

## PANELISTS DEBATE

### **Steven ERLANGER**

Would anybody else like to talk to that question, which we have not quite discussed? How emblematic is Trump of a structural change in the US, or is he a kind of shocking interlude that was an accident, after which it will go back to something different but not so different?

### **Rozlyn ENGEL**

I would probably reframe it not as his being the structural change but as many structural changes happening in the US and his becoming a symptom of them. Economic and wage growth is very stagnant in many parts of the country, with deindustrialisation across many parts of the country, and a lot of migration into the country and out-migration from a lot of communities. Using a personal example, I have 16 first cousins on both sides of the family, all from the mid-West, from Ohio, Wisconsin, etc., all born there, but only four still live there, and that happened in one generation. That hollowing-out of the mid-West, the heartland, and of the middle class has been going on for 20 years in the US. It just did not seem ever to percolate up, and the US leadership, both Democrats and Republicans, have not explained well the benefits of integration and of openness.

I disagree with some of the people on the panel that the American people will be very smart and understand why we should be engaged internationally. I am actually not sure about that; I do not think we have done a good job explaining the benefits to the average American voter, and as a consequence there are a lot of doubts about the benefits of American leadership if you are in Canton or Toledo, Ohio.

### **Michael FULLILOVE**

Both points are correct. Clearly something was happening before Trump; that was the point I was trying to make. A lot of people observed that President Obama was more interested in building the nation at home than building the order abroad. However, what is different about President Trump is that, whereas Obama had a cool, analytical view that the US role in the world was changing, President Trump is actually actively hostile to that role. It is not that he does not feel he can sustain it anymore; he feels that America has been a schmuck. The current leader of the free world does not believe in the free world – he does not want to lead it. He does not think that it is in America's interests to lead, in a way. He believes much more in the brutal application of superior negotiating power in a dog-eat-dog, zero-sum sort of way. That's an important change.

The second point is whether America can go back to what it was after four or eight years of Trump, and the jury is out on that, because we already see in public opinion polls that Mr. Trump is changing the views of Republicans, for example, about alliances, trade and other issues like that, and I do not think those views will snap back easily.

The third point, and I would say this as someone from the Asia-Pacific, is that there are real questions about the future of both the US and China, and this is why it is such a discombobulating moment. We are talking about Mr. Trump, but equally on the China side, there is a bipolarity to Chinese behaviour, sometimes very skilful and sometimes very hard and forward-leaning. We do not know how the contours of this relationship will work, and whether the current uneasy competition will slide into actual confrontation, which will be deeply uncomfortable for all of us.

Therefore, a country like Australia worries both about a feckless America, which is what we are talking about, but also about a potentially reckless China in the future. You have to be aware of uncertainty in both those poles.

### **Steven ERLANGER**

Some people suggest that Trump even understands the structural change and is taking one of the last moments of real American hegemony to push outside the multilateral system to get better deals from inside it, because America's power is inevitably slowly declining compared to China and Asia.

**Ichiro FUJISAKI**

I am a believer in the US coming back, but how soon this is, I do not know. I think it could be a temporary phenomenon. I am sorry if I sound cynical, but a weakness of intelligent analysts is that you take what is as something that should have happened. Three years ago, no one was saying that Trump and Americans would change like this, but now a lot of people are saying that Trump is a phenomenon and this had to happen, but I do not really believe in that kind of logic. Sorry to be very straightforward.

Maybe Mr. Trump denies the values of your founding fathers – democracy, freedom of speech and everything – but a lot of Americans still believe that, and that is why Mr. President does not have more than 40% support, so I still believe that. Maybe I am too optimistic, but I feel that way.

**Steven ERLANGER**

It is true that it is always easier to interpret the past.