

Kim talks a test for Abe-Trump ties

Japan PM worries he is being sidelined by US president's willingness to meet face-to-face with DPRK leader

Emerging from Trump Tower in New York in November 2016, Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe said he was convinced that Donald Trump is "a leader in whom I can have confidence". Abe was the first head of government to visit the then US president-elect.

Abe has been busy trying to forge a relationship with Trump, making the most of their shared outdoor pursuit, golf.



Cai Hong

"When you play golf with someone not just once, but for two times, the person must be your favorite guy," Abe said last year. He and Trump teed off at both Mar-a-Lago in Florida and Tokyo.

Trump, during his Tokyo visit in November 2017, said he had enjoyed every minute of the time he spent with Abe.

But their "very, very good bond" in Trump's words and "very, very good chemistry" do not necessarily mean that Japan is on Trump's good side. His latest decisions have shocked, if not scared, Tokyo.

When Trump said yes to the invitation from Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) leader Kim Jong-un to meet him for a summit talk by May, Japan felt sidelined.

Shortly after the news, Abe had a telephone conversation with Trump. "I want to work even more closely with President Trump to resolve various issues related to (the DPRK), such as its nuclear weapon and ballistic missile programs and the abduction of Japanese nationals," Abe said after the phone call.

He also announced he would visit the US president in April.

The Japanese still remember a case of US diplomatic endeavor that left Japan in the dark. In 1971, US President Richard Nixon sent his national security adviser Henry Kissinger to Beijing for secret talks to normalize relations with China, without notifying Japan.

Despite Trump's decision to meet Kim, however, his appointment of hawkish Mike Pompeo as US secretary of state is believed to signal the US' harder line policies toward the DPRK and Iran.

It is not hard to understand Japan's sense of alienation. Tokyo is the staunchest supporter of the Trump administration's "maximum pressure" campaign on the DPRK, saying "talks for the sake of talks" would be unacceptable.

The inter-Korea thaw brought by the Winter Olympics in Pyeongchang was a diplomatic breakthrough for Republic of Korea (ROK) President Moon Jae-in. Moon and Kim are scheduled to meet in the demilitarized zone on the southern side of the border village of Panmunjeom in late April.

The ROK is also playing an intermediary role between the US and DPRK.

Shocked by these developments, Abe has to be pragmatic and flexible. Now, playing to his domestic audience, he is reported to be considering seeking his own face-to-face meeting with the DPRK leader. He wants to raise the issue of Japanese abducted by the DPRK in the 1970s and 80s. Japan officially lists 17 citizens snatched away by DPRK agents. Pyongyang allowed five of them to return to Japan in 2002, saying eight have died and the remaining four never entered the DPRK.

Meanwhile, Trump pressed ahead on March 8 with import tariffs of 25 percent on steel and 10 percent for aluminum, but exempted Canada and Mexico. He said the United States would also be open to negotiations on alternatives to the new tariffs with countries willing to engage in fair trade policies.

The US government has made clear that whether allies like Japan and the European Union will be exempted from the tariffs in the future will depend on how much they contribute to US trade and defense.

Unlike the EU that has released a long hit list of American exports it could target, Japan is seeking a country exemption.

The importance of the Japan-US alliance, *The Mainichi Shimbun* said, has Tokyo looking to avoid a

hardline response to the tariffs, and the Japanese government is finding it difficult to formulate a position.

The US is renegotiating a free-trade agreement with the ROK. It also has begun talks on sharing the cost of maintaining US troops based there.

Trump appeared to threaten the ROK that he would withdraw US troops from the Korean Peninsula if Seoul does not give in to his demands on trade.

"We have a very big trade deficit (with the ROK), and we protect them," Trump told donors at a fundraiser in Missouri in audio leaked to *The Washington Post*. "We lose money on trade, and we lose money on the military. We have right now 32,000 soldiers on the border (between the DPRK and ROK). Let's see what happens."

Japan, one of America's most important allies in Asia, was one of Trump's favorite punching bags on his presidential campaign trail.

