signatories complete domestic procedures.

During the APEC summit he stated that he was willing to sign bi-lateral agreements with all nations of the Indo-Pacific that would be of mutual benefit, the Summit Leader's Declarations while talking about free and fair trade also reaffirmed the groupings commitment to a Free Trade Area for the Asia Pacific (FTAAP) to further APEC's regional economic integration. The APEC envisages inclusive sustainable growth and development for all its members. His speech nonetheless, provided some light on the future economic policy of the Trump administration by stating that in some areas the United States would follow the principles of the WTO such as in protecting intellectual property rights etc. His view is to build bi-lateral economic relations, bases on mutual respect and mutual benefit. It wants to partner nations while respecting their independence and sovereignty and wanting them to strong, prosperous, and self-reliant, rooted in their history, and branching out toward the future. It is only then that the partnership and the nations would be able to thrive and grow together in partnerships of real and lasting value. He further elaborated that the United States, "We will no longer tolerate the audacious theft of intellectual property. We will confront the destructive practices of forcing businesses to surrender their technology to the state, and forcing them into joint ventures in exchange for market access."³² This could be an attempt to position the United States as an alternative to China's policies in the region. He also made it clear that while he was not blaming nations for taking advantage of the poor economic policies of the administrations that had governed America before, thus making clear that relations with all nations remain important for the United States. He spoke about the need for building more infrastructure investment from both the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank, involving both, an institution born in the post war financial system and one that is a financial institution born in the region.

It would be safe to say that the Asia visit was not just restricted in its need to build United States policy towards Asia, but was projected towards his supporters and political bases within the United States. His stress on trade and buying more defence products from the United States is

with a view to his larger policy of generating more jobs within the country. It also allows private sector led initiatives to flourish. He also mentioned in all his speeches the growth in the American economy, the all time high stock market with record unemployment and the defeat of the ISIL as fulfilling the campaign promises that he had made.

The visit to Asia was a success to the extent that President Trump was able to put forth his administrations views on the region with a stress on the Indo-Pacific. It remains to be seen how his administration takes this forward during the rest of his presidency. His repeated use of the phrase "Indo-Pacific" is being seen as an acknowledgment of the need to recognise the role India and the Indian Ocean are likely to play in the region. The speeches of President Trump in all the capitals he visited were more nuanced than expected. The summits can be judged a success for reasons not for what President Trump said at the summit but for what he didn't say. The list includes, taking a moderate language in criticizing North Korea, avoiding his past remarks like "fire and fury" or the "military option" in regard to the North Korean issue and the scrapping of free trade agreements. The visit was not a success given the need to defuse tensions on the Korean peninsula or start negotiations for new trade deal. He has also been criticised for not talking on human rights and extra-judicial killings.

It remains to be seen if President Trump's "Make America Great Again" and "America First" are able to allay the fears that have arisen that the rejection of multilateralism will undercut the efforts of the region to build an inclusive economy. There is also a fear that his speeches did not highlight the future role of the United States in this region, which provides China with an opportunity to step in and work with its regional partners to adopt a leadership role in the region.

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Disclaimer: The views expressed are that of the Researcher and not of the Council.

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