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What May Not Be in the President's Asia Briefing Book

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As President Trump departs for Asia, he will undoubtedly have briefing books filled with facts on the countries he's visiting, their leaders and the issues likely to arise. But more regional, subtle, and sometimes less comfortable aspects affecting US Asia policy are often hard to capture in such material. Let's consider this more general context.

First, the power balance has dramatically changed over the decades. The United States is still systemically the region's most important power, but no longer in the dominant position it once had. Americans now need Asian cooperation to achieve US goals (just as Asians need the US), and this puts a premium on listening, consulting, persuading and developing positions in partnership. In the past, the US has often been seen as demanding and failing to give due respect to the other countries and the complexity of their societies and politics. There is much less tolerance of this now.

Second, and related, successful US policies have been rooted in US national interests, but understand and work with positive regional trends. It is virtually impossible to force another government to do something it does not see in its own interests because its leadership is put in the untenable position of losing face or even office. It is more likely that government will win favor at home by rejecting US "demands."

The most effective US policies have been based on identifying and supporting favorable forces of change. For example, as developing economies acquire their own intellectual property, their business interests also want laws to protect it. Taiwan and Singapore, once notorious for intellectual property theft, now have strong rules, based on American models.

Third, effective US leadership requires a comprehensive set of tools – military, diplomatic, economic, and cultural-educational – and the political will to adequately and consistently resource these. The tendency to privilege the military and take other elements of power almost for granted fails to best use our many assets. US business, science, education and entertainment project influence in critically important and long-term ways.

Fourth, multilateralism matters. Asia-Pacific organizations, such as APEC, are voluntary and don't negotiate treaties. They are like clubs where leaders at different levels socialize, discuss significant issues and develop common values. APEC is the club for most socio-economic issues, and the East Asia Summit for politico-security issues. Leaders may bilaterally make deals on the side, but they are all expected to be committed club members in good standing and attendance. The president's challenge, as a new member, will be to learn the ropes. Later, he may want to suggest

changes.

Finally, in Asia even more than most regions strategic vision, gravitas, patience, respect for protocol and predictability are highly prized and expected in leadership. Historically, American leaders usually – though not always - projected these traits, and they remain expected today.

Building a coalition on North Korea, for example, requires a well-thought out and articulated strategy based on the damage North Korea is doing to the global non-proliferation regime. This needs to be presented not simply as an American security problem, but a regional and global one in which South Korea, China, Japan and others have equal or greater stakes.

President Trump has had successful meetings with many of the Asia-Pacific leaders he will see and telephone calls with others. More than in Europe, Asians have been giving the benefit of the doubt to the new president. They will be watching hopefully for new signs of affirmative US regional partnership and leadership.

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President Trump delivers a television national address on the coronavirus pandemic from the Oval Office on March 11. (Jabin Botsford/The Washington Post). By. The frequency with which the coronavirus was mentioned in the PDB has not been previously reported, and U.S. officials said it reflected a level of attention comparable to periods when analysts have been tracking active terrorism threats, overseas conflicts or other rapidly developing security issues. AD. A White House spokesman disputed the characterization that Trump was slow to respond to the virus threat. "President Trump rose to fight this crisis head-on by taking early, aggressive historic action to protect the health, wealth and well-being of the American people," said spokesman Hogan G. The president-elect urged Americans to modify their Thanksgiving celebrations. He said that instead of the usual large gathering he would be spending the holiday with just his wife Jill and their daughter and son-in-law, while the rest of the family would be in small groups. Millions of Americans are travelling to be with their loved ones despite warnings from health officials, although numbers are down on previous years. Mayor ignores own Thanksgiving travel advice. The president-elect vowed that in due course, the pandemic would be beaten. "I know that we can and will beat this virus," Additionally, the incumbent president's supporters are unlikely to go down without a fight. In other words, we should not be expecting any fundamental shifts in bilateral relations any time soon. Unlike Dwight D. Eisenhower and Ronald Reagan before him, President Biden simply does not have the political capital to make such changes a reality. This means that relations will continue to be built on the basis of the "lowest common denomin." The president also may be vulnerable to foreign influence. His tax records, as reported by the New York Times, reveal that Trump appears to face financial challenges, having personally guaranteed more than \$400 million of his companies' debt at a time when the pandemic has put pressure on the hotel industry, in which Trump is a major player. Story continues. "Is that a risk?" said Priess, who wrote "The President's Book of Secrets," about presidents and intelligence. And when George H.W. Bush visited his son in the White House, he sat in on the President's Daily Brief, the highly classified compendium of secrets that is presented each morning to the occupant of the Oval Office, according to Priess, who interviewed both men for his book.