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## With President Trump at helm, Japan feeling adrift at sea

Andre Vltchek

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Japan mourns your departure, Barack Obama! You were a predictable ruler, and a genuinely traditional imperialist. You spoke so well, and tormented all those unruly colonies with admirable zeal and effectiveness!

What is coming is untested and therefore frightening. Obedient and disciplined Japan historically detests unpredictability.

It doesn't mind prostituting itself, but only if it brings significant tangible benefits and as long as strict protocol and decorum are fully respected. The future scenario could be frightening: Who knows, that new chap across the ocean could soon ruin all the etiquette; calling whores and profiteers by their real names.

The Japanese government and big business are now shaking in dread, day and night. What changes are coming? How to please the new foul-speaking lord?

Ten billion dollars will be spent - or should we say 'invested' - in the United States by car giant Toyota to appease the new Emperor. Why not, every penny of it is worth it! The Emperor has to be kept happy. Japan is ready to arm itself to the teeth, provoking both North Korea but especially China? Yes and yes again, as long as the global 'balance of power' so greatly in favor of Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan for decades, remains intact.

The conservative Prime Minister of the country, Shinzo Abe, doesn't want any 'dangerous' developments, any deviations. As far as he is concerned, things are just fine as they were. Not perfect, but fine. Japan has been exactly where it should be: on its back, aging, but still desirable, eating mountains of caviar and oysters.

Things are, however, 'developing,' rapidly and some would say, irreversibly. New US President Donald Trump, is clearly allergic to China as well as to several other Asian countries. He is preaching protectionism and an extreme form of nationalism, something that used to be synonymous with Japan's trade and business practices of the past.

Somehow, this does not appear to be in Japan's favor. Japan was allowed to be protectionist, in exchange for its unconditional political obedience. It thought that it was awarded almost exclusive privileges.

Now paradoxically, Japan is trying to save the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), a 12-nation free trade agreement, which Donald Trump is nuking. Japan's parliament even ratified the pact at the end of 2016. Foreign Policy Magazine (FPM) said in its report published in January 2017: "*Abe Wants to Be the Last Free Trade Samurai.*"

In fact, Shinzo Abe is desperately trying to preserve Japan's prominent position, at least in Asia, and mainly against China, which is intensively negotiating its own economic partnership agreement with several Asian countries called the 'Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership' (RCEP). Mr. Abe is also trying to push through his brutal neo-liberal reforms that are encountering resistance from the Japanese public.

Japan's desperate desire to remain the regional superpower is pushing it even closer toward the West, and particularly the United States. Since WWII, the country has been wholly dependent on Washington (and its market fundamentalist dogmas), to such an extent that it almost entirely abandoned its own global vision and foreign policy.

In the meantime, Japan is trying even further to penetrate and subjugate various Southeast Asian countries, literally wrestling them away from the increasing influence of China and Russia. It is a very complex, often bizarre game, as Abe's government is habitually acting by inertia, doing what was expected of it by the earlier US administrations, not necessarily by the upcoming one.

Once totally under Western control, the Southeast Asian monolith is beginning to crack: the Philippines under President Duterte and Vietnam after some fundamental leadership changes in early 2016 are moving closer toward China and away from Washington's orbit. Even Thailand, one of the most dependable Cold War allies of the West is quickly discovering the many advantages that come from a stronger relationship with Beijing.

In Asia, resistance against Western imperialism is on the rise, and Japan is in a panic. It collaborated for so long that it lost all memories of acting independently. In exchange for betraying Asia, it used to reap significant benefits; the gap between its astronomical standards of living and those in the rest of Asia used to be exorbitant, but now, the Human Development Index (HDI) rates such countries as South Korea, even higher. Socialist and fiercely independent

China is catching up, not only economically but also regarding science, technology, and standards of living.

The essential question is never openly asked, but is creeping into the subconscious thoughts of many Japanese people: ‘Was it really worth it to collaborate so shamelessly with the West, and for so long?’

The more confusing and unsettling the answers, the more aggressive the behavior of many ordinary Japanese citizens: racism toward the Chinese and Koreans is on the increase. Often it is propelled by a frustration that accompanies defeat; sometimes it comes from shame.

The present is intertwined with history and its interpretation.

