



The US Role in Asia Under Trump Administration 2017-21: A Critical Analysis

Dr. Adnan Nawaz

Assistant Professor, Department of International Relations, Government College University, Faisalabad. adnannawaz@gcuf.edu.pk

Marwa Riaz

MPhil Scholar, Department of International Relations, Government College University, Faisalabad.

Abstract

The Trump administration's policies towards Asia represented a major shift on many levels compared to past US policies – it was bilateralism, nationalist, and soaked in competition, especially with China. This paper seeks to analyse how the Trump administration policies affected individual Asian countries: China, Japan, South Korea, North Korea, India, Southeast Asia (ASEAN), Taiwan. Analytical approaches used in the present study were diplomatic, economic, and military analysis of the action taken by the administration using official records documents, policy papers, and expert opinions. Outcomes show that, on the one hand, the administration improved the partnership with Japanese, South Korean, and Indian defence establishments, fortified Taiwan's security, and, on the other hand, raised tensions through the trade war campaign, strategic decoupling policy, and an unpredictable approach to ASEAN. These actions served to deepen polarization in the region – this is not bad news for those who, as has been said earlier, wish to dominate the region. The paper also speaks about rather weak outcomes of the Trump-Kim meetings for dismantling of nuclear potentials in North Korea. Conclusion: In its Asia policy, the Trump administration reaffirmed the commitment to allies and partners while at the same time exacerbated tensions: the period produced a mixed legacy that will linger in the relations in the post-Trump period.

Keywords: ASEAN, China, Defense Cooperation, Diplomatic Rivalry, Economic influence, Indo-Pacific strategy, India , Japan, Multilateral engagement, North Korea, US-Asia relations.

Introduction

Asia, the largest and most densely populated continent, positioned at the geographic and demographic crossroads of the world. It is the home to more than half of the world's population 4.5 billion and encompasses a diverse array of cultures, languages, and economies. The region is rich in natural resources which include large quantities of oil , minerals , rare metals, making it a highly significant area for global trade and economies. Additionally, Asia which includes China , Japan and India continues to play a significant role in global growth, innovation, and development as a result of its flourishing economies. Geographically speaking, Asia spans from Middle east to South and Central Asia to East Asia and Southeast Asia. It is characterized by variety of landforms, including enormous deserts , fertile-plains, huge mountain ranges and long coastlines. The presence of diverse ecosystems and biodiversity contributes to ecological balance and offers a wide range of resources that fuel its economic



growth. For example, South China Sea is an essential maritime route for global shipping, a considerable amount of world's commercial shipping passes through it, which highlights the strategic significance of the region. Asia, is a global economic powerhouse, boasting several of the world's largest and most rapidly expanding economies that are located within its borders. China, the world second-largest economy is an essential player in both international trade and industry. Japan due to its advanced technology and automotive industries that it possesses continues to be a significant economic actor. India with its rapidly expanding information technology and service sectors, contribute to economic diversity of the region (SUTTER, 2018). Additionally, Southeast Asia nations also play a vital role in regional cooperation and growth via ASEAN. The continent's economic strength is evident in its substantial contributions to worldwide innovation, particularly in the fields of technology and digital economies, positioning it as a crucial participant in determining the future global economic scenario.

The United States has an important and strategic interest in Asia for a long time, a region known for its great heterogeneity, its economic growth and its political and security issues. Historically, the United States involvement in Asia can be dated back to the aftermath of the Second World War up to the Cold War period where US turned out to be a superpower in the world involving itself in reconstruction of the world, economically, politically and socially, and in putting up of security systems in a bid to eliminate spread of communism (Torkunov, 2019). These years witnessed the formation of strategic partnerships with countries like Japan, South Korea and the Philippines the framework of which was deep-rooted military defence pacts enhanced by a sizeable American military presence in the region. These alliances remained the anchors of US strategic pertinence in Asia and let the US to stabilise the region, discourage aggression, and propagate democracy and free markets (Smith, 2017).

At the onset of the end of Cold War, the Asian map started changing with formation of China as a potential challenger economy and power to the United States of America and rest of the developed world. The collapse of the bipolar system led to a change of focus, with political, economical and administrative integration added to military concerns. This change was seen in the US engagement in regional multilateral organizations like the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) in which the US aimed at the construction of a rules-based system in Asia for the purpose of advancing the US's economic and strategic interests in the region. The approaches to China predominate during 1990's and till the beginning of 2000s were aimed to cooperate, to draw China into the global economy as a part of an international system, while to strengthen the relations with traditional allies in the region and to build a Nouvelles equations with new potential partners (Dalpino, 2017).

Another critical change in the relations of the USA and Asia before the Trump administration was the "Pivot to Asia" initiated by Barack Obama in 2011. Thus, the diplomatic line dubbed "Pivot," or "Rebalance" was the reaction to the process where the Asia-Pacific region clearly emerged as the area that would define the dynamics of the forthcoming changes in the system of international relations. The strategic aim was to deepen America's involvement in the region in every possible measure, military, economic and political. On the military front



the Pivot to Asia entailed a rebalancing of the US military capabilities towards Asia-Pacific. This entailed increasing forces in the Asia-Pacific area, building political and defence relations with countries in the region, including Japan, Korea, and Australia; as well as developing relationships with emerging partners (including India and Vietnam as well as other southeast Asian nations).

Economically, the Pivot to Asia was evident literally by the chase of the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), a free trade agreement that aimed to include twelve Pacific countries. The TPP was viewed as an important part of Washington's plan to advance regional integration, ensure a high level of liberalisation of trade and investments, and to respond to the China's economically rising power. In diplomatic terms, the Obama administration endeavoured to establish a more intense partnership with the regional multilateral organizations including ASEAN, multilateralism and rule of law-based approach has been stressed upon as a mode to tackle the regional issues. The US also focused on human rights and democracy putting pressure on Myanmