

COMPARATIVE STUDY OF US POLICY TOWARDS ASIA-PACIFIC UNDER OBAMA AND TRUMP: CHANGE OR CONTINUITY?

Poornima R Vijaya¹ & Dr. Joshy M Paul²

¹A Student of Masters in International Studies at Christ (Deemed to be University), Bengaluru.

²Assistant Professor in the Department of International Studies and History at Christ (Deemed to be University), Bengaluru

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ABSTRACT: *Obama, popularly known as the first Asia-Pacific President of US, formulated Asia Policy of 'Rebalance' that produced mixed results. However, he was unsure of Chinese intention behind an increased presence in the Asia-Pacific. Drastic economic policies and policy changes were introduced by the Trump Administration. This led to an increase in the amount of uncertainty. At present, there are several policies undertaken like withdrawal from Trans- Pacific Partnership, renegotiation of NAFTA, withdrawal from the Iran Nuclear deal that is critical to shape the US presence. With the rise of China, the US ought to be more cautious while framing their policies. Even though, the sustenance of his policies is less, it is critical to examine if there is a probable chance of a productive arrangement between US and China, especially amidst the growing trade war. In this process, also aim to assess the shift from the concept of Asia Pacific to the idea of Indo-Pacific.*

Key Words: *US and Asia Pacific, Multilateral, Economic, President Obama, President Trump, Rebalance, change, continuity*

INTRODUCTION

Economics played a major role in shaping the policy of the Asia-Pacific. Both the Atlantic and East Asian regional order were formed by – and today bear the profound signs of – the exercise of America's post war hegemonic power. American power in the region has developed gradually and incrementally. Japan, South Korea, and other nations in the region are dependent on American military assistance and the American market. In reality, American extended deterrence and regional trade linkages and competition are at the core of East Asia's economic order. The Atlantic and Pacific areas show distinctive domineering examples: American relations with Europe are composed around multilateral economic and security cooperation, though the East Asian region is sorted out around bilateral ties and free multilateral economic relations. However, trade, investments and other economic measures value over a trillion dollars today. The US and Asia-Pacific continue to have enormous stake in shared prosperity. This engagement is particularly driven by numbers with the top three economies as members of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) namely, the US, Japan and China. According to the international Monetary Fund (IMF) this region is the fastest growing region with an average GDP of 6.3 percent¹ and 55 percent of world trade.² The US policy objectives in this region is economic growth, upholding a rule-based international economy and a long-term presence in the region.

Regional integration by the US is marked by two distinctive characteristics. Firstly, regional integration is trans-pacific and not Asia-centric and secondly it is based on high standards of liberalization and rule-making. The outcome of these policy objectives is linked to the sustenance of the international economic order. However, the economic engagement poses few challenges. The persistent trade imbalance leads to a trade deficit. The US trade deficit is greatly numbered from major Asian countries (China and Japan).

Their trade policy has supported macro-economic growth agenda like that of Clinton inviting APEC Heads of States to Black Island Summit in 1993, George W Bush's Korea-US Free Trade Agreement (KORUS FTA) in 2007 and Obama's Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) in 2012. George W Bush and Obama have insisted on broadest and deepest possible liberalization and state of art discipline on trade and investment related policies.

However, the scenario in the Asia Pacific is changing, and poses growing risks to US interests. Mercantilist trade and state level industrial policies are on the rise. Hence, U.S. leadership is being tested both by new contenders and by ambiguity about US policies and commitment to the region. Against this setting, the United States needs a comprehensive strategy to promote their interests in the region. A core to this strategy is the economic statecraft that creates a more level playing field for US exporters and investors and recaptures U.S. leadership in market opening and high-standard rulemaking in the Asia Pacific.

Asia Policy of President Barack Obama

President Barack Obama announced his administration's emphasis on the Asia-Pacific region through a historic speech at the Australian Parliament in 2011. He stated that "in the Asia-Pacific region, the US is all in".³ By referring it to as a "deliberate and a strategic decision", he described that US being an Asia-Pacific nation will play a larger and a long-term goal shaping the region and its future".⁴ With this the President had pledged to increase focus in this region. The economic mantra of the Obama Administration has been strong, sustainable and balanced growth. Since the administration aimed at shared economic prosperity, promoting regional security and good governance,⁵ this emphasis came to be termed as the "Rebalance to Asia".

Theoretical Framework

Liberalism is a political doctrine that emphasizes on protecting and enhancing the freedom of the individual as the central objective of politics. Liberals believe that government is necessary to protect individuals from being harmed by others, but they also recognize that government itself can pose a threat to liberty. As the revolutionary American Philosopher Thomas Paine expressed it in his book, *Common Sense* (1776) by stating that government is at best "a necessary evil." Laws, judges, and police are needed to protect the individual's life and liberty, but their coercive power could turn against him.

Some liberals known as the neoclassical liberals say that most liberals have insisted that the powers of government can promote as well as protect the freedom of the individual. According to modern liberalism, the primary task of government is to eradicate obstacles that prevent individuals from living freely or from fully realizing their potential. Such obstruction includes poverty, disease, discrimination, and ignorance. The difference among liberals over whether government should uphold individual freedom rather than just protect, is reflected in the prevailing conceptions of liberalism in the United States and Europe since the late 20th century. The grand strategic direction of the Obama administration can be understood as an effort to reformulate and re-legitimize US control by adapting it to a changing international system.