In Nagasaki, I discussed once again the complex intricacies related to Japan’s past, with the legendary Australian historian Geoff Gunn.

Japan never really took full responsibility for the tremendous pain it caused several Asian countries, but particularly China, where around 35 million people vanished during the brutal, genocidal occupation.

It is also silent about its role during the Korean War, and the crimes committed by its corporations in Southeast Asia and elsewhere.

However, it portrays itself as a victim, because of the atomic bombs that destroyed two of its cities – Hiroshima and Nagasaki – at the end of WWII, and because of the annexation of several of its islands by the Soviet Union.

Of course, the nuclear bombing of the Japanese cities by the US Air Force (or the fire bombing of Tokyo) was not meant to be a ‘punishment’ for the monstrous crimes Japan committed in China or Korea. It was simply a thinly disguised experiment on human beings, as well as an aggressive message and warning to the Soviet Union.

In Japan, everything is taken out of historical context. Collective memory is hazy. The occupation of several Asian and South Pacific countries, the alliance with the European fascist powers, WWII itself, the US occupation and consequent collaboration, Japan’s profiteering during the Korean War, as well as the constant siding with the imperialist policies of the West: it all has been covered by a comforting and softening duvet; by cozy make-believe pseudo-reality.

While the horrendous US military and air force bases located in Okinawa and Honshu have been intimidating both China and North Korea, Japan has been distributing, hypocritically, all over the world its multi-lingual columns with “May Peace Prevail On Earth” signs, trying to feel good, and congratulating itself for its “*peaceful constitution*” (composed by the US after the War).

In 2016, Shinzo Abe’s close ally, Barack Obama visited the Peace Park in Hiroshima City. He did not apologize to the victims of the nuclear blast. Instead, he posed with two traditional Japanese paper cranes, the local symbols of peace, and he spoke about the suffering of people

during the wars. He wrote a message to promote the abolition of nuclear weapons, and then signed the book, putting the paper crane next to his signature.

How touching!

Servile Japanese media dutifully covered the event. Nobody died from laughter; nobody got sick publicly while recalling countless wars, deadly covert operations, and coups as well as targeted killings that took place while Mr. Obama was the boss of his aggressive Empire.

A few months later, Mr. Abe visited Pearl Harbor. Like his US counterpart did in Hiroshima, he spoke about the suffering of the US servicemen based in Hawaii during the Japanese attack. He did not apologize, but he turned sentimental, even poetic.

In the end, almost everyone felt well, at least those living in Japan and the West. Others do not matter too much, anyway!

Now the old script is quickly becoming obsolete. The new director is facing the stage, shouting at the actors, hitting seats with his cane, insulting proteges of his predecessors.

Japan is terrified. It likes continuity and certainty. It plays by the rules, the older the better.

This is not looking good. It may not end well, not well at all.

China and Russia are rising, indignant and finally united. Several Asian countries are switching sides. The president of the Philippines is calling Western leaders 'sons-of-whores'. India, now the most populous country on Earth, has gritted its teeth and 'just in case' got itself one more chair, now sitting on two.

At least some in Japan are now (secretly and quietly) suspecting that all along they were betting on the totally wrong horse.

How can a samurai break all his allegiances without losing face? How can he save his ass, when his armor begins to burn? It is not easy; the etiquette of honor is extremely strict, even if honor consists, if stripped of its decorative layer, of brainlessness and sleaze.

One possible and very traditional escape is a ritual suicide. It seems that Japan's leadership is committing exactly that: it is raising the banner abandoned on the battlefield by the previous warlord, it is trying to gather some scattered allies, and then lead them to the futile battle against the mightiest creature on Earth – the Dragon, and by association, against the dragon's friend and comrade - the Bear.

It is all beginning to look like a kitschy martial art movie, or like a desperate set of irrational moves performed by a gambler before he reaches utter bankruptcy.

All this could be, however, extremely deceiving, as Mr. Abe is actually not a fool. He is playing a very high game, and he may still have some chances of winning: if the new lord, Mr. Trump,

decides to exceed all previous rulers by brutality and aggressiveness, and re-hire the old and well-tested samurai, Japan, for a deadly onslaught against humanity.

It is worth remembering that throughout Japan's history, not all samurais were fighting for honor. Most of them were for hire.