

US Approach from Asia Pacific to Indo Pacific Region: A Comparative Study of Obama and Trump Era

Jasmeet Kaur^{1,2*}¹M. PHIL in International Relations from Jawaharlal Nehru University²Pursuing P. HD in International Relations from O.P Jindal UniversityDOI: [10.36347/sjahss.2021.v09i10.001](https://doi.org/10.36347/sjahss.2021.v09i10.001)

| Received: 23.08.2021 | Accepted: 29.09.2021 | Published: 07.10.2021

*Corresponding author: Jasmeet Kaur

Abstract

Review Article

Asia Pacific region was increasingly becoming world's strategic, geopolitical and economic centre of gravity in the 21st century. For United States, the objective of institutionalizing and structuring relationships in the Asia Pacific specifically was to ultimately create a more extensive network of partners in the region beyond traditional allies as a part of rebalancing strategy. The aim of this paper was to identify the significance of Indo Pacific region for US. The paper focused on Barack Obama's 'Pivot to Asia' which elaborated the foundation of US-Asia relations that was already in place. Further, Donald Trump's 'Free and Open Indo Pacific' was focussed, which highlighted on US's commitment to expand its vision and value of free and open regional order. The research methodology includes in-depth and detailed historical, strategic, political and international issues pertaining to US policies towards the Indo Pacific region. Lastly, the focus was also given on comparing the rationale for this policy shift by both the presidents. This study has indeed contributed towards the development of knowledge to fulfil and secure our understanding of US policies towards the region and to the changing dynamics of geopolitics.

Key words: USA, Barack Obama, Donald Trump, Asia Pacific, Geo politics.

Copyright © 2021 The Author(s): This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution **4.0 International License (CC BY-NC 4.0)** which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium for non-commercial use provided the original author and source are credited.

INTRODUCTION

The Asia Pacific region has emerged in the recent past as a significant centre in the international political field. The region occupies a vast area starting from the Indian subcontinent to the west coast of America. The region comprises of about half of the world's population. It also has the world's two most populated countries – China and India which together account for 36.28% of total world population 7,632,819,325 [1]. The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) which has now developed as one of the most significant regional association in the world represents more than 600 million inhabitants. In addition, the region also has number of important centres which excelled in manufacturing goods, have advanced technologies and probabilities of distinction in service sector due to economical labour. The region also comprises of three most important straits- Malacca strait, Sunda Strait and the strait of Lombok. Malacca strait is one of the busiest shipping lanes and all most

all the shipping passes through these three straits which further indicate the importance of the region.

Three key emerging trends in the geo-politics of Asia- Pacific deserves a special attention i.e., America's re-engagement with Asia- Pacific region, a seeming 'containment' of China and propping up of India as a potential 'counter-weight' to China [2]. Though, US president Obama has clarified that US presence in the area did not mean hold of China, instead the aim was to respond quickly to humanitarian and security issues in Asia Pacific region.

The emergence of China as a global power, its growing economic influence in the region, rising nationalism and competing claims in South China Sea among other factors are all seen as issues that will derive US expansion in the Asia Pacific region. US and China, both have a strong desire for peaceful accommodation into the regional order. However, the key point of difference between US and Chinese policies lies in the purpose behind the accommodation.

¹ China VS India population, 2018. United nation Department of Economics and Social affairs.

² Muhammad S, 2014. Emerging trends in Geo politics of Asia Pacific region, pp 81-101.

From US perspective, it rests with sustaining US leadership, securing US interest and advancing US values in the region [3]. From the Chinese perspective, it is about safeguarding China's national unity, territorial integrity and developmental interest, with China 2013 Defence White paper also asserting that 'China oppose any form of hegemonies or power politics, and does not interfere in the internal affairs of other countries [4]. Given these differing perspective, points of friction are likely to arise when deciding how the respective interests can be accommodated, especially when China's perception is that the current mechanism for dispute resolution favour the US as a result of its historic influence with the region [5].

