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**Robert Lawrence Kuhn introducing Xi Jinping's book** The Governance of China at the Frankfurt Book Fair in October 2014.

TRUMP IN ASIA

## Beijing wary of Japan, US, India strategic cooperation: Kuhn

Long-time adviser to Chinese leaders and multinational corporations adds that Xi's overtures to South and North Korea may portend movement in nuke crisis

By [DOUG TSURUOKA](#) EDITOR AT LARGE NOVEMBER 6, 2017 5:46 PM (UTC+8)

US President Donald Trump lands in China on Wednesday for a state visit as part of his 12-day tour of Asian nations.

Trump will meet with Chinese President Xi Jinping against the international backdrop of a continuing nuclear crisis with North Korea, an escalating

Russia scandal and plunging poll numbers at home. Xi, in contrast, emerged triumphant after being re-elected as paramount leader at October's 19th Chinese Communist Party Congress (CPC).

**How do China's leaders view Trump's visit and how will they react? And what important developments can be expected — if any?**

[Robert Lawrence Kuhn](#), a long-time adviser to Chinese leaders and multinational corporations, says that China's "deepest concern" as Trump visits Asia is the promotion of an "Indo-Pacific strategy" by Tokyo that may draw the US, Japan, India, and possibly Australia, into a defensive alignment to "contain" China throughout the region. On North Korea, Kuhn says that while there are no signs of a breakthrough in the crisis, he believes something may be brewing in Xi's recent overtures to Pyongyang and Seoul for improved ties.

The well-known commentator on China also notes that Xi has emerged as the strongest Chinese leader "since Mao" following the pivotal CPC's conclusion. This gives the Chinese president more flexibility in dealing with outstanding trade and investment issues with the US. Kuhn says Xi also wants to avoid future tensions with Washington that might undermine his ambitious domestic agenda.

Kuhn, the host of "Closer to China with R.L. Kuhn" on the China Global Television Network (CGTN), adds that China will go all the way in extending VIP treatment to Trump despite his embattled status at home. It's all part of Xi's over-arching vision of making China the "center stage of the world." Kuhn spoke with Asia Times about what's likely to happen when Trump visits China this week.

Is a breakthrough or other progress likely in resolving the North Korean nuclear crisis when Trump meets with Xi in Beijing?

**We're conditioned not to expect a breakthrough, but something's afoot with President Xi reaching out to both North Korea ("better relations") and South Korea (post-THAAD reset).** Xi and Trump will have to evince progress; it will be for us to discern substance.

What will China be monitoring most closely as Trump visits Asia?

I think the deepest concern is the nascent development, promoted highly by Japan, of an "Indo-Pacific strategy" of growing cooperation among the US, Japan and India, and possibly including Australia – seemingly "surrounding" or "containing" China. But China cannot be contained. China is working to restart relations with South Korea, never a big fan of Japan.

Trump has raised the possibility of unilateral military action by Japan against North Korea in the crisis. Does China take this seriously?

**I don't think so. China** is not reacting to everything that Trump says. Rather to what he does. That said, China has genuine concern that Japan will use the **“excuse” of North Korea to accelerate military development.**

Is Xi pushing for improved ties with South Korea and North Korea **following the CPC? Is he trying to bolster China's influence vs. other** parties in the nuclear crisis?

**For sure, China, in Xi's vision, is “moving to center stage of the world” – this is a prime theme of Xi's “New Era” on the road to 2050.**

Xi appears to be in a strong position after the recent CPC Congress. How will this affect his negotiating stance with Trump when they meet?

**Xi doesn't just “appear” to be in a strong position —** he is in the strongest leadership position since Mao, and in a sense stronger, because he is intelligently using his power with [appointments] and sophisticated ideas. Xi will project confidence and determination but, as per his personality, in a dignified and not overbearing way. China will treat the US leader with proper protocol irrespective of the current president. That said, China may go for higher pomp.

Is Xi in a better position to offer concessions to the US on trade and investment? What might Xi do? Will there be a big gesture?

**With Xi's position in China secured, he** can be more flexible. He has a massive domestic agenda and does not want increased tension with the US to be disruptive — so accommodations must be made, which have good optics but do not violate, for sure, any of China's **“core interests.”**

Will the Russia **scandals and Trump's sliding poll numbers at home** weaken his credibility with Xi?

**One would think so, but that is not Trump's personality. He doesn't care —** not sure whether this is an asset or liability, but it is the fact. Personal troubles could, in normal politicians, elicit more aggressive behavior, but Trump is Trump no matter what the circumstances.