

# opinion

## What now for economic integration in the Asia-Pacific?

And what to make of Trump's recent comments about the TPP free trade deal?

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In January, Toshimitsu Motegi, the minister in charge of economic revitalization, announced that an agreement had been reached on the TPP 11, absent the United States, and that it was set to be signed this March. Several days later, U.S. President Donald Trump attracted attention for remarks hinting at Washington returning to the Trans-Pacific Partnership. The evidence took the form of a speech delivered by Trump at the annual World Economic Forum in Davos, and an interview with U.S. media outlet CNBC he gave just before his speech.

In fact, Trump made little mention of the TPP during his speech in Switzerland. Most of the speech consisted of the president taking credit for job creation and economic revitalization that has taken place in the U.S. since he took office. Indeed, Trump emphasized his commitment to an "America First" policy that condemns "unfair trade" and pur-

sues the U.S. national interest above all else. Trump simply mentioned the possibility of the U.S. pursuing negotiations with TPP members "either individually, or perhaps as a group." During an earlier interview with CNBC, however, Trump noted that "we would do TPP if we made a much better deal than we had." He also repeatedly described the TPP in its current form as "horrible."

Consider the sum of these comments, and Trump is merely suggesting that the U.S. would be open to participating in a TPP whose provisions furthered the realization of the "America First" policy. This is not a "return to the TPP" by any measure; they are remarks that seek to jump on the bandwagon of the TPP 11 agreement while effectively calling for a renegotiation of its terms. Having led the TPP 11 negotiations, Japan probably made the right call in coolly describing the prospect of renegotiation as "practically impossible."

Throughout its history of involvement in Asia, the United States has traditionally kept its distance from multilateral frameworks in the region as a matter of basic policy. While the Trump administration's stance toward the TPP and other multilateral agreements is indeed extreme, in that sense it marks a shift back to America's basic policy toward Asia. However, twice in the past the U.S. has taken a positive view of multilateral economic



U.S. President Donald Trump speaks Jan. 26 at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland. He stated that the U.S. would consider negotiating trade deals with its onetime TPP partners "either individually, or perhaps as a group" — but only "if it is in the interests of all." BLOOMBERG

frameworks in Asia. The first was in the early to mid-1990s, which spanned the last stages of the Bush (senior) administration and a period of the Clinton administration, when the U.S. embraced an APEC-oriented policy. The second was from the closing days

of the Bush (junior) administration through to the Obama administration, when the U.S. led negotiations to expand the TPP. In both cases, the U.S. stance was to emphasize a multilateral economic framework in Asia as a catalyst for revitalizing what were then

slumping U.S. economies. Beyond these exceptions, however, an "America First" aspiration is hardly unique to the Trump administration.

Trump's hinting at room for negotiation over a TPP he has said the U.S. will never return to suggests that even the president cannot ignore strong opposition from industrial and agricultural circles at home, which claim that the TPP withdrawal could impact them adversely. The U.S. midterm elections are approaching, and the need to shore up support for the administration from inside the country is likely a factor here. Increasing recognition that the TPP will be essential to further revitalizing the U.S. economy will be a necessary condition for America's return to the trade pact.

Looking beyond the short- to medium-term economic benefits the TPP will bring, in the long term it is also important in terms of comprehensive rule-setting for meaningful economic liberalization in the region, and showing that the countries involved share this approach to rule setting in itself highly

significant. In that context, the fact that a consensus was reached on the TPP 11 is significant. However the U.S. under the Trump administration acts, the member nations need to calmly move forward on initiatives to ensure the implementation of the TPP 11.

Alongside the TPP, regional negotiations are also underway on another trade deal, the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership. The RCEP is an effort to form an economic bloc mainly comprising the existing ASEAN Economic Community with the addition of China and India. Progress made in TPP negotiations spurred on RCEP talks, which in turn further stimulated TPP efforts. It is thought that the recent consensus on TPP 11 has increased momentum for RCEP countries to reach a deal as well.

If we consider the economic future of the Asia-Pacific region as a whole, the formation of an economic bloc that includes China and the establishment of standards for rule setting are both important, which makes it vital that RCEP negotiations move forward.

Japan has taken a leadership position in both the TPP 11 and RCEP negotiations, and has assumed a considerable role in the future development of the region.

