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America and the World—The Effects of the Trump Presidency

Engage? Trump and the Asia-Pacific

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“Engage.” This was the captain’s signature command in the liberal internationalist sci-fi classic, *Star Trek, the Next Generation*. It is clear why. Engagement is the lifeblood of diplomacy. Maintaining dialogue and manifold ties with allies and rivals alike is the way to nourish relationships and forge new common ground. In US foreign policy, expansive engagement can be defined as “a broad-based grand strategic orientation,” or as Bill Clinton’s National Security Advisor Anthony Lake described it “active American engagement abroad on behalf of democracy and expanded trade.”¹ At the very least, you can’t get to yes without keeping the lines of communication open.

By that metric, the newly-ended Trump administration leaves behind a mixed legacy. The bombastic and mercurial approach to policy making in the past four years destabilized the economic and security architecture that have served U.S. interests in Asia-Pacific so well since 1945. President Donald Trump argued that such relationships are transactional and must be in America’s immediate interests. Since 2017, Trump’s public questioning of alliances, and especially America’s 2019 abandonment of its Kurdish allies in Syria, have diminished the value of security agreements with the United States.² The U.S. withdrew from the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), a multilateral trade agreement which was a crowning achievement of the Obama era. The TPP, revised and renamed, went ahead without American involvement. China, not the United States, was the biggest power at the bargaining table for a larger trade agreement, the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RECP), which was signed in 2020. With shaken allies and no part in the world’s largest trading bloc, America’s role in the Asia-Pacific is much reduced.

Trump’s hostile rhetoric and trade actions against China constrain cooperation between the world’s two largest economies. Modern-day Cassandras, and indeed China’s leader Xi Jinping himself, call out the threat of a new cold war.³ So far, so much disengagement. However, the administration also proved willing to shake up calcified conflicts and re-engage two of the thorniest and most intractable security situations in the region, the status of Taiwan and North Korea’s nuclear program. The fruits of those endeavors remain to be seen.

Security Engagement

Since the end of the Second World War, the U.S. has been able to project power globally through its security alliances with regional allies. These agreements allowed the U.S. to establish military outposts far beyond its own sovereign territory, creating a modern “empire of bases.”⁴ This strategy of cooperation has underpinned America’s global hegemony. It has also been undermined by President Trump.

¹ “National Security Advisor Anthony Lake’s Speech at the Johns Hopkins University, September 21, 1993,” *Foreign Policy Bulletin* 4 (November-December 1993): 45. As quoted in Evan Resnick, “Defining Engagement,” *Journal of International Affairs* 54:2 (Spring 2001): 552.

² Ben Hubbard, Charlie Savage, Eric Schmitt, and Patrick Kingsley, “Abandoned by U.S. in Syria, Kurds Find New Ally in American Foe,” *New York Times*, October 13, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/10/13/world/middleeast/syria-turkey-invasion-isis.html>.

³ “China’s Xi Warns against ‘New Cold War,’” *Al Jazeera*, January 21, 2021, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/1/25/chinas-xi-warns-against-new-cold-war-at-davos>.

⁴ Chalmers A. Johnson, *The Sorrows of Empire: Militarism, Secrecy, and the End of the Republic* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2003).

The President openly questioned the value of American allies and the empire of bases strategy, taking to twitter and making off the cuff remarks both in front of the cameras and behind closed doors. These casual statements undermine what had been enduring relationships. The U.S.-Japan security alliance is the foundation of America's ability to project military power in the Asia-Pacific and perhaps the most important alliance since end of World War Two. However, Trump has proved capricious about the relationship. Immediately after a May 2017 bilateral meeting with Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, Trump stated that "US-Japan alliance is steadfast and ironclad. We want peace, and we want stability."⁵ However, just weeks later he took a different line. Japan, he argued, took "tremendous advantage of the United States" through the arrangement.⁶ In his blustering negotiation style, Trump first disparaged alliances and then demanded that allies pay huge payments to maintain them. He demanded 400% and 500% increases in annual contribution to the cost of hosting U.S. troops from Japan and South Korea, America's most important regional partners. He then threatened to destabilize the region and embolden North Korea by pulling troops out if host countries didn't pay up.⁷ Most of Trump's demands were ultimately repulsed, and the alliances continue, but with little warmth and less trust.