The engagement and interest of US in the region is not a new phenomenon as there was a deep connection between US and Asia Pacific region for more than two centuries. US have begun to pursue more significant relationship with the Asia Pacific region under Barack Obama administration. However, the Asia Pacific region has expanded to Indo Pacific region under Donald Trump administration in which the geographical definition of Asia is expanded. US Secretary of Defence Chuck Hagel in his first official visit to the region in June 2013 stated that "America's long-standing commitment to the Asia-Pacific, including precious sacrifices made by him, members of his family, and millions of Americans who have served in the region in war and peace since the start of World War II [6]. US non-governmental actor's like- media, business, religious groups have been responsible for forming close relations in the region. Lately, tremendous inclination of US interest in the region could be witnessed due to Asia's recent economic growth. Asia's preference can also be noticed due to large number of flow of immigrants from Asia-Pacific to US which has strengthened their ties. Over the past half century, many Asian immigrants have flourished in the American education and free enterprise system, becoming leading figures in the United States while sustaining close ties with their home countries[7].

The presence of US can be seen in the region during World War II and throughout the cold war. The end of World War II saw the United States as the pre-

³ US department of Defence, 2015. US National Security Strategy 2015. Department of Defence: Washington D.C.

⁴ China's Défense White papers, 2013." The Diversified Employment of China's Armed Forces".

⁵ Swaine M, 2012. "Chinese leadership and Elite responses to the US Pacific Pivot", PP 6-10.

⁶ Sutter, G. Robert, Brown E. Michael and Adamson, J.A Timothy with Mochizuki, M. Mike and Ollapally D, 2008. "Balancing acts: The U.S. rebalance and Asia Pacific Stability".

⁷ Ibid.

eminent power in the region, but also launched its competition with China, with the communist party's takeover of mainland China in 1949 and its engagement in the Korean War in the 1950s and the Vietnam War that ended in 1975 [8]. The relationship between US and China normalised in 1979, though the competition between them intensified with the latter joining World Trade Organisation in 2001.

The significance of the Asia Pacific region has reached new heights of relevance with the establishment of Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation process (APEC) in the late 1980's. Its consolidation, including most East Asian and Australasian countries, plus the United States, Canada, and three Latin American countries, helped allay concerns about US retrenchment at the end of the Cold War [9]. The US presidents, Bill Clinton and George W. Bush were also actively engaged in Asia after cold war. The 'New Pacific Community Initiative' was announced by Clinton administration in 1993, to elevate the importance of the APEC, for encouraging trade and maintaining good economic relations in the region. President Clinton viewed Asia Pacific region full of potential for free trade and economic, his administration placed an emphasis on such regional economic institutions and gave a passive support to the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF). During President Clinton' tenure steps were taken to both to engage and prevent China. US administration under President Clinton tried to engage China by energising negotiations leading to China's accessions to WTO and also tried to maintain balance against China with the support of its allies and partners in the region.

The Bush administration made the similar moves to strengthen US ties with the countries of Asia Pacific region. US signed many bilateral and multilateral agreements with the countries of the region. Bush administration was willing to maintain cordial relations with China and therefore, held back all the claims of stating China as a Strategic competitor. Subsequently, the government got occupied in combating global terrorism and hence launched 'Operation Enduring Freedom', in response to September 11, 2001 attacks on World Trade Centre against one of the deadliest terrorist group-Al Qaeda. In the second term of Bush's tenure, he had taken certain concrete steps to escalate its relation and therefore, he has carried out number of important naval exercises. US had conducted one of the largest Pacific Ocean

⁸ Directorate General for External policies. Policy Department, 2017. "Workshop What Next after the US withdrawal from the TPP? What are the options for trade relations in the Pacific and what will but the impact on the EU"?

⁹ Medcalf R, 2015. "Reimagining Asia: From Asia-Pacific to Indo-Pacific".

exercises in June 2006. This exercise involved 22,000 personnel, 280 aircraft (including B-2 & B-52 bombers) and 30 ships (including three US aircrafts Carrier battle groups operating together in Pacific Ocean for the first time in ten years) [10]. Another notable exercise occurred 2007 in the Bay of Bengal along the sea line of communication leading to the straits of Malacca that is very sensitive to China [11]. This exercise was carried out by US, India, Australia and Japan. US by the end of the Bush administration observed good and improving relationship with the key countries of Asia Pacific.

Barack Obama's 'Pivot to Asia' or 'Rebalancing Policy'

US foreign policies under the former president Barack Obama have witnessed a significant shift by paying higher level of attention to the Asia Pacific region. Obama Administration has identified Asia Pacific region as a geostrategic priority. Obama Administration in his two terms as a US president has made important policies in relation to the region. The most important foreign policy announced by Obama in 2011 was 'Pivot to Asia', which is characterized by a rebalancing strategy. The key areas of actions under Pivot to Asia are: 'strengthening bilateral security alliances (Australia, Japan, South Korea, Philippines), deepening our working relationships with emerging powers (India and Indonesia), including with China, engaging with regional multilateral institutions (ASEAN, EAS and ARF), expanding trade and investment (Trans Pacific Partnership), forging a broad-based military presence and advancing democracy and human rights [12].

The rebalancing policy focuses on emphasising and building on an elaborate foundation of US-Asia Relations that was already in place. For US policy makers, the objective of institutionalising and structuring relationships in Asia Pacific specifically was to create a more extensive network of partners in the region beyond traditional allies as a part of rebalancing strategy [13]. The rebalancing policy was not fixed, it continued to evolve based on the changing circumstances of the countries of Asian Pacific region and US.

While the US had always projected itself as a Pacific power, re engagement process with Asia Pacific commenced when at the outset President Obama described himself as the first "Pacific President" of the

¹⁰ Sutter, Brown, Adamson, Timothy with Mochizuki and Ollapally, no. 6.

¹¹ US navy, Exercise Malabar 07-2 kick off, September 7, 2007.

¹² Clinton H, 2011. U.S. Department of State through Foreign Policy Magazine. "America's Pacific Century".

¹³ Parameswaran P, 2014. Contemporary Southeast Asia, PP 262-289.

United States owing to his Hawaiian origin and Indonesian childhood [14]. After a prolonged war in Afghanistan and Iraq, US under Obama administration has started paying more focus on Southeast Asia, South Asia and Northeast Asia. These were those parts of the world that will be growing economic and strategic importance in the first half of the 21st century. The new policy of rebalancing indicates at the determination of Obama's government to maintain force and military capability in the Asia Pacific region despite US cut down on its defence spending. Additionally, the US government also worked on setting up various bases and deployment arrangement of US forces in the region. US extension of relationship with the countries of Asia Pacific is driven by a desire to assure US allies and other countries in the region that US has not been exhausted after a decade of war, and is not weakened by economic and political problems at home. Another crucial reason to expand this relation is to share the burden of regional and global challenges as well as to structure US-Asia Pacific relationship. The US government under Obama was very clear of the fact that global challenges like global warming and terrorism can't be fought single handed. The alignment with key countries is the need of an hour and therefore is comprised a topmost priority in Obama's foreign policy in handling the global agenda.

The Asia Pacific region was clearly identified by Obama administration from India to New Zealand and the Pacific Island to Northern Japan and the Korean peninsula as a geostrategic priority for the US. The Obama government has institutionalised partnership with many countries of Asia Pacific like India, New Zealand, Indonesia and Singapore among others. US rebalancing strategy also went ahead in forming relations with existing multilateral institutions like ASEAN, ARF and the East Asia Summit (EAS). EAS was established in 2005, its original membership consisted of ten ASEAN members, China, India, Australia, Japan, New Zealand and Republic of Korea. US under Obama showed its willingness to join EAS by stating that this organisation provides a major tool for addressing regional challenges. There were few member countries willing for US membership as it would provide a counterbalance against China and hence, US joined EAS along with Russia in 2011.

Secretary of state Hillary Clinton, in a speech to council of foreign relations in Washington D.C in July 2009, said that, we are working with our key treaty allies, Japan and Korea, Australia, Thailand and the Philippines and other partners to strengthen our bilateral relationships as well as trans-Pacific institutions. We are both a trans-Atlantic and a trans-Pacific nation. We will also put special emphasis on encouraging major and emerging global powers: China, India, Russia and

¹⁴ Muhammad S. No.2

Brazil, as well as Turkey, Indonesia and South Africa to be full partners in tackling the global agenda [¹⁵]. Secretary Clinton further put in her foreign policy article- the first public unveiling of the Obama administration's pivot to Asia Pacific- "our challenge now is to build a web of partnerships and institutions across the Pacific that is a durable and as consistent with American interests and values as the web we have built across the Atlantic. That is the touchstone of our efforts in all these areas [¹⁶].

The Obama administration has taken concrete steps to revitalise US relations with ASEAN to reassert US's role in this part of the world. US engagement with ASEAN started in 1997, with former becoming the dialogue partner of ASEAN and has cooperated ever since. It also became the first non-ASEAN country to name an ambassador to ASEAN in 2008 along with the first non-ASEAN country to establish a dedicated mission to ASEAN in Jakarta in June 2011. The partnership of the United States and ASEAN focuses on five areas including supporting economic integration, expanding maritime cooperation, cultivating ASEAN emerging leaders, promoting opportunity for ASEAN women, and addressing transnational challenges [¹⁷]. President Obama made his intent clear in his speech at the opening session of the US-ASEAN summit in Sunnylands Centre in 2016.

... early in my presidency, I decided that the United States, as a Pacific nation, would rebalance our foreign policy and play a larger and long-term role in Asia-Pacific. And this has included engagement with Southeast Asia and ASEAN, which is central to the region's peace and prosperity, and to our shared goal of building a regional order where all nations play by the same rules [¹⁸].

One of the biggest undertakings of Obama's administration is setting up of Trans Pacific Partnership (TPP) in February 2016. TPP was originally signed between four countries- Singapore, New Zealand, Brunei and Chile. The Obama administration reinforced its policy of 'Pivot to Asia' by joining this organisation in 2009. US along with other eleven members of TPP commenced negotiations in 2010 and signed the agreement in 2016. It is a free trade agreement between US and eleven Pacific Rim countries. Obama administration saw TPP as a major geo strategic

¹⁵ A conversation with U.S secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton, 2009. 'Council on Foreign Relations,'.

¹⁶ Clinton H, 2011. Explaining US strategic partnership in the Asia Pacific region.

¹⁷ Ordaniel, J and Baker C, 2019. 'ASEAN Centrality and the evolving US Indo Pacific strategy'.

¹⁸ Barack Obama, 2016. Remarks by president Obama at opening session of the US-ASEAN summit.

instrument on digital trade and state-owned enterprise between to address the issue of growing US-China tensions.

It was evident for the Obama government that, China has significantly improved its geopolitical relations with countries of Asia Pacific. Efforts were made by China to expand its soft power relations with the countries of Asia Pacific by extending its political and cultural activities as well as by expanding its trade and investment flow in the region. Countries of the region are going through number of developmental projects in their respective countries with an assistance of China. With such grounds, China's influence has been steadily growing. Hence, there is conflicting interest in their pursuits for influence between China and US. Obama administration also has concerns with China over the matter of South China Sea. US have tried to deal with this matter at the summit of ASEAN While China wants to resolve this matter of maritime claims bilaterally with all the claimants - Malaysia, Vietnam, Philippines, Brunei and Taiwan. Countries of the region differ on their opinion on the role of US intervention in resolving this issue of South China Sea. Under these circumstances, it has been a tough task for Obama administration to maintain balance in the region. The evolution of this 'policy of rebalancing' can't only be seen in terms of US's desire to balance China but also of its willingness to play a greater strategic role in the region. Though, US have a desire to maintain balance in the region but in doing so, it never has an intention of standing against China. This policy is not against China as US has never forced any of the countries of the region to choose between US and China. The Obama administration respects the perspective of all the countries of the region to maintain healthy relations with both the superpowers. US have been able to form close relations with key countries of the region, but they have done so willingly. US under Obama administration have tried to re-evolve its relations with all the countries through active participation in the region regardless of differences in their perspective, ideologies and political system.

Donald Trump's policy of 'Free and Open Indo Pacific'

In the initial days of Donald Trump, his administration lacks a clear strategic vision to formulate a new Asian strategy, however, despite numerous apprehensions; the administration provided a national security strategy within the first year in office. The strategy clearly defines China as a strategic rival that poses a challenge to US's power and influence. The Business tycoon turned politician has expanded its strategic perspective from Asia Pacific to Indo Pacific by unravelling a new US vision for 'Free and Open Indo Pacific region' comprising of Indian and Pacific Ocean. The Trump government has manifested deep engagement and wide-ranging commitment towards the

Indo Pacific region. US along with its allies and partners are the frontrunners in promoting free and open regional order.

Trump administration approach towards the region is primarily an issue oriented or case by case approach in which he addresses to the main challenges first, structuring a grand strategy with smaller strategic designs. Trump advocates the Policy of 'America First' in which his administration prioritises the interest of United States over all its allies and other regional countries.

Trump administration believed that the existing international system is not fair. He wanted to renegotiate the existing deals. In his inaugural speech, Trump emphasized his priority was to reinvigorate the economy, to "buy American" and "hire American," and to address the issue of "unfair" trade [19]. In Trump's opinion, the long-time trade deficit is to blame for the United States' economic downturn, and the United States has become the loser in trade while Asian countries are taking advantage of the US market to develop their own economies [20]. In lieu of that US has withdrawn from the TPP agreement started by Obama government in which eleven other countries were left to tackle with consequences.