Obama tried to reinstate a common basis of shared interests and values between the US and the traditional US allies. The anticipation was a new, positive perception of the US would make it easier to mobilize international support for US objectives. When he took office, Obama affirmed that over the course of the "global war on terror," the US had diluted the values that had made the US strong. But his assurance to restore the moral authority of the US and thus is foundational for "soft power" was hard to translate into operational policies.

President Obama assured to further develop institutional procedures by pushing the US in multilateral frameworks. In Obama's political agenda, a stronger multilateral orientation is used. In effect, it intended a "return of geopolitics" and the outlook of competing trading blocs. For the United States, the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) is seen as a means of oppose Chinese hegemonic ambitions in Asia by refuting China the political control over other Asian countries in case they become too economically reliant on China. Together with the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP), it offers the US the hope of preserving its leadership role in setting ground rules of the international trading system.

From the start, the Obama administration has placed a clear priority on "resetting" relations with US allies. The relationship between the US and China contains elements for a geopolitical power rivalry: China has been expanding its economic and military power. Thus, its regional and global influence is growing. The Obama administration was building strategic framework for dealing with China with the aim to further integrate China into the international system and incorporate it as a constructive actor into a platform of powers under US leadership. This strategy didn't assure that China's rise will occur peacefully. Rather, it allowed for the possibility that a rivalry for hegemony would emerge. Political cooperation and economic integration were therefore pursued through a notable increase in strategic hedging. Maintaining American military superiority and expanding security relationships with states in the Asia-Pacific region had become central elements by the end of the Bush administration. The Obama administration strengthened these elements of the strategy, while at the same time trying to maintain cooperative relations with China. Strengthening the US alliance system in the Asia-Pacific region, deepening relationships with rising powers in that area, becoming more involved in regional organizations, and deepening economic integration through the TPP became the central features of Obama's policy.

Why did the US formulate such a policy?

National Security Advisor, Tom Donilon stated "The rebalance is ultimately oriented to making certain that international norms and law are respected, that commerce and freedom of navigation are not impeded, that the emerging powers build trust with their neighbors and disagreements are resolved peacefully without

threats or coercion.” This diplomatic explanation and the Asia-Pacific Policy was a result of transformation in the continent balance of power which was caused by growth on one state- China. The new force of geopolitical consequence began post 1978 when Deng Xiao Ping formulated policies of liberalizing Chinese economy and leading China towards positive integration, globally. China emerged as a new power in the global system after these policies. The US took measures to integrate China into the global economy post 1978.⁶ There was certain underlying desire to expand international economy that was complimented by a certain degree of altruism. However, the US didn’t expect a fundamental change in the geo-political system. The vast implication for the US to combat has been the rising insecurities amongst the treaty allies. China is involved in military build-up and this has created a formidable for US power in the region. Chinese military powers are capable in threatening the security of US allies and obstruct the US defending its allies in wake of a crisis. The trends in Chinese military advancement lie in anti-access/area denial (A2/AD) component within the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) missions. China has sought to expand the strike capability to specific US facilities in Asia-Pacific with conventional missiles.⁷

The US last confronted a high-tide competition with Soviet Union and now, they ought to confront China which can break the US from its allies in the Asian periphery. In this situation, the US can; a) walk away by accepting that the new geo-political order will hinder their past commitments or b) they can assure their presence to its allies and ensure that they don’t succumb to Chinese power.

This policy was drawn by several initiatives of the previous administration, George W Bush. However, the 9/11 tragedy was a peripheral challenge for his government to combat. Hence, it weakened the focus of the geo-political challenge in the Asia-Pacific region. Bush had recognized the rise of Chinese power. Entering a “new era” of China’s rise implies a grand upgrade to Chinese power. With respect to China’s international involvements, its role has been changing in the world system. This will have far-reaching regional and global significance, both economically and politically. Ultimately, efforts had to be taken to reassure US commitment in the region. This translated into a policy called as Rebalance decade later.

Rebalance under President Obama

Though the Rebalance was initially announced through a speech by President Obama, its initial announcement was through an article in *Foreign Policy* titled “America’s Pacific Century” by Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton.⁸ This article was seen as a foundational document to the Rebalance Policy. In early 2012, the policy makers shifted from using the term Pivot to using Rebalance because the term Pivot implied that the US engagement came at the expense of their engagement with other regions.

In the speech delivered by President Obama at the Australian Parliament, he specified certain objectives that are to be followed by the administration. Firstly, emphasized on a strong and modernized US military presence in the Asia-Pacific region to deter threats to peace and strengthen regional alliances. Secondly, he stated on a deepened engagement with multilateral institutions present in the region. Thirdly, he expanded economic partnerships with the countries through new trade agreements. Lastly, he aimed at establishing partnerships with emerging democracies to strengthen its governance.⁹

With the emergence of Rebalance, it marked some fresh emphasis for US foreign policy. However, it didn’t change the fundamentals of the US objectives and interest and didn’t differ from the interests of the previous administrations. President Obama’s policy reflected on the five longstanding principles of the US policy which are; security is the foundation for peace and security, stand for international order upholding rights and responsibilities, international laws, norms and rules are enforced, commerce and freedom of navigations is not impeded and, disagreements are resolved peacefully.¹⁰ Hence, he devised a policy that aimed at integrating strategic, diplomatic economic and military components.