America's 70 year old security alliance with the Philippines has been even more badly damaged than relations with Japan or South Korea. Philippine politics play a role in the current contentiousness of the U.S.-Philippine relationship. President Rodrigo Duterte came into office in 2016 with a confrontational style and the promise of big changes. He advocated a reorientation away from the United States and toward friendlier relations with China and Russia. The Philippines was able to avoid threats of exorbitant "cost sharing" like those made against Japan and South Korea by announcing a unilateral end to the Visiting Forces Agreement (VFA) in February 2020. The declaration may only have been a delay tactic. Action on it has been suspended twice (most recently in Nov 2020), and the Biden administration will have a chance to renegotiate before the next deadline expires.⁸ Still, the legacy of this issue is a much shakier U.S.-Philippines alliance.

Adding injury to insult, hardball protectionist trade policies targeted these allies. At a donor event in March 2018, Trump threatened South Korea's national security in order to strengthen America's bargaining position on trade. "We have a very big trade deficit with them, and we protect them," Trump said. "We have right now 32,000 soldiers on the border between North and South Korea. Let's see what happens."⁹ Such threats, reported around the world, undermined the credibility of the U.S. security umbrella and threw the value of being America's ally into question.

The administration later imposed what it called "national security tariffs," designed to boost domestic production of steel and aluminium, a blow to major allies like Japan and Taiwan.¹⁰ The tariffs were driven by domestic political messaging more than American economic or strategic interests. By August 2020 most imports had to be given a tariff exemption to avoid catastrophic shortages.¹¹ Because tariffs were

⁵ "Donald Trump: 'US-Japan Alliance is Steadfast and Ironclad'," *BBC News*, May 27, 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/news/av/world-asia-48420185>.

⁶ Linda Sieg and Daniel Leussink, "Trump Renews Criticism of Japan-US Alliance before G20 Summit," *Reuters*, June 27, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-g20-summit-trump-japan/trump-renews-criticism-of-japan-us-alliance-before-g20-summit-idUSKCN1TS057>.

⁷ Jesse Johnson, "Trump Demanded Japan Cough up \$8 Billion for U.S. Troops — or Risk Pullout, Bolton Says," *Japan Times*, June 22, 2020, <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2020/06/22/national/us-donald-trump-japan-troops-john-bolton/>. "U.S. And South Korea Negotiate Cost-Sharing Deal of U.S. Military Presence," *All Things Considered*, March 5, 2020, <https://www.npr.org/2020/03/05/812644970/u-s-and-south-korea-negotiate-cost-sharing-deal-of-u-s-military-presence>.

⁸ "Philippines Extends Termination Process of U.S. Troop Deal, Eyes Long-Term Defence Pact," *Reuters*, November 11, 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-philippines-usa-defence/philippines-extends-termination-process-of-u-s-troop-deal-eyes-long-term-defence-pact-idUSKBN27R0RD>.

⁹ Veronica Stracqualursi, "Trump Apparently Threatens to Withdraw US Troops from South Korea over Trade," *CNN*, March 16, 2018, <https://www.cnn.com/2018/03/15/politics/trump-us-troops-south-korea/index.html>.

¹⁰ Chad P. Bown, "Trump's Steel and Aluminum Tariffs are Cascading out of Control," *Peterson Institute for International Economics*, February 4, 2020, <https://www.piie.com/blogs/trade-and-investment-policy-watch/trumps-steel-and-aluminum-tariffs-are-cascading-out-control>.

¹¹ "US Waived Extra Tariffs on 70% of Japanese Steel and Aluminum," *Nikkei Asia*, August 11, 2020, <https://asia.nikkei.com/Economy/Trade/US-waived-extra-tariffs-on-70-of-japanese-steel-and-aluminum>.

so harsh that domestic producers couldn't meet demand, American manufacturers were left without needed materials and friendly powers were alienated.