He wants to bring on radical changes at international front. Rather than a clear and comprehensive policy, he adopted issue-based policy. Without having an appropriate vision, he pressurised other countries to change by threatening sanction in exchange for their concessions. For his drastic policies and perspective, Trump had a shaky start from the beginning of his presidency. By withdrawing from TPP, Trump administration wanted to demonstrate a consistent US trade policy in which no one will be allowed to take advantage of US or, as articulated in the president's trade policy agenda 2017: -

"Every action we take with respect to trade will be designed to increase our economic growth, promote job creation in the United States, promote reciprocity with the trading partners, strengthen our manufacturing base and our ability to defend ourselves, and expand our agricultural and service industry exports. As a general matter, we believe that these goals can be best accomplished by focussing on bilateral negotiations rather than multilateral negotiations- and by renegotiating and revising trade agreements when our goals are not being met. Finally, we reject the notion that the United States should for putative geopolitical advantage, turn a blind eye to unfair trade

¹⁹ Blake A, 2017. "Trump's Full Inauguration Speech Transcript Annotated".

²⁰ Liu Q, 2017. "Trump's Asia-Pacific Policy: Features and Directions".

practices that disadvantage American workers, farmers, ranchers and business in global market...the Trump administration has identified four major priorities: (1) defend US national sovereignty over trade policy; (2) strictly enforce US trade laws; (3) use all possible sources of leverage to encourage other countries to open their markets to US export of good and services; and provide adequate and effective protection and enforcement of US intellectual property rights; and (4) negotiate new and better trade deals with countries in key markets around the world [21].

From the very beginning Donald Trump had taken a tough stance on China. During the 2016 presidential campaign, he threatened to designate China and also stated to put a 45 per cent tariff on Chinese exports to the US. President Trump, also challenged the long established 'One - China policy' by trying to build contact with Taiwanese leader Tsai Ing Dec 2016, which gave an imprint that this action might disturbs US China Relations. It is not only that both the countries differ on the matter of Taiwan issue, there are many other issues on which they have different perspectives like- Trade and investment, South China Sea, regional security, global governance, and the vision of world order.

The US- China relationship is very confusing and indeed the most significant bilateral relationship in the world. However, efforts were made by both the sides to improve their relationship. The relationship with China during the first year of Trump Presidency was revolved around mainly two issues- the issue of North Korea and issue of Trade. Donald Trump needs China's cooperation in imposing severe sanctions on North Korea and in doing so held back harsh policies on China in trade. However, this fragile relation didn't last long. A presidential memorandum named 'China's economic aggression' was signed by president Trump on 22nd March 2018, to benefit American trade and economy. The memorandum directed the US trade representative to level tariffs on about \$50 billion worth of Chinese imports, following a seven-month investigation into China's intellectual property theft [22]. This was followed by China's retaliation, announcing series of measures against US export to China. On the geopolitical front also, there are indications that US is moving towards competition and rivalry towards China. The White house, in December 2017 released the new U.S National Security Strategy (NSS). In this important strategy document, China is named as one of the

²¹ Workshop What Next after the US withdrawal from the TPP? What are the options for trade relations in the Pacific and what will but the impact on the EU?2017. 1-2.

²² White house, 2018. "Presidential memorandum targeting China's economic Aggression".

‘Strategic rivals’ that ‘Challenge American power, influence and interests’^[23].

Trump administration changed US’s approach towards South China Sea. As the nuclear issue subsided and China reached a framework agreement with neighbouring countries on a code of conduct in the South China Sea, the United States has again started hyping the issues^[24]. Though, US continues to intervene in the issue related to the territorial dispute of South China Sea but it is doing so passively without entangling itself deep in the region and avoiding to become focus of controversy.

The Trump administration issued on 1st June 2019, ‘Indo Pacific strategic report’ which exquisitely defines Indo Pacific strategy’s (PDS) foundations and policies. Using very straight forward language, the report states that, “Inter State strategic competition, defined by geopolitical rivalry between free and repressive world order visions, is the primary concerns for US national security. In particular, the people’s Republic of China, under the leadership of Chinese Communist party, seeks to reorder the region to its advantage by leveraging military modernisation, influence operations and predatory economies to coerce other nations^[25]. On 4th November 2019, the state department released, “A free and Open Indo Pacific: Advancing a shared vision”. This report, focussed more on the political vision of the regional order, argues that “Free, fair and reciprocal trade, open investment environments, good governance, and freedom of sea are goals shared by all who wish to prosper in a free and open future^[26]”.