Walter Lohman, Director of Asian Studies Center at the Heritage Foundation testified to the US-China Economic and Security Review Commission by stating that the Rebalance represented a mere tactical adjustment than a strategic innovation to the US policy.¹¹ In the Shangri-La Dialogue of June 2016, Ashton Carter, US Secretary of Defense said that the Rebalance policy to the Asia-Pacific is “not transient”.¹² It was rather enduring due to the logic and the American engagement in the Asia Pacific is irrefutable.

The closest economic initiative to achieve the goal was the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) agreement. The TPP was widely referred as the centerpiece to the economic rebalance.¹³ It was regarded as a “high standard” free trade agreement as it went beyond tariff reductions as it eliminates 18000 different types of tariffs. It addressed thirty different issues which include provisions on intellectual property rights protection, labor and environmental standards, transparency, foreign investments, government procurement of goods and services and state owned enterprises. The US gained active role since its joining in 2008. While TPP consisted of 12 members (including the US), it allowed for new countries to join if they could meet the required standards.¹⁴

The regional countries have responded to the economic initiatives by the US. TPP was convened in 2008, through negotiations between four small APEC economies- Brunei, Singapore, Chile and New Zealand. The US embraced the efforts of the TPP negotiations in 2009. The regional response was increasingly overwhelming for the US. Australia, Peru and Vietnam joined the negotiations. Canada and Mexico embraced the TPP negotiations in 2012, and Japan became a part of these efforts in 2013.¹⁵

There were several efforts undertaken by the Obama Administration. The Export-Import Bank (EXIM Bank) of US had signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with the governments of Brunei, India, Indonesia, the Philippines and Vietnam in order to facilitate financing exports. Between 2011 and 2015, the bank had financed exports worth USD 32.6 billion. Under the National Export Initiative, US aimed at doubling the exports through trade promotion with top four economies namely, China, India, Indonesia and Vietnam.¹⁶

It was of particular significance to strengthen diplomatic and economic ties with the region especially through Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), both individually and collectively. There were initiatives of regional trade relations taken with the support of ASEAN. ASEAN constitutes the 7th largest economy. As their economies developed, so did the opportunities for US trade and investments. By 2014, ASEAN was the 4th largest trading partner of the US. The ASEAN- US Plan of Action that was in talks during his presidency was meant to intensify the relationship between the US and the Southeast Asian Nations. US-ASEAN Expanded Economic Initiative consisted of series of dialogues and trainings to boost US- ASEAN trade relations. East Asia Summit and APEC gained steadily as premier regional conclaves where leaders convene annually. President Obama took important steps like the ASEAN treaty of Amity and Cooperation and he appointed the first ambassador to ASEAN in 2010.¹⁷

Over the course of the Rebalance, US trade with Asia had risen when compared to trade with Europe, North America, South America and Central America. Through such initiatives, the US merchandise trade with Asia has increased by 23.6 percent from USD 1.18 trillion¹⁸ in 2010 to USD 1.46 trillion in 2015¹⁹. US exports trade with China has increased by 26 percent from USD 92 billion to USD 116 billion in 2015.²⁰ US imports from China grew by 32 percent from 2010 to 2015.²¹ With that China became the largest trading partner for US with trade accounting for 41 percent (USD 600 billion).²²

Dynamics with Regional Players: Japan and China

Apart from these, the relationship with regional players was strong. Under the Obama Administration, the US relationship with Japan was strong. There were constant engagements between the Japanese PM Shinzo Abe and President Obama. Engagement with Japan was aimed at encouraging Tokyo to restructure its economy in order to generate sustainable growth. Relationship with South Korea was equally strong. While there were instances of a suspected shift towards China, but countering North Korea's aggression and its nuclear program acts as a ground of common cause for the relationship to foster. Renegotiations and implementation of KORUS FTA had been a principal feature of this engagement. The Administration had active bilateral dialogues with Australia and Indonesia. Relationship with Taiwan remained sound and the new government of 2012 wanted to maintain status quo in the case of the US and China.²³

However, it was noticed that the regional relationship between US and China has deteriorated during the Obama era. This decline was due to the existence of deep sense of mistrust in the intentions of the other country and both the countries had increasingly divergent interests. According to the US, this failure was a result of internal repressions, increased pressure on American corporate espionage, military modernization and island building in South China Sea. China claims that the US is strategically trying to encircle China externally and is constantly undermining the regime internally. As a result, the economic dynamics of the broad Asia Pacific today is growing as a strategic competition between the US and China.²⁴

China proposed for an alternative regional economic framework which aimed to create and promote new economic institutions in the region. In order to pursue this, China launched Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) and Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP). AIIB is a multilateral development bank founded in 2015 and is largely led by China. With 57 members,^{25*} AIIB was a way for China to exert greater influence in development financing. It was partly motivated by the delay at IMF funding process and helped China gain in the IMF voting power.²⁶ AIIB, a bank based in Beijing enjoys veto power over the selection of the president.²⁷ Belt and Road Initiative was an initiative to build a network of ports, transportation and link China and Europe through infrastructure.²⁸ Asian Development Bank (ADB) and AIIB have together sponsored highway projects in Central Asia and South Asia, electricity project in Bangladesh and urban infrastructure in Indonesian slums.²⁹ AIIB could serve as a mechanism for China for excessive use of its industrial capacity.³⁰ On the trade front, the key organization for China is RCEP which is a mega free trade agreement (FTA). It has the largest share of world population (3 billion people) and

