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Peter Roff talks about America

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Trump Comes to Asia

By

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President Donald Trump's Asia visit – which consists of a 12 day trip through five countries – is the longest of any U.S. President since George Herbert Walker Bush toured the region in 1991. To those who understand how the president thinks, that's important.

Trump believes time and attention are an important component of business relationships and has carried that philosophy into the White House with him. The more essential an ally is, the more time you spend in consultation with them discussing issues of importance, building the relationship in the down time so that it will be there on an unquestioned basis when crises occur.

President Trump consults frequently with Prime Minister Abe by phone, mostly about the situation in North Korea. The two men are believed by many U.S. analysts to have formed a warm, cordial relationship based on mutual respect that is fruitful to the ambitions and needs of both countries.

Overall, says the White House, the president has five objectives in mind as he visits Asia, the first being to demonstrate America's commitment to the region, something that he feels strongly about as a personal matter according to those close to him. The fact no sitting president has traveled to more Asian countries over the course of a single trip since George W. Bush visited Japan, the Philippines, Thailand, Singapore, Indonesia, and Australia in 2003 is, notable. Trump measures things in orders of magnitude, something U.S. commentators have observed and at which U.S. late night television comics, who collectively are something of a barometer of the nation's political views, continually poke fun. Nonetheless Trump, who as a real estate developer puts a premium on elegance and opulence, considers whether something is “the biggest,” “the best,” “the longest,” “the most” and other concepts that suggest an achievement is top of the mark to be significant. It is expected he will use both his public and private appearances during the trip to underscore his commitment to strengthening longstanding United States alliances and expanding new partnerships which has ramifications especially in the area of trade.

Trump has been described as a protectionist rather than a free trader. This is unfair. He believes his job is to look out for the interests of the people of the United States as well as its economic health. He, unlike other policymakers on the right, is both aware and concerned about the ways in which expanded trade has displaced American workers who cannot find jobs at home – and cognizant of the role these people played in putting him

the White House. He is for free trade as long as it is also fair trade which, in his mind, means the United States at all times gets the better end of the deal or, at worst, at least gets as much as it gives.

Whether what he calls “bad trade deals” bear as much responsibility for the economic displacement experienced by U.S. workers since the 1970s is of little actual importance. It is a matter of symbolism since most American voters are moved by what they think has happened rather than but what actually may be the case.

Also at the top of the president’s list is the need to strengthen the international community’s resolve to de-nuclearize North Korea.

Expect the president, at each of his stops, to emphasize American resolve in countering the threat posed by Pyongyang’s development of nuclear capabilities and its missile program to the peace and security of the region and the world.

The United States remains committed to the complete, verifiable, and permanent de-nuclearization of the Korean Peninsula, which can best be achieved through the application of maximum diplomatic and economic pressure. Expect the president to reference this point repeatedly while defining the specific objectives of U.S. policy as being to dent North Korea the resources necessary to fund nuclear and missile programs and to convince the regime to reject the path of provocation and confrontation.

That begins, sources inside the White House suggest, with all nations implementing U.N. Security Council resolutions and sanctions and end any trading relationships that directly fund North Korean nuclear and missile development programs.

The president is likely to call on Japan and other countries in the region to further downgrade their diplomatic relationships with Pyongyang and, where applicable, to expel North Korean guest workers. Standing together, presenting a strong coalition of opponents to North Korean military expansionism is the best course of action. The United States will defend itself and our allies against the North Korean threat, using the full range of our capabilities if called upon to do so but, hopefully, it will not reach that point. The president will also use the trip to promote what is being called in Washington “A Free and Open Indo-Pacific” stretching from the Indian subcontinent to the North American West Coast.

To this end Trump will reinforce the U.S. commitment to a system based on respect for sovereignty, the rule of law, open markets, fair and reciprocal trade, freedom of navigation, and private sector-led economic growth. Increased connectivity among Indo-Pacific nations is essential if a range of trans-national challenges are to be addressed successfully.

At the same time, something that is never far from the president's mind is the need to advance American prosperity. Count on him to mention at every stop and to every leader he encounters that it is his responsibility to promote U.S. economic interests and that this is something the American people elected him to do.

In this regard he will consistently advocate for free, fair, and reciprocal trade and investment policies that benefit all nations, as previously mentioned, but also to focus on the need to reduce trade deficits by insisting upon future deals all being keyed to the need to expand market access opportunities. Unfair tariffs, restrictions on investment, forced technology transfer and intellectual property theft, industrial subsidies, and non-market interventions all work against Trump policies. Any failure to address them by Asian trading partners, current and potential, will seriously impede the progress of future deals.

As the president sees it, America is open to trade and leads the world in free and fair trade and investment and the rest of the world should, if they want to take advantage of that, reciprocate U.S. openness and fairness in order to promote economic growth and development for all.

There's a lot to do but a lot of success on which to build. Those close to the president, in the days before he departed for Asia, emphasized this in their talking points. The Japanese people can be confident the president regards the alliance between the United States and Japan as essential to global security and economic freedom. While in Japan and after he will talk trade, and he will talk tough, but that's because he's a tough negotiator – not because he doesn't want to do a deal.

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