Economic Engagement

The 2017 withdrawal from the TPP represents a significant missed chance. If the goal of economic engagement is squeezing the most concessions out of a trade deal, then for a powerful actor like the United States much can be gained by one-to-one agreements. There is no possibility of smaller powers banding together to strengthen their positions, as can happen in multilateral negotiations. Clearly, this is how Trump viewed trade strategy. As he explained via a tweet, "I don't like the deal [the TPP] for the United States....Bilateral deals are far more efficient, profitable and better for OUR workers."¹² Trump walked away from the TPP and instead focused its energies on hardball renegotiations of bilateral agreements. However, U.S. interests are served by something much larger than wringing every last concession from individual states. Big agreements increase U.S. influence by using the pull of what is still the world's largest economy to hold allies close and bring others into the American orbit. They are a chance to write the rules that shape trade decisions in accordance with American interests and values, even when members are not trading with the United States.

The TPP was intended to be a "gold standard in trade agreements to open free, transparent, fair trade, the kind of environment that has the rule of law and a level playing field," which would "cover 40% of the world's total trade and build in strong protections for workers and the environment."¹³ Although China was not included in the deal, it was expected to shift regional norms and encourage China to adopt trade practices which benefit the United States, especially intellectual property protections. When the U.S. pulled out of the deal, the agreement evolved into the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP), with 11 signatories. The new deal uses language on labor standards, environmental protections, and dispute resolution agreements taken from TPP drafts. However, members removed rules on intellectual property which America had previously fought to include. These included technology protections, and patent and copyright term lengths, which were meant to protect U.S. pharmaceutical products against competition from generics.¹⁴

Without American participation, the CPTPP is smaller than intended. Rather than being attractive enough to draw more neighbors to sign on to U.S.-backed rules in return for access, its diminished size instead left room for a new larger trade agreement, the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP). Signed in November 2020, this agreement brings China, not the United States, into the world's largest trading bloc. RCEP also includes South Korea and the ASEAN members who had not joined CPTPP. Accordingly, rather than reinforcing American-backed norms, this new agreement was negotiated without U.S. involvement. Reflecting Chinese and ASEAN preference for non-interference, it is far less strict than the CPTPP, with few new rules on intellectual property, and none on labor and environmental standards.¹⁵

Combined, CPTPP and RCEP will increase trade and integration within Asia, but they are certainly not good for America's influence in the region. China's recently declared interest in joining the CPTPP is another opportunity to strengthen that country's foreign connections and counter American containment strategies.¹⁶ Pro-business publications like *Forbes* call on the new Biden administration

¹² As Trump has been banned from twitter, his original tweets have been removed. However, the quotation appears in Nyshka Chandran, "Trump Appears to Rule Out Rejoining the TPP," *CNBC*, April 18, 2018, <https://www.cnbc.com/2018/04/18/president-donald-trump-says-he-doesnt-like-tpp-deal-for-us.html>.

¹³ Hilary Clinton in 2012, as quoted in Michael A. Memoli, "Hillary Clinton Once Called TPP the 'Gold Standard,'" *Los Angeles Times*, September 26, 2016, <https://www.latimes.com/politics/la-na-pol-trade-tpp-20160926-snap-story.html>.

¹⁴ Jack Caporal, "The CPTPP: (Almost) One Year Later," *Center for Strategic and International Studies*, November 5, 2019, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/cptpp-almost-one-year-later>.

¹⁵ Peter A. Petri and Michael Plummer, "RCEP: A New Trade Agreement that Will Shape Global Economics and Politics," *Brookings*, November 16, 2020, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2020/11/16/rcep-a-new-trade-agreement-that-will-shape-global-economics-and-politics/>.

¹⁶ Hemant Adlakha, "With RCEP Complete, China Eyes CPTPP," *The Diplomat*, December 22, 2020, <https://thediplomat.com/2020/12/with-rcep-complete-china-eyes-cptpp/>.

to “reconsider the TPP ...[and] rethink a U.S. retreat.”¹⁷ However, it is harder to negotiate concessions when joining an existing club. In addition, 2016 campaign rhetoric demonized the agreement as “potential disaster for our country,” making it politically toxic.¹⁸

Rather than creating a lucrative trade agreement based on U.S.-written rules that China and others would be required accept in order to join, Trump’s withdrawal from the TPP has created two massive trade agreements from which the US is excluded.