economic activities within its membership (40 percent of global trade).³¹ Since history, free trade agreements pursued by China were of low quality as it addresses only tariff reductions. They fail to address several other issues like investments, labor protections etc.³² Similarly, RCEP which was in negotiations is considered to be a low quality FTA when compared to the TPP. RCEP doesn't consist of provisions related to China's market access policies.³³ The FTA is sympathetic to Chinese economic structure. China promoted RCEP because of the advancement of the TPP. TPP was considered as a measure to slow the economic growth of China. Chinese economy calculated a loss of 0.3 percent loss of GDP by 2020 and 1.2 percent by 2025, over the course of time, especially with the rising presence of TPP. It seemed less likely for China to join the TPP negotiation process as it would require structural economic reforms in China. President Obama claimed that China is seeking to write the rules for regional economy.³⁴ He stated that the US has to ensure that they have written the century's rules for world economy and countries like China shouldn't dominate the world's economic order. If the RCEP is passed then China would have access to regional markets at low tariff rate.³⁵ Initially the Chinese media projected that TPP was an effort to isolate China economically. However, after Japan joined the negotiations, Chinese vice Finance Minister Zhu Guangyao stated that the TPP agreement is incomplete without China.³⁶

Stimulated effects of TPP and RCEP on Chinese Economy

TPP PASSED		TPP NOT PASSED
RCEP PASSED	USD 72 billion gain	USD 88 billion gain
RCEP NOT PASSED	USD 22 billion loss	No Change

Fig. no: 1

Source: 2016 Report to the Congress of the US- China Economic and Security Review Commission, China and the US Rebalance to Asia- Chapter IV, pg 489

China urged APEC to form a Free Trade Area of the Asia-Pacific (FTAAP), membership of which would include China, Japan and the US. China is trying to push FTAAP as a reaction to the TPP and has bid to create rules that are sympathetic to Chinese economic priorities.³⁷ In 2014, APEC began a strategic study on the issues surrounding the launch of FTAAP.³⁸

Assessing the policy, President Obama tried to pivot US foreign policy by laying out a number of pillars such as promoting human rights, spread of democracy, upholding and enforcing rules based system and so on. When he exited office in 2016, his administration could claim progress on some fronts. His policies aimed to strengthen trade ties with Japan, Indonesia, Vietnam, Philippines, China, South Korea and other Asia-Pacific countries.

The US government had given strategic importance for their economic interests to the Asia Pacific region. In 2015, the US trade with China totaled to over USD 6 billion making it the second largest trading partner for US. Trade with ASEAN was over USD 2 billion marking it as the third largest trading partner. This ensures the enormous interest of the US to maintain the continuous and free flow of goods and services.

The TPP established economic bedrock for the US Rebalance to Asia. However, it failed to address the trade deficits. In January 2010 at the State of the Union address, President Obama had promised to double US exports by 2015.³⁹ However, that didn't materialize. Instead, the US exports struggled as it fell by USD 52 billion (nearly 2.3 percent) and so did the economies of the major US trading partner. In the full eight year term of President Obama, the annual exports of goods and services rose by less than 20 percent.⁴⁰ However, the export declined in the years 2015 and 2016. The trade deficit was persistent as the imports grew slowly. In the United States Trade Representative report of 2015, it is stated that the trade deficits reflected reduction in demand for US-made goods (especially manufactured products which constitute 85 percent of US exports).⁴¹ The reports stated that China and TPP members were important contributors to the growing trade deficits in manufactured goods.⁴²

US trade and investment deals like North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and KORUS led to a growth in the trade deficits, employment loss for the US and reduction in US wages. President Obama's repeatedly indicated for a push in foreign investments. His view was that an increase in foreign investment would help to reduce trade deficits and help generate employment. Foreign investments declined from to USD 84 billion in 2012 to USD 66 billion in 2013.⁴³

In an issue brief that was published by the Council of Economic Advisors of the Obama Administration stated that the provisions of TPP include rules for labor, the environment, state owned enterprises but it also addresses currency manipulation and competitive devaluation. In September 2015 Obama Administration issued a joint statement with China and US stated that the US and China affirm their exchange rate commitments and they will refrain from competitive devaluation of currency.⁴⁴ However, in a

press conference later in the month, President Obama hinted that Chinese Yuan was deliberately kept undervalued to increase its market share.⁴⁵ It implies that US doesn't support currency manipulation.⁴⁶ While he remained intolerant to currency manipulation, strong actions to condemn such practices were missing.

By focusing on the slow movement of The TPP in the Congress, or the unexpected rise of Rodrigo Duterte in the Philippines or limiting the study to US- China relations or the South China Sea dispute can be considered as poor ways to judge the comprehensive strategic reorientation of the US policy. An appropriate assessment would be to assess the Rebalance in the *three levels of analysis*, domestically, regionally and globally.

At the *domestic level*, the administration has deepened bureaucratic attention to the Asia-Pacific. In displaying its seriousness, the administration created new Office of Multilateral Affairs at the State Department's Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs and has appointed a US ambassador to ASEAN in Jakarta. The President was also committed to attend East Asia Summit and convene annual US-ASEAN Leaders' Meetings.