Trump sent shock waves through the international community in early 2016 when he suggested some allies could develop their own nuclear weapons rather than rely on the US.

"Japan is better if it protects itself against this maniac" of the DPRK, Trump told CNN in March 2016. "We are better off frankly if (the ROK) is going to start protecting itself ... they have to protect themselves or they have to pay us."

In August 2016, he laid into the US treaty commitment to defend Japan.

"You know we have a treaty with Japan where if Japan is attacked, we have to use the full force and might of the United States," he said. "If we're attacked, Japan doesn't have to do anything. They can sit home and watch Sony television, OK?"

The US has around 50,000 troops stationed in Japan.

Trump threatened Japan that under his presidency it could be necessary to "walk" away from the treaty. "It could be that Japan will have to defend itself" against the DPRK, he said. "You always have to be prepared to walk," Trump added about getting allies to carry their financial weight.

Trump's jabs at Japan have not deterred Abe from pursuing a close relationship, because the strength of Japan-US ties remains the linchpin of the Japanese prime minister's diplomacy.

But to get a clear picture of the US' DPRK policy, Abe must visit Trump. If his meeting with the US president happens in April, he will be the first foreign leader to visit the White House over the DPRK issue. Will Abe have the same confidence in Trump that he had after their first meeting?

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US bullying poses threat to global trade

Pursuing a more open policy with China would better achieve what Trump seeks

By XINHUA

Despite warnings from business groups and trade experts, US President Donald Trump on March 22 signed a presidential memorandum that could impose tariffs on up to \$60 billion of imports from China, the latest unilateral move that poses a threat to global trade.

It follows Trump's recent tariff plan on steel and aluminum imports and January's tariffs levied on imported solar panels and washing machines.

Those punitive measures are all based on outdated US trade laws put in place during the Cold War era to protect domestic industries, but they have been rarely used

since the launch of the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 1995.

Trump and his trade advisor Robert Lighthizer, former deputy US Trade Representative in the Ronald Reagan administration, might wish to re-live the trade battles against Western Europe and Japan in the 1970s and 1980s.

However, global trade and supply chains have tremendously changed over the past three decades. Products from one country usually incorporate components from others, as coordinating international production is cheaper and more efficient.

Therefore, raising tariffs on Chinese goods is just like using 20th- or even 19th-century tools to tackle problems of the 21st-century, an age of globalization. It would disturb

the interconnected supply chain of many industries and increase costs for American businesses and consumers.

Just think about Apple's popular iPhones, which combine American design with hardware from international suppliers and Chinese assembly lines. Global production nowadays has eliminated national boundaries.

While counting as Chinese exports to the US, iPhones are produced by American multinational companies operating in China.

That's why 45 US trade associations, representing retail, technology, agriculture and other consumer-product industries, recently urged the Trump White House not to move forward with tariffs on Chinese imports.

"America First" and unilateralism seems to be the mantra of Trump's trade policy. Unfortunately, with a zero-sum mentality, it is hard to see how the US can negotiate better trade deals with other countries.

What is worrisome is that the US, the world's largest economy, begins taking unilateral actions rather than resolving trade disputes through the WTO.

On March 21, a WTO compliance panel said in a ruling that the US did not fully comply with a 2014 ruling against its anti-subsidy tariffs on a range of Chinese products, including solar panels, wind towers, steel cylinders and aluminium extrusions.

If the US starts to ignore WTO rules or honor its obligations selectively, other countries could follow

suit, putting the rule-based global trading system at risk. The result will be a global trade war. As former US trade representative Carla Hills put it, "without the WTO it would be the law of the jungle".

In Trump's eyes, China seems to be taking advantage of the US on trade. But the truth is that the China-US trade relations are reciprocal and broadly complementary. Trade and investment between China and the US supports about 2.6 million American jobs, according to the US-China Business Council.

The best way to get the good deals that Trump seeks is to pursue a more open trade policy with China. Both countries should work together to further open their respective markets to each other. Trade wars are for losers.