Diplomatic Engagement

Shake-ups

While Donald Trump’s North Korean diplomacy came to nought in the short term, it may pave the way for future successes. The precedent of highest-level discussions alone lowers the barrier for future talks. They may also have revealed a fundamental misunderstanding in the United States of North Korea’s position. The country is extremely unlikely to give up its nuclear arsenal before receiving concessions, and future overtures may be more likely to take this reality into account. If so, then a temporary diplomatic failure followed by continued engagement brings potential for something new and constructive in what had become a stagnant situation.

The question of Taiwan’s political status is another knotty issue which the Trump administration has re-engaged with fresh thinking. America has been a stalwart supporter of the Kuomintang since the 1930s, when that party controlled China.¹⁹ It remained so when the party lost control of the mainland during the Chinese civil war, and continued to recognize the government of Taiwan as the sole legitimate government of China until the 1970s. After diplomatic relations were established with the People’s Republic of China in 1979, the U.S. ceased formal relations with the government of Taiwan as a state, and began an informal and ambiguous relationship which continued alongside American security guarantees and arms sales to build up Taiwan’s defences against a forced reintegration with the mainland.

America’s policy of “strategic ambiguity” adopts a kind of Schrödinger’s-cat approach to solve the paradox between Taiwan as a stable democratic ally and Taiwan as a region within the People’s Republic of China. As long as one doesn’t open the box and look inside, both mutually exclusive options can be true at the same time. Trump has moved away from this policy, stating that America was not necessarily committed to a One China policy. Instead, his administration sent two high-level visitors to Taiwan. On August 10, 2020, Secretary of Health and Human Services Alex Azar signed a memorandum of understanding and meet with Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-wen. A month later Under Secretary of State for Economic Growth, Energy, and the Environment Keith Krach attended the state funeral of former President Lee Teng-hui. In the final weeks of the Trump administration Secretary of State Mike Pompeo declared that the U.S. would end its ambiguous and informal diplomatic form of relations with Taiwanese counterparts. The form had been a misguided “attempt to appease the Communist regime in Beijing,” he said, “No more.”²⁰ Such strong statements and actions explain why Taiwan alone in the region rooted for Trump in the recent US election.²¹

¹⁷ Robert Goulder, “It’s Not Just The Taxes and Tariffs: Why Biden Should Reconsider The Trans-Pacific Partnership,” *Forbes*, December 22, 2020, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/taxnotes/2020/12/22/its-not-just-the-taxes-and-tariffs-why-biden-should-reconsider-the-trans-pacific-partnership/?sh=578e1fec1051>.

¹⁸ Donald Trump, as quoted in “Trump Executive Order Pulls out of TPP Trade Deal,” *BBC News*, January 24, 2017, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-38721056>. Hillary Clinton also hedged on TPP during her 2016 presidential campaign, indicating she would push for more restrictions on currency manipulation. Michael A. Memoli, “Hillary Clinton Once Called TPP the ‘Gold Standard.’ Here’s Why, and What She Says About the Trade Deal Now,” September 26, 2016, <https://www.latimes.com/politics/la-na-pol-trade-tpp-20160926-snap-story.html>.

¹⁹ See Dayna Barnes, *Architects of Occupation: American Experts and the Planning for Postwar Japan*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2017), 12-15.

²⁰ Robert Eldridge, “Trump’s Whiplash Policy on Taiwan,” *Japan Times*, January 17, 2021, <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/opinion/2021/01/17/commentary/world-commentary/trump-taiwan-us-china/>.

²¹ Matthew Smith, “Who Do People in Asia-Pacific Want to Win the US Presidential Election?” *YouGov*, October 15, 2020, <https://today.yougov.com/topics/politics/articles-reports/2020/10/15/who-do-people-asia-pacific-want-win-us-presidential>.

However, the status of Taiwan is a “red line” issue for China, a non-negotiable question of state sovereignty. Demanding clarity and an end to strategic ambiguity is unlikely to end well for independence-minded Taiwanese. China has repeatedly warned that this is a matter over which it will go to war, and open conflict is in no party’s interest. For this reason, the Biden administration is likely to return to a policy of non-confrontational ambiguity, focusing on concrete support for Taiwan rather than declarations which stir up the situation and add to a sense of crisis. But despite Trump’s changes, support for Taiwan is a bipartisan constant in U.S. politics. In his first two weeks in office, Biden has continued arms sales to Taiwan and sent U.S. warships transiting the Taiwan Strait. New thinking and a non-traditional approach did not yield quick results.