Comparison between Obama and Trump policies towards the Asia Pacific region

There is a stark difference between the policies adopted by US presidents Barack Obama and his successor Donald Trump towards the Asia Pacific region. Obama’s policy promoted the theme of Liberal internationalism by maintaining the balance in the Asia Pacific region. ‘Pivot to Asia’ by Obama also gave an opportunity to regional countries to take initiative to maintain balance in the region by countering China. Trump Administration on the other hand, was against this policy. After declaring the death of Obama’s ‘Pivot to Asia’, the Trump administration began to use the concept of a ‘free and open Indo–Pacific region to describe its new Asia strategy, though it pursues similar goals of the Obama administration: containing China’s

²³ White house, 2017. “National Security Strategy of the United States of America”.

²⁴ *ibid*

²⁵ Department of Defense. 2019. “Indo Pacific Strategic Report: preparedness, partnership and promoting a networked region.”

²⁶ State Department. “A free and open Indo Pacific: Advancing a shared vision

ability to dominate Asia and bolstering partnership with major partners in Asia like Australia, India and Japan^[27]. The US policies and actions under Trump showed that there are still lot of gaps and confusion in framing policies against China. On the one hand, Trump wants to have cordial relation with president Xi to get its support on North Korea and other international issues. On the other hand, Trump’s administration is moving in a direction of treating China as a strategic rival.

Former President Obama was aware of China’s rising in the Asia pacific region. He therefore, has adopted the rebalancing strategy against China’s growing action in the South China Sea, trade and cyber security policy. While on the other hand, President Trump didn’t follow the footprints of Obama and came up with the policy of ‘America First’ towards the world affairs. As an overriding theme, Trump’s America first foreign policy emphasises the focus and priority of ‘America interests and American National security’^[28]. The policy of ‘America first’ gave the impression that Trump government is mainly concerned by putting its own interest and preferences before anything else. Trump was of the view that just like leaders of others countries put their countries first; similarly, he will also put his country first. He further stated, The US will forever be a great friend to the world especially to its allies, but we can no longer be taken advantage of or enter into one sided deal in which the United States gets nothing in return^[29]. Such policy has not been carried out by any previous US administrator and to an extent has completely transformed the purpose and rational of US foreign policy.

Another major difference between the two is their views on establishment and globalization. By launching TPP, Obama administration was successful in extending alliances and enhancing regional order. As opposed to Obama, Trump is against liberal belief that globalization benefit America. Trump’s economic nationalist thinking believes that the ‘system is rigged’ against middle class Americans and globalism puts the economic interests of Multinational Corporation and international elites above those of the ordinary American working class^[30]. Hence, the Trump administration has withdrawn from the TPP and other such international treaties and brought about drastic changes in US foreign policy.

Obama and Trump approach was also different in terms of military defence expenditure. Trump administration completely overturns Obama’s military

²⁷ Kurlantzian J 2020. “The Trump Administration’s Free and open Indo Pacific: A solid Idea, But Different to pull off”.

²⁸ White house, ‘American first foreign policy, 2021.

²⁹ Weixing H. No.21

³⁰ *ibid*

design of better quality with less quantity and replaced it with expansion of US armed forces, the impact of which can also be seen in the Asia Pacific region as Trump government has expanded its maritime forces in the region to maintain its naval hegemony.

The approach of Obama and Trump was also different in terms of dealing with an issue of North Korea. Obama administration has adopted an approach of 'Strategic Patience' towards North Korea while Trump administration has assumed a tough stand by adopting the approach of 'maximum pressure' instead of more assertive ones. The only difference lies in Trump putting more emphasis on sanctions and strengthening dialogue with the United States' allies to extend strategic deterrence [31].

Trump will not be as avid in promoting Asian multilateralism as his predecessor, but he will not completely withdraw either, instead taking a utilitarian approach and selectively participating in those mechanisms that can advance American interests [32]. Obama administration has made concrete efforts to expand its engagement with existing institutions they were a member of by either hosting or attending meetings with other member countries. Trump administration gave credit to ASEAN's role in combating terrorism and maintain maritime security. However, Trump wants to establish cooperative relations by selectively negotiating with some countries.

IN LIEU OF CONCLUSION

With this we can conclude that the Indo Pacific region is emerging as a new focal point wherein, world's major powers are struggling to excel and get maximum benefits. US evident shift towards the region display the most important shift in the international and political dynamics of modern times. It is clear that the geopolitical landscape has got more complex with the presence of both the challenges and opportunities.