Regionally, the administration was successful in ensuring the regional commitment in the Asia-Pacific. In February 2016, he convened the first US-ASEAN Summit with Southeast Asian leaders at Sunnylands, California (US). This was a clear manifestation of his increased emphasis on Southeast Asia. He institutionalized the relationship with emerging and established allies through strategic and comprehensive partnerships. Institutionalization was important as it eases the regional fears about the sustainability of the US presence. The administration desired to ease the insecurities and collaborate for issues like climate change. His policy of "strategic reassurance" collided with a confident and sometimes, assertive China, especially after Xi Jinping's Presidency. The South China Sea issue was seen as a key test of US credibility. However, the administration faced constant struggle to find a way to respond China's assertiveness.

At the *Global level*, the presidency was successful in bringing the emerging powers together in order to solve global issues like climate change. It was also able to manage Iranian nuclear crisis and situations in Iraq and Afghanistan by a combination of assertiveness and diplomacy. However, the Administration's hasty withdrawal from Middle East and non-interference in Syria is widely criticized. It is partly blamed for the rise of Islamic State whose influence has spread to Southeast Asia.

At the end, Obama's Asia Policy of Rebalancing has produced mixed results. The Administration has succeeded in establishing military presence in the Asia-Pacific region. However, they failed to prevent China from violating international law. They were unsure of Chinese intention behind their increased presence in the region. Though the administration was successful in fostering people-to-people relationship but they were unable to materialize their economic interests through the proposed trade deals.

Asia Policy of President Donald J Trump

With the exit of the President Obama and the transition in administration to President Trump, there can be a new dynamics to the relations between the US relations and Asia-Pacific region. With the recent announcements of withdrawal from multilateral treaties like TPP and renegotiations of treaties like NAFTA, domestic economic reforms, tariff impositions and so on, the central question then is, can President Trump's approach towards Asia-Pacific sustain?

Through the series of his campaign, Donald Trump had made several provocative statements on relations with China and in broader sense to the Asian region. He was committed to impose tariffs on Chinese goods, accused China of currency manipulation⁴⁷ and he swore to withdraw the US from TPP. Shortly after being elected he reaffirmed his commitment by pulling US out of the TPP agreement.⁴⁸ The treaty was criticized and suspected to be more of a political statement than an economic statement.⁴⁹ The Policy makers had estimated a rise of trade by 2% after the withdrawal from TPP because the signatories of the agreement already had beneficial trade agreements with the US. The effect of this withdrawal is opening the wide economic field of Asia to China and furthermore it reduces the leeway that the US had to negotiate with China.⁵⁰ It is in the interest to secure the future of regional trade by continuing free trade among the remaining 11 members and pursuing TPP11 (same dealing excluding the US). The initiative to TPP11 was proposed in Chile in March 2017. This implies that the countries in Asia-Pacific are not willing to give up economic multilateralism.⁵¹ Hence, playing to the advantage to China to intervene and offer alternative free trade deals that are less restrictive and is sympathetic to the Chinese market model. Trump promotes bilateralism and exclusivity but, Obama emphasized on promoting multilateralism and inclusivity.

US President Donald Trump finished up his 12-day trip to Asia in November 2017, which he called a "tremendous success". As indicated by Trump, his visit was fruitful in light of a few reasons. Initially, he was

gotten with "extraordinary warmth" and regard, demonstrating that America has recaptured confidence and position in the world. Second, his trip demonstrated that "sovereign and free countries ought to coordinate together to propel security, success, and the purpose of peace". Third, he helped to "Rebuild America, its economic strength and defend its national security". What's more, for this Asia trip particularly, it was characterized by three objectives, which are to "join the world against the atomic threat presented by North Korea", to "fortify America's unions and monetary associations in a free and open Indo-Pacific", and to emphasize on "free and reciprocal trade".⁵²

He and some leaders conceded the expected denuclearizing North Korea. Japan, South Korea, and Vietnam consented to impose additional sanctions, and President Moon Jae-in consented to remove payload restrictions on missiles to combat the North Korean danger. President Xi Jinping of China promised to "faithfully execute UN Security Council goals and to utilize more monetary influence" to denuclearize North Korea. The US and China would not acknowledge "freeze for freeze" and all alternatives stay on the table.⁵³ However, both Japan and South Korea "focused on bearing more duties of common defense" and making more interests sown in their own particular military, which incorporates purchasing propelled American innovation. On exchange, every one of the pioneers consented to develop their associations with the US in light of "reciprocity and fairness". That incorporates more speculations and work open doors for the US renegotiating the US-South Korea Free Trade Agreement, and a pledge to diminish the exchange deficiency with U.S. as to which the \$250 billion worth of arrangements marked among Chinese and American organizations should help.

With regards to the "Indo-Pacific" idea, his principle focus is around fair and open trade. At the ASEAN summit, Trump emphasized on freedom of navigation and overflight in the South China Sea, and at a gathering with the Prime Ministers of India, Australia, and Japan, he talked about their "mutual commitment to a free and open Indo-Pacific".⁵⁴ This differed from the idea of Asia-Pacific that Obama projected. The Indo-Pacific is a more comprehensive and it helps ensure strong relations between US and India.

In spite of the fact that he entered office trumpeting an "America First" arrangement, he was projected a figure who had been steadily fused inside the foundation of strategic orientation. As found in his Afghanistan speech, he has overcome his underlying instinct to pull back and has started to comprehend the multifaceted nature of the circumstance and chose to remain on there, proceeding with President Obama's system. A lot of coherence can likewise be found in his Asia Policy, including his building of old alliances with Japan, South Korea, and Australia, and redesigning ties with new accomplices like Vietnam and India. In spite of the fact that he pulled back the US from the Trans Pacific Partnership, he requests and encourages more market access and support for targeting on China economically, which isn't similar as past approach. Indeed, the "Indo-Pacific" idea is aimed for those frightened by China's rise.⁵⁵ However, Obama was liberal in his approaches towards Asia-Pacific.