Trump-era shake ups of North Korean negotiations and diplomatic relations with Taiwan appear not to have changed the status quo. However, they may yet bear fruit.

China

The Trump era has seen a rise in harsh anti-Chinese rhetoric. The ideological divide and intense rivalry has raised fears of a new cold war. Certainly, Sino-skepticism has been a plank in the Trump platform, as seen in publicized moves against Chinese technology firms like Huawei and TikTok. It appeared in references to the new Coronavirus disease as the “China virus,” and expulsions of Chinese journalists. Trump White House’s national security strategy for the Indo-Pacific, which was declassified and released in the final days of the administration, is illuminating. Drafted in the administration’s first year and endorsed by Trump, the document confirms that US policy goal in the region is to contain and constrain China.²² As one analyst put it, “the United States ... is increasingly defining competition with China in zero-sum terms.”²³ Beijing bashing rhetoric was stepped up in the 2020 campaign cycle, fomenting American hostility toward China. Combined with increasing Chinese assertiveness, especially over Hong Kong, it made the “basic premise of the Trump policy... that China is now an adversary” into a bipartisan and accepted part of American politics.²⁴

There are upsides to a cold war. It could rally popular domestic support for government and tighten bonds between allies in the face of a shared foe. Friedrich Nietzsche argues that it is the struggle of war, not peace, that improves us.²⁵ We can see this in some past responses to Cold War challenges. For example, the Soviet Union’s criticism of American racism was a driver of the civil rights movement.²⁶ We may see a similar dynamic in response to America’s recent declaration that China’s treatment of its Muslim Uyghurs population constitutes a genocide.²⁷ Still, a cold war between the U.S. and China would diminish the potential for cooperation between the world’s first and second largest economies, likely with deleterious effects on both regional stability and the American ability to project influence in the Asia-Pacific. Cold wars are dangerous. They heighten tensions and limit options. They are polarizing, and lead to violence through proxy wars. The escalating trend of harsh rhetoric and threats is therefore alarming.

The United States and China have vast areas of overlapping common interest. China has and does benefit from international architecture long championed by the United States. Its very successes in economic engagement only reinforce what the country has to gain from maintaining a stable system of rules-based order by which all parties abide. However, in a climate of “China bashing,” President Biden may calculate that he cannot afford to lose domestic political capital by rolling back aggressive U.S. policies against China, even if his

²² “U.S. Strategic Framework for the Indo-Pacific,” Trump White House Archives, accessed March 1, 2021, <https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/IPS-Final-Declass.pdf>.

²³ Mireya Solís, “U.S.-Japan Relations in the Era of Trump: Navigating the Turbulence of “America First,” *México y la Cuenca del Pacífico* 24, no. 8 (September 2019): 12 note 4, https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/20190903_japan_us_relations.pdf.

²⁴ “A New Cold War: Trump, Xi and the Escalating US-China Confrontation,” *Financial Times*, October 4, 2020, <https://www.ft.com/content/7b809c6a-f733-46f5-a312-9152aed28172>.

²⁵ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Antichrist*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1923), 43.

²⁶ Mary L. Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights: Race and the Image of American Democracy*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011).

²⁷ Edward Wong and Chris Buckley, “U.S. Says China’s Repression of Uyghurs Is ‘Genocide,’” *New York Times*, January 19, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/01/19/us/politics/trump-china-xinjiang.html>.

administration believed doing so were in the country's best interest.²⁸ This is exactly the kind of self-imposed straightjacketing that makes cold-war logic illogical and hard to escape once caught.

Moral Engagement

The fact that America is a symbol of democracy, rule of law, and human rights is important to the country's soft power in the region. It is also the basis of America's place in "the quad," a quadrilateral relationship between the US, Australia, Japan, and India, which is the focus of American plans for stability in the region. The Trump administration adopted the term "Indo-Pacific" to describe the region, and took part in the first-ever ministerial-level meeting of the quad in 2019.²⁹ However, aspects of the Trump era have dealt a blow to the international prestige of the U.S. political system and call into question America's commitment to the shared values of the quad.

Once in office, Trump launched a rhetorical assault on democratic values and institutions, including the free press. He claimed that the press is "truly the enemy of the people," branded the paper of record in the United States, the *New York Times* a "Fake News paper," and described the conservative *Washington Post* as "Crazed and Dishonest."³⁰ Trump often refused to call fellow leaders to account for human rights abuses, instead engaging in moral relativism. In response, one senator lamented on twitter "We are watching in real time as the American human rights bully pulpit disintegrates into ash."³¹ After losing his bid for a second term in November 2020, Trump openly rejected the results of election, claiming fraud and calling on his supporters to "stop the steal." The result was the January 6th insurgency on the capitol and an unprecedented second impeachment.³² These actions gave ammunition to regimes which are sceptical of democracy as a stable form of governance by eroding belief in the media, elections, and peaceful transfers of power. They may embolden and lend political cover to events like the recent military coup in Myanmar.

Trump's Legacy in Asia

For all the sound and fury about re-evaluations and putting America first, strategic goals actually changed very little. While some Trump policies damaged U.S. prestige and antagonized America's allies, those traditional relationships survive. The Trump White House policy document on national security strategy for the Indo-Pacific, while highly aggressive in its containment strategy for China, is otherwise actually quite conventional. Listed under "Top interests of the United States in the Indo-Pacific" is the aim to "Enhance the credibility and effectiveness of our alliances," with references to India, Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan throughout.³³ Strong security alliances and a liberal economic order remain cornerstones even after a dramatic outsider re-evaluation of U.S. policy interests.

But perhaps what will turn out to be the most significant Trump administration actions to U.S.-foreign relations were not intended as foreign policy at all. The botched response to the COVID-19 pandemic in the United States economically and politically weakened the country, at least in the medium term. A more organized and centralized response from governments including China has meant that the relative impact of a global health crisis has been uneven. As the United States reels, China has resumed a semblance of normalcy. China's economy continues to grow while America's has contracted. This will speed up an existing shift in the balance of power in China's favor,

²⁸ Eric Yu-Chua Huang, "Taiwan's Opportunities and Risks During the Post-Trump, New Biden Era," *Brookings Institution Taiwan-U.S. Quarterly Analysis series*, December 14, 2020, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2020/12/14/taiwans-opportunities-and-risks-during-the-post-trump-new-biden-era/>.

²⁹ "A Free and Open Indo-Pacific: Advancing a Shared Vision," *U.S. Department of State*, November 4, 2019, <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Free-and-Open-Indo-Pacific-4Nov2019.pdf>.

³⁰ Brett Samuels, "Trump Ramps up Rhetoric on Media, Calls Press 'The Enemy of the People'" *The Hill*, April 5, 2019, <https://thehill.com/homenews/administration/437610-trump-calls-press-the-enemy-of-the-people>.

³¹ Mark Landler, "Trump's 'Very Friendly' Talk with Duterte Stuns Aides and Critics Alike," *New York Times*, April 30, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/04/30/us/politics/trump-duterte.html>.

³² Dan Barry and Sheera Frenkel, "'Be There. Will Be Wild!': Trump All but Circled the Date," *New York Times*, January 8, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/01/06/us/politics/capitol-mob-trump-supporters.html>.

³³ "U.S. Strategic Framework for the Indo-Pacific," Trump White House Archives, accessed March 1, 2021, <https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/IPS-Final-Declass.pdf>.

particularly in the Asia-Pacific region. And, if a new cold war that is based on an ideological divide has indeed begun, the success of China's Coronavirus response thus far has been a powerful argument for centralized, communal, authoritarian systems over the decentralised and highly individualistic American model.

As a historian, I quail at predicting the future, particularly in such eventful times. So much still feels precarious as I write from what may be the near end or mere beginning of a global pandemic. The past four years have seen a weakening of American influence around the world. Voices questioning the long term leadership potential of the United States in the Asia-Pacific no longer speak in a whisper. Cold war rhetoric has raised tensions and hinders America's ability to cooperate with a declared rival. Trump's tweets have made America appear an unreliable ally even to its closest friends. But, Trump's fresh approach has shaken up issues related to North Korea and Taiwan. The outcomes of that re-engagement may yet yield new paths out of what have been intractable problems.

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