The Obama administration throughout his tenure in office was committed to the goal of rebalancing policy. The fundamental goals of new US policy aim to broaden areas of cooperation beneficial to the United States with the regional states and institutions, strengthen relations with American allies and partners, including great powers such as China and India as well as important regional powers such as Indonesia, and develop regional norms and rules

³¹ Benjamin L, 2017. "Trump's First 100 Days in Asia: Continuities and Discontinuities in Trump's Asia Policy,"

³² Parameswaran P, 2016. "What Will Donald Trump's Asia Policy Look Like?"

compatible with international security, economic and political order long supported by the United States [33].

Trump's 'America First' was a matter of tension even for US allies and partners. Trump administration after coming to power indulged in disputes with its traditional allies on minor issues such as free trade, investment and democratic values, forcing them to adjust their relations with US or even to seek alternatives.

Though the Trump administration strategies in general, and with Pacific allies in particular, is consistent in being driven by a desire to stop other 'taking advantage of United States, it is often seen as relatively inconsistent in its approach towards China.

Trump administration decision to withdraw from TPP and other such international treaties has further reduced the integrity of US playing a leadership role in the region. Trump policies towards the Asia Pacific region forms a pattern that leaves an impression of doubt on many leaders of the region. There are feelings of apprehensions among them that the US under the present administration lacks the willingness or the ability to lead in the global affairs.

Indo Pacific region is still an idea under construction, but the bodies who are constructing it are some of the most formidable forces in the world and are up against equally strong opponent. Therefore, there is a need for US to build a foundation for closer cooperation with the countries of Indo Pacific and regional organisations. US cooperation that focuses on the Asian countries and regional groups and avoids regional instability prompted by direct American challenges to China fits well with the policy priorities of most regional governments; the latter remain focussed on enhancing their countries economic development while preserving sovereignty and policy independence [34]. Thus, US in present circumstances should follow a path that requires effective US initiative towards rising power- China and effective initiative towards the broader Indo Pacific region.

In the contemporary times, with Joe Biden coming to power, all eyes are set on the foreign policies that will be undertaken by his government vis-à-vis the region. US presidency under his administration will in many ways be a defining one as it will parallel to the period when a long-term US strategy towards the Asian giants finally takes shape. The Biden administration is projected to lay prime emphasis on building strong ties

³³ Sutter, Brown, Adamson, Timothy with Mochizuki and Ollapally, no. 6.

³⁴ Sutter, Brown, Adamson, Timothy with Mochizuki and Ollapally, no. 6.

with potential partners and strengthen faltering relations with territorial allies.

