

Event Report

“Interpreting the Essence of Trump’s Foreign Policy”
US Study Group
Fiscal Year-end Open Symposium
(Monday, March 11, 2019, 16:00-17:30; JIIA Conference Room)



<Overview>

1. Title: “Interpreting the Essence of Trump’s Foreign Policy”
2. Date/time: Monday, March 11, 2019; 16:00-17:30
3. Venue: Conference Room, The Japan Institute of International Affairs
4. Program

Opening remarks: Yasunori Nakayama (Director General (Acting), JIIA)

Reports:

Akio Takahata, Professor, Hakuoh University

“Trump’s ‘Peace through Strength’ Foreign Policy and the Republican Establishment”

Tomoyuki Miyata, Lecturer, Teikyo University

“The Rise of the Trump Faction and Its Implications for American Politics”

Discussion:

Funiaki Kubo, Professor, The University of Tokyo; Senior Adjunct Fellow, JIIA

Kenichiro Sasae, President, JIIA; former Ambassador of Japan to the US

Question-and-answer period

<Description>

This open symposium was held at the Japan Institute of International Affairs for the purpose of widely sharing the interim survey/research findings for the second year of Sub-project I (“The Trump Administration’s Foreign Policy and Japan-US Relations”) of the FY2017-FY2019 Research Project A (“The Resilience of the Free and Open International Order – The Situations of the US, China and Europe and Their Impact”).

This symposium focused on interpreting the Trump administration's foreign policy, which swings back and forth between “peace through strength” and “America first”, as well as the hints it provides for future US foreign policy, in terms of its differences from the Republican Party's traditional approach to US foreign policy and the networks of people surrounding the Trump administration. The speakers offered reports and then exchanged views with each other before participating in a question-and-answer session with the 100-strong audience, bringing to light valuable suggestions for future research.

The following were among the views presented and discussed:

- The Trump administration can be seen to be taking a two-pronged approach in its foreign policy: (1) the “peace through strength” route in foreign/security policy and (2) the application of an “America first” principle to trade and immigration policy.
- The Trump administration's “peace through strength” approach is characterized by an absence of values and virtues, little interest in the international order, and a disregard for allies, and the ways in which it differs from the Republican establishment's “peace through strength” approach exemplified by the policies of the Reagan administration in the 1980s were pointed out. Over time, however, the Trump administration has been making course corrections toward realism associated with values and virtue.
- It should be noted, though, that these course corrections toward an emphasis on values and virtue have not necessarily led the US to tightly embrace a sense of mission vis-à-vis the liberal international order. Values and virtue still cannot be said to have become firmly rooted in the Trump administration's foreign policy.
- While on the one hand President Trump has adopted major foreign policies that were quite unforeseen, he has also shown himself subsequently willing to make tactical revisions and ultimately settle on a realistic course, so President Trump could be said to have a certain instinctual ability to adjust.
- Candidate Trump remained on the fringes of the Republican Party during the presidential election, and the Trump campaign's political infrastructure was extremely fragile. Once he took office as president and an overwhelming number of Republicans became supporters, however, a major change took place within the Republican mainstream, rapidly expanding the Trump camp's political infrastructure.
- Conservative media have had particularly significant roles and impacts, not only serving as cheerleaders for President Trump but also making their influence felt by, for example, taking a hardline tone and making it more difficult for President Trump to compromise with Congress. Changes have also become apparent in conservative think tanks.
- The growing number of Republican supporters opposed to political correctness, as well as the changes identifiable among Republican supporters, are both key elements. President Trump is said to be very adept in dealing with the changing makeup of Republican supporters and the expanding number of Trump supporters within the party that have consequently emerged.

- As a result, the Trump faction has clearly increased its presence within the Republican Party, suggesting that the “America first” approach will not be a transient idea.

Vigorous discussions took place in the subsequent question-and-answer session, too.