Trump's America First strategy has reshaped US interests in the region, with its emphasis on bilateral trade arrangements, yet the technique he uses for these purposes is the same, i.e. to fall back on the US overriding strategic advantages. However, it's difficult to anticipate whether Trump's technique will reinforce US stand or debilitate it, and whether the US can balance its self-interests and its international role in the long run.

The idea of Indo-Pacific

The Trump Government has begun to emphasize on a strategic framework for US-Asia policy, notably known as the Indo-pacific that is different from the Asia-Pacific framework in terms of its scope, focus and its key partnerships. President Trump used his first Asia trip to enunciate on the free and open Indo-Pacific framework. However, this conceptualization is not new. This has been used by the US military for decades. There were major changes in US policies like the withdrawal from multilateral free trade agreement like the TPP and is also showcasing less emphasis on promoting democracy and human rights. Secretary of State Tillerson articulated the concept of Indo-Pacific in a speech delivered at a Washington-based think tank. At the heart of free and open Indo-Pacific, is the strengthened strategic ties among four maritime democracies; US, India, Japan and Australia known as the Quad. This quadrilateral construct was first advocated by the Abe Administration when Japan released a policy strategy of "two ocean, two continents". This move was supported by the respective countries. The four foreign affairs officials met at Manila, Philippines in 2017 and convened a Quad Meeting under the theme free and open Indo-Pacific and the four governments released similar statements outlining the objectives and outcome of the meeting. Trump administration is seen filling key positions in Asia through increased military activity and cooperation in the region. As reflected by three-day military exercise between the trilateral- Japan, India and US, this collaboration with advanced navies is continuing to reinforce its strategic presence in the region.

Theoretical Framework

The Constructivist, on the other hand opine that the Trump Administration is capable of change. Giving greater importance to individuals and domestic issues, his Presidency is predicted to have more global repercussions. Theorizing, constructivists argue upon concepts like anarchy and power. Hence the US policy makers are constantly bothered by a Nuclear North Korea but a Nuclear United Kingdom (UK) doesn't pose to be a threat. Russia was seen as a threat by the Obama administration but the Trump Administration has established a relationship of harmony. This is because the national interests are determined by the individuals that are representing states. The constructivists also try to examine the statements made with regard to Taiwan. The President, when elected accepted a congratulatory call from Taiwanese President elect. This move was criticized by China and gathered comments on promoting two-China Policy. With this move, President Trump has questioned the rationale of the One China Policy. Constructivism would also explain the belief that President Trump had with respect to have a "better relationship". Under this theory, there lies a scope of significant change in the US foreign policy. The constructivist's take on comments about Trump isolationism and protectionist measures that the government would give less importance to global affairs and rather feel that the return of protection would result in revival of the domestic manufacturing production. They opine that the trade conflict with China would enable to "Make America Great Again". The challenge of pursuing such a policy of transactionalism is a belief system rather than a diplomatic tool that is capable of leading an inconsistent foreign policy. The constituents of Trump policy is a metric that mattered on money. A deal is good if it resulted in making the country wealthier and vice versa. National interest of a country is complex, overlapping and sometimes contradictory but the metrics used to measure a nations power and security is inter-related. When deals are pursued in a narrow manner, it has a negative effect at large and if they were viewed independently, they tend to have successful impact. For significant success, the America First must keep a balance between the national goals and its interests.

Dynamics with Regional Players: China, Japan, Indonesia, Philippines and Vietnam

The relationship with China is seemingly deteriorating. When Trump answered the phone call by the Taiwanese President Elect, there were accusations made on the basis of promoting two Chinas and questioning the rationale of one China policy. The actions sought to make concessions around the margins to another state accounting to what all great powers do when tensions arise.⁵⁶ Furthermore; there were repeated accusations on China for currency manipulation. Rex Tillerson, in his visit to China stated that the relationship between US and China has been that of "non-conflict, non-confrontational, mutual respect and win-win cooperation". He was criticized for his overly friendly statement.⁵⁷ This statement implied that the two countries are not facing excessive indifferences at regional and global arena. However, it will lay a diplomatic test for the Trump Government when President Xi Jinping visits Washington.

Apart from the North Korean issue, there are other central issues like charges on currency manipulation, Chinese cyber hacking and Trade deficit. With the age of Trump moving towards anti-globalization sentiments in economic arena, China gains prominence for symbolizing benefits from globalization. In a speech at UN in Geneva in January 2017, President Xi Jinping stated that from 1950 to 2016, China had provided foreign aid for several countries worth over 400 billion Yuan. During outbreak of any economic crisis, China had contributed over 30% of global growth each year on average. In the next five years, China estimated an import of USD 8 trillion of goods and attracts USD 600 billion of foreign investment. China is also committed to bring more opportunities of development to other countries.⁵⁸

President Trump's dream to Make America Great Again is followed by his interests to push investments to US and increase jobs in the country. Paradoxically, the nature of Chinese economic policy of globalization has important implications to US- China relations. China had taken initiatives to expand investments in the US. China attempted to purchase an oil company that was turned down by the US. China sought to buy Lehman Brothers and created an attempt to construct high speed rail between California and Las Vegas. This was also turned down by the US. A request by BRICS to increase contributions to IMF was not considered by the US. This implies the reluctance in the US to allow Chinese investments in critical sectors for security reasons.⁵⁹ There is certain amount of unwillingness in the US to encourage Chinese power and allow it to challenge the unipolar status of US in the international system.