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**The U.S. has traditionally kept its distance from multilateral frameworks in Asia as a matter of basic policy.**



## The point of sharp power

China and Russia's influence is growing in spite of their soft power deficits

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In recent years, Russia and China have poured considerable resources into arenas typically associated with "soft power," a term coined by the American political scientist Joseph Nye and understood as the "ability to affect others by attraction and persuasion." Either directly or through compliant surrogates, these two countries have devoted billions of dollars to increasing their global influence through media, culture, think tanks, academia and other spheres.

Despite these immense investments, however, observers — including Nye himself — have scratched their heads, wondering why these authoritarian regimes continue to suffer a deep soft-power deficit, even as they have grown more assertive internationally.

Russia and China tend to do poorly in global public opinion surveys and indices of soft power, reinforcing the notion that attraction and persuasion are incompatible with authoritarianism. Internationally, autocrats are not "winning hearts and minds." Nonetheless, Russia, China and other well-resourced and ambitious regimes are projecting more influence beyond their borders than at any time in recent memory — and not principally through what Nye calls "hard power": military might or raw economic coercion.

To be sure, Russia has used military force with some frequency in the last decade — in Georgia, Ukraine and Syria, for example. But Russia's fighter jets and tanks are not driving Moscow's global surge in influence. Simi-

larly, China is flexing its military muscles in the South China Sea and along its disputed border with India. But, like Russia, China has been far more active using other forms of influence over the last decade.

Theorists are therefore in a bind: These regimes are not relying chiefly on hard power, are unsuccessful at generating soft power, but are still able to project real influence abroad. Given the resurgence of authoritarianism around the world, it is an opportune time to reflect on this apparent paradox.

The Financial Times recently observed that in China's "efforts to build soft power outside its borders," the country "needs to tread more lightly and take a more reciprocal and less authoritarian approach." In a recent commentary, Nye makes the similar observation that "China could generate more soft power if it would relax some of its tight party control over civil society." The same could be said of Russia and other countries with governments that prioritize state control over openness, independent culture and civil society — all of which are crucial ingredients of soft power.

But such exhortations to Chinese or Russian authorities are bound to fall on deaf ears. Any significant liberalization would contradict these regimes' own political needs and objectives to retain control at any cost.

The analytical trap is to assume that authoritarian governments, which suppress political pluralism and free expression in order to maintain power at home, would be inclined to act differently internationally. These regimes have shrewdly adopted some of the forms, but not the substance, of soft power. What they pursue is better understood as "sharp power," whose key attributes are outward-facing censorship, manipulation and distraction, rather than persuasion and attraction.

While "information warfare" forms a part of the authoritarians' repertoire, it is by itself

an inadequate description of sharp power. Much activity undertaken by authoritarian regimes — whether it is China in Latin America or Russia in Central Europe — falls outside of this definition, as colleagues and I detailed in a December report, "Sharp Power: Rising Authoritarian Influence."

With hindsight, we can see the misconception that took hold at the end of the Cold War, when conventional analysis assumed that authoritarian regimes would liberalize and democratize. Nearly three decades ago, when the United States emerged from the Cold War as a global hegemon and the term soft power was introduced, political analysts did not take sufficient account of regimes like the ones in control of Russia and China today.

As my colleague Jessica Ludwig and I wrote in Foreign Affairs in November, "the democracies' complacency concerning the evolution of malign, sharp power has been informed by their reliance on the soft power paradigm." Analysts who view the authoritarians' behavior in terms of efforts "to boost their countries' soft power are missing the mark and risk perpetuating a false sense of security."

A sound diagnosis is necessary in order to devise an appropriate response. Authoritarian governments are not playing by the rules governing democracies. Systematic repression is the autocratic regimes' calling card, and the "sharp power" they generate cannot be shoehorned into the familiar and reassuring framework of "soft power." Without more precise terminology, the world's democracies will have little hope of countering these states' increasingly multifaceted influence.

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## Forget fake news — worry about fake history Oscars

Award contenders 'Dunkirk' and 'Darkest Hour' are full of historical nonsense

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The Oscars are handed out each year in early March. Ahead of this year's festivities, two movies about Britain in 1940 — "Dunkirk" and "Darkest Hour" — have collected plenty of nominations. They notably include Gary Oldman's imitation of Winston Churchill and the remarkable cinematography of "Dunkirk."

Yet, both movies are full of historical nonsense. For that reason, they should be catalogued with World War II propaganda movies. I am thinking of "Objective Burma" (in which Errol Flynn single-handedly defeats the Japanese army). A British sample is "In Which We Serve," made in 1942, where Noel Coward plays the royal family's naval hero Lord Mountbatten, showing British grit at its best.

### Welcome to 'Brexit movies'

Tantalizingly, both "Darkest Hour" and "Dunkirk" are Brexit movies. They were made to allow moviegoers in Brexit Britain to wallow in the warm water of English nostalgia when Britain was utterly cut off from Europe.

It was also a time when everyone on the Isles felt united and closer to the English-speaking Empire and the United States, rather than the beastly Nazis or cowardly capitulationist French.

Unfortunately, the two movies are also shot through with historical howlers. In "Darkest Hour," the broken Neville Chamberlain, the prime minister of appeasement, is presented as a bitter enemy of Churchill.

### Inaccuracies galore

In fact, Chamberlain told King George VI to make Churchill prime minister as the only Conservative politician the Labour Party and trade unions would serve under in a wartime coalition.

The film presents the Labour leader and postwar prime minister, Clement Attlee, as a ranting demagogue denouncing Chamberlain in a bitter House of Commons speech.

Attlee never made such a speech. He was a determined socialist but a mild-mannered public school and Oxford educated middle class politician who never raised his voice, waved his arms around or shouted when speaking.

Both films show the evacuation of British troops from Dunkirk as a miracle performed by hundreds of pleasure craft and small boats hastily commandeered on southern English coastal resorts and fishing boat harbors. The vast bulk of the 330,000 British and



allied soldiers brought back from Dunkirk embarked from a long pier onto 40 British destroyers and cruisers. The film ends with Kenneth Branagh playing a Royal Naval officer bravely staying behind to help French soldiers evacuate to England. In truth, 100,000 French soldiers — about a third of the total — were brought back to England at the same time as the British Army.

The French Army lost 40,000 men defending the Dunkirk evacuation perimeter. And yet the sacrifice of French soldiers is written out of the movie, which presents the story as one of English heroism and glory.

Similarly, in "Darkest Hour," French politicians are presented as drooling idiots, in contrast to stiff-upper lippered Brits.

"Dunkirk" has a Spitfire landing gently on the water, floating for a while as a dramatic struggle to save the pilot unfolds. The Spitfire's Merlin engine weighed 5 tons and any plane landing on water would have tipped over front-first to sink instantly.

### Churchill in the Tube?

"Darkest Hour" has a surreal scene in which Churchill takes the London Tube from Downing Street to the House of Commons — a three-minute walk. On the Underground, the new prime minister exchanges verses from Macaulay's Lays of Ancient Rome with a cheerful young black man. There were a handful of Afro-Caribbeans in London in 1940, but Churchill never took the Tube and it is doubtful if any MPs today would know by heart Macaulay's patriotic inspiring lines. The black Briton reciting verse is a nod to today's Hollywood and is ahistorical.

### White-washing Churchill

As to the innards of British party politics of the era, Labour and its then-leader Attlee were fully aware of the dangers of European fascism. In contrast, Churchill praised Mussolini as a statesman who has "rendered a service to the whole world... a Roman genius — the greatest lawgiver amongst men." It is also worth recalling that prewar Tory

appeasement policy allowed Hitler a free hand in the Rhineland, the Spanish Civil War, Czechoslovakia and Austria.

Meanwhile, Labour leaders knew from their social democratic comrades in Germany and Austria, from trade unions and a network of Jewish contacts, what Hitlerism amounted to.

Churchill's motivations in opposing Hitler's Germany had nothing to do with the latter's ideology. Churchill was concerned with Germany's hegemonic ambitions in Europe which he saw as a strategic threat to the British Empire.

This was why the strongly anti-Labour and anti-trade union Churchill combined with Attlee, Labour and the U.K.'s trade unions in a coalition against Hitler. That broad domestic alliance helped defeat Nazism (with more than a little input from the Soviet Union, and in due course from the United States).

In 1946, Churchill, then out of government, but to his credit, called for the creation of a "United States of Europe." In contrast, Attlee's Labour government resisted any role in the first steps toward European integration in 1950.

### Speaking gently

As a former MP, I can say that the scenes in "Darkest Hour" of the House of Commons are just wrong. It is an intimate conversational chamber — not one where MPs orate and thump the dispatch box and wave their arms in the air.

Perhaps none of this matters. A movie is a movie, not a historical monograph. But both films are peak nostalgia about a Britain utterly disconnected from Europe and, presumably, all the better for it. They belong to today's Brexit-era propaganda about an invented Britain in 1940 that never existed.

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