REFERENCES

- A conversation with U.S secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton. (2009). 'Council on Foreign Relations,' Accessed on 17th November 2020. <https://www.cfr.org/event/conversation-us-secretary-state-hillary-rodham-clinton-1>
- Aaron Blake, Aaron. (2017). "Trump's Full Inauguration Speech Transcript Annotated," The Washington Post. Accessed on 22nd December 2020, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2017/01/20/donald-trumps-full-inauguration-speech-transcript-annotated>
- Barack, O. (2016). Remarks by president Obama at opening session of the US-ASEAN summit. February 15, 2016. White house, Sunnylands centre, California. Accessed on 21st November 2020. <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2016/02/15/remarks-president-obama-opening-session-us-asean-summit>
- China VS India population. 7th July 2018. United nation Department of Economics and Social affairs. Accessed on 7th November 2020. <http://statisticstimes.com/population/china-vs-india-population.php>
- Department of Defense. 1st June (2019). "Indo Pacific Strategic Report: preparedness, partnership and promoting a networked region." Accessed on 22nd December 2020, Department of Défense Indo-Pacific Strategy Report 2019 (andrewerickson.com)
- Directorate General for External policies. Policy Department. (2017). Workshop What Next after the US withdrawal from the TPP? What are the options for trade relations in the Pacific and what will but the impact on the EU? Accessed on 14th November 2020. [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document.html?reference=EXPO_STU\(2017\)603857](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document.html?reference=EXPO_STU(2017)603857)
- Hillary, C. (2011). 'America's Pacific century', Foreign policy. Explaining US strategic partnership in the Asia Pacific region. Accessed on 18th November 2020. https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/pais/research/researchcentres/cpd/easg/easg_calendar/america27s_pacific_century_2011.pdf
- Hillary, R. C. (2011). U.S. Department of State through Foreign Policy Magazine. "America's Pacific Century". Accessed on 19th November 2020. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2011/10/11/america-pacific-century/>
- <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4328129> as quoted in Conversation with former Obama administration official, 4 June 2014.
- Jashua, K. (2020). 'The Trump Administration's Free and open Indo Pacific: A solid Idea, But Different to pull off'. Council on Foreign Relations blog. 21st December 2020. <http://www.cfr.org/blogs/Trump-administration-free-and-open-indo-pacific-solid-idea-difficult-pull>. Accessed on 27th November 2018.
- Lee, B. (2017). "Trump's First 100 Days in Asia: Continuities and Discontinuities in Trump's Asia Policy," The Diplomat. Accessed on 5th January 2021. <http://thediplomat.com/2017/04/trumps-first-100-days-in-asia>.
- Medcalf, R. (2015). Reimagining Asia: From Asia-Pacific to Indo-Pacific. National Security College, Australian National University. Brookings Institution.
- Ordaniel, J., & Baker, C. (2019). 'ASEAN Centrality and the evolving US Indo Pacific strategy'. Vol. 19, CR-4, Conference report of the US-ASEAN partnership forum, Accessed on 18th Nov 2020 [issuesinsights_Vol19CR4_USASEAN_0.pdf](https://www.pacforum.org/issuesinsights_Vol19CR4_USASEAN_0.pdf) (pacforum.org),
- Prashant, P. (2020). Contemporary Southeast Asia, Vol.36, NO.2 (August 2014), PP 262-289. Accessed on 19th November 2020.
- Prashanth, P. (2016). "What Will Donald Trump's Asia Policy Look Like?" The Diplomat, November 10, 2016, <http://thediplomat.com/2016/11/what-will-donald-trumps-asia-policy-look-like>.
- Qing, L. (2017). Trump's Asia-Pacific Policy: Features and Directions. China Institute of International studies. Accessed on 22nd December 2020. http://www.ciis.org.cn/english/2017-11/09/content_40063015.htm
- Shafiq, M. (2014). Emerging trends in Geo politics of Asia Pacific region. Pp. 81-101. IPRI journal XIV. No.1. Accessed on 9th November 2020. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/289317217_Emerging_Trends_in_Geo-politics_of_Asia_Pacific_Region
- Sutter, G. Robert, Brown, E. Michael., & Adamson, J. (2020). A Timothy with Mochizuki, M. Mike and Ollapally, Deepa. August 2008. Balancing acts: The U.S. rebalance and Asia Pacific Stability. Elliot School of International affairs, The George Washington University. Accessed on 13th November 2020.
- Swaine, M. (2012). Chinese leadership and Elite responses to the US Pacific Pivot. PP 6-10. China Leadership Monitor, No.38. Accessed on 12th November 2020. <https://carnegieendowment.org/2012/07/17/chinese-leadership-and-elite-responses-to-u.s.-pacific-pivot-pub-48871>
- The people's republic of China. (2013). The Diversified Employment of China's Armed Forces. 2013. PP.1.China's Defence white paper. Accessed

on 10th November 2020.
<http://aseanregionalforum.asean.org/files/library/ARF%20Defense%20White%20Papers/China-2013.pdf>

- US department of Defence. (2015). US National Security Strategy 2015. Department of Defence: Washington D.C. Accessed on 10th November 2020.
https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/sites/default/files/docs/2015_national_security_strategy_2.pdf
- US navy, Exercise Malabar 07-2 kick off, 'September 7, 2007. Accessed on 15th November 2020
https://www.navy.mil/submit/display.asp?story_id=31691.
- White house, 'American first foreign policy. 'https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/president-donald-j-trumps-foreign-policy-puts-america-first/ accessed on 2nd January 2021.

- White house. 22 March 2018. 'Presidential memorandum targeting China's economic Aggression. Accessed on 24th December 2020.
<https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-signing-presidential-memorandum-targeting-chinas-economic-aggression/>
- White house. National Security Strategy of the United States of America (Washington, D.C, December 2017), Accessed on 24th December 2020.
<http://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/NSS-final-12-18-2017-0905.pdf>.
- Workshop What Next after the US withdrawal from the TPP? What are the options for trade relations in the Pacific and what will be the impact on the EU? No.8 as quoted in Office of US trade representative. The president's 2017 Trade Policy agenda,1-2.