The opportunity arises when President Trump's could work out a productive arrangement with China in order to tap the resources that Chinese are able and willing to offer in the international arena. The US Treasury Bills worth USD 1085 billion is bought by the Chinese. While these give very less financial returns, it ensures that the Chinese is committed to the US economy.⁶⁰ Hence, they are committed to increase

investments in sectors like telecommunication and automobiles. However the question is can President Trump work out a mutually beneficial arrangement with China?

The trade deals between US and China have been analyzed to be favoring the Chinese in the past. Hence, President Trump has sought to reassure that the US will benefit from the new trade negotiations with China. On May 14th, 2018, President Trump had tweeted stating “China and the United states are working well together on trade, but the past negotiations have been so one-sided in favor of china, for so many years, that it is hard for them to make a deal that benefits both countries. But be cool, it will all work out!”⁶¹ The US officials have been preparing for talks with Chinese official Liu He in order to resolve the trade disputes between the US and China. President Trump had also signaled that the Beijing meetings on trade and to resolve the North Korean issue had been “very productive”. The Chinese media projected this meeting as a “new blueprint” to handle ties. President Trump emphasized on the North Korea’s nuclear ambition and bilateral trade that had been unfair for the US. However he praised President Xi’s globalization initiative in China.⁶²

While China faced intensifying pressures from the Western government and lobby groups to remove barriers on investments and intellectual property theft, the US refrained from further push on trade related issues as US will require China’s support on North Korean issue and China’s commitment to ensure denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula.

President Xi and President Trump are exploring opportunities to sign a deal of USD250 billion of commerce. However, the concerns of US remains as the two leaders haven’t found productive arrangements on issues like market access, market reforms and the North Korean nuclear issue. Hence, there is a possibility that the US administration takes a hard-line approach. The hard line approach can be accounted to a US-China trade war.⁶³

The US- China trade war is an ongoing economic conflict between the two countries involved. In April 2018, US imposed 25% tariff on \$34 billion of Chinese goods. This was part of President Trump’s tariff policy and its effect was a similar tariff action by China. Immediately after this, President Trump enlisted Chinese goods worth \$200 billion dollars to impose 10% tariff. However, this hasn’t been implemented but has received in a hostile manner.⁶⁴ Chinese media has projected this move of President Trump as “irrational” and completely unacceptable.

With the striking of new wave of exclusivity and bilateralism, President Trump has been vocal about maintaining good relations with Japan. They have remained strong allies and PM Shinzo Abe stated that TPP would be meaningless without US when US withdrew from TPP.

Nevertheless, his repeated criticism of the absence of free and reciprocal trade had brought some strain in the relations. Recently, PM Abe and President Trump met (17th April and 18th April 2018) in Mar-a-Lago resort. Here, President Trump affirmed the importance of further progress in the area of bilateral economic, trade, and investment ties, noting the United States’ persistent trade deficit with Japan. Accordingly, the two leaders have agreed to intensify trade and investment discussions, building on progress achieved through a US-Japan Economic Dialogue. The two leaders have committed to advance discussions on how both countries can serve as a model for bilateral and global trade.

Trump claims that countries like Vietnam and Indonesia are being held responsible for the flooding the US economy with cheap goods.⁶⁵ As a counter measure, the US has imposed tariff on Indonesian solar panels and washing machines (January 2018). In addition, he put Indonesia on the US trade review list where the trade surplus between the two countries will be studied. Meanwhile, Vietnam has been criticized for the lack of protection for intellectual property, ensuring that the US place Vietnam on its watch list since 2016. Nevertheless, in the case of the US and the Philippines, one can find some concessions. The Philippines is of strategic importance to the US as a key location for America’s military presence in the region. It is also an active supporter of international principles which are central to the preservation of the rules-based order, which US officials so often talk about. Both the US presidents have maintained a similar policy to stimulate inclusive economic expansion with The Philippines. Obama Administration enhanced the engagement by supporting The Philippines through the ‘Partnership for Growth’ (PFG). Likewise, President Trump discussed with President Duterte ways to expand mutual commitment to fair, free and balanced trade that increases the economic opportunity for both the countries.

President Trump, in over a year of his Presidency, has assigned an order to withdraw from any further negotiations on the TPP (January 2017). He instead agreed to replace this with a series of bilateral agreements based on ‘reciprocity and fairness’.⁶⁶ In 2017, the Trump Administration began renegotiating NAFTA with Mexico and Canada. President Trump also stated that if the US withdraws from NAFTA, it will impose 35 per cent tariff on Mexican goods.⁶⁷ He has further warned the US’s possible withdrawal from KORUS if South Korea did not import more US goods. In the present year, in keeping with his economic

policy stand, President Trump announced an increase of 25 percent tariff on steel and 10 percent tariff on aluminum imports, in order to create manufacturing jobs in the US. The Trump Administration has imposed 25 percent tariff on Chinese goods worth USD 60 billion. On 6th April 2018, President Trump stated that he may impose tariff on Chinese goods worth another USD 100 billion.⁶⁸ With such drastic and contrasting economic policies pursued, a new economic wave is created which is moving towards protectionism and exclusivity. His policy is criticized for his complex diplomacy as it would lead to turbulent economy and politics, domestically.

On the other hand, Obama's dynamics with regional players were strong. Engagements with Japan were aimed at restructuring Tokyo's economy and promote sustainable growth. He also helped foster relations with South Korea. He maintained active dialogues with Australia and Indonesia. Even though relations with China deteriorated, he did try to achieve grounds for cooperation and had bilateral talks with China to strengthen the financial institutions like World Bank, IMF, ADB etc.

President Trump had withdrawn US from the TPP in January 2017. However, in an interview on January 2018, President Trump offered to rejoin post TPP negotiations. This nuance of decision making is volatile which is expected to contribute to his complex diplomacy. Reviewing his earlier stance, President Trump had announced that the US will be willing to re-join TPP if the clauses were re-negotiated. However, what could he have meant by negotiation? President Trump has been stating that the renegotiation will aim towards open markets with strong regulations relating to labor standards, intellectual property rights and exchange rates. He also aims for a fair agreement because he believes the TPP is an attack on American businesses. He made his views clear even before he took over the presidency, when he tweeted on August 2015, "The Trans-Pacific Partnership is an attack on America's business. It does not stop Japan's currency manipulation. This is a bad deal".⁶⁹ With respect to social and sustainability standards, strengthen intellectual property rights, to address non-tariff barriers in the export markets, to establish competitive neutrality, the US objective in parts of TPP will remain the same even in the new political situation. However, the present stand of the Trump Administration of anti-TPP and anti-multilateral trade is largely influenced by unfair imports especially from China, weakening of job opportunities in the US, pressure from immigrant labor and low wages as a result of import competition. Hence, the US would not favor the tariff reduction to its least denomination.

Are the policies leading change or continuity? As an expansive generalization, the greater part can relate to what can be called as, appropriately, the 80/20 rule. It is mindfully supported that maybe 80 percent of U.S. approach seems, by all accounts, to be continuing pretty much ordinarily. NATO's improved forward nearness is continuing, U.S. spending on the European Deterrence Initiative (previously the European Reassurance Initiative, or ERI) has expanded, opportunity of route activities in the South China Sea have proceeded and even been heightened, and everyday working associations with U.S. partners remain fairly robust. However there were policies that came simply after Trump considered sensational breaks with set up strategy — pulling back from the Iran bargain and the North American Free Trade Agreement, hauling out of Afghanistan, lifting sanctions on Russia, withdrawal from the TPP — and no less by the other 20 percent of U.S. arrangement. With respect to Obama, he believe that the United States was confronting a level of key overstretch when he took office and was resolved to actuate a level of limitation in U.S. approach. However, similar to Bush, he was obviously dedicated to the fundamental thought of a liberal world request, and he embraced various activities — from the Asia Pivot turn to the Trans-Pacific Partnership to the ERI — to shore up and even extend that request as his administration advanced. At last, what makes the Bush-Obama-Trump examination especially irritating is that both Bush and Obama were on a very basic level not too bad, noteworthy individuals who considered their vows of office important, trusted that the United States should experience its qualities, and never would have occupied with the rude, adolescent, and semi tyrant conduct that is Trump's purpose in life card. As I have composed somewhere else, Trump represents a genuine takeoff in U.S. strategy, one that the Bush-Obama-Trump correlation too effectively omits.

Will the new economic outlook of President Trump sustain to 'Make America Great Again'? The academicians devised an "economic policy uncertainty index" that tracks mentions of the words "uncertain" and "uncertainty" in major newspapers' articles about economic policy.⁷⁰ The measure was developed by Scott Baker of North-western University, Nicholas Bloom of Stanford University and Steven Davis of the University of Chicago, Booth School of Business. According to this index, the average uncertainty of the US economic policy has increased to an average of 127 when compared to 1985-2009, when the average index was 100. These academicians find that economic policy uncertainty is slightly higher under President Trump than it was during President Obama's era which was marked by deep recession, auto bailouts, and

unconventional Federal Reserve interventions in the financial system and routine brinkmanship between Democrats and Republicans on fiscal policy. The index averaged 140.2 during President Trump's first 14 months in office, compared with 126.0 during the comparable period of President Obama's tenure and 134.7 during his full two terms in office indicating high volatility in policies of the Trump Administration.

Conclusion

President Trump's foreign policy narrative of America First is myopic which offers insufficiency in the national security policy for the future of the US. Vitally, President Trump fails to catch the full value of international relations or offer an objective dream of global leadership as it was a tradition of past American presidents. What is lost in the Trump precept is the basic significance of diplomacy, in building partnerships, shaping multilateral alliances, and creating international institutions. To put it plainly, the art of persuasion – underlying collective action and the intangible quality of legitimacy – is absent.

His doctrine is driven by force and conflict which then implies that the people shouldn't be surprised at the end of his tenure. Hence, the challenge for the future is for President Trump to become a statesman, not just a politician. To widen the scope, the world is in deeper flux where the rising and confident China offers a fresh alternative to the US leadership.

As Sir Lawrence Freedman of Kings College, London states that comedy ends with a satisfactory settlement with the main protagonist anticipating the future and tragedy ends in a negative manner for the protagonist, as he would be responsible for his misfortune, even if society as a whole is restored to equilibrium. The real tragedy, under the policy of America first, would be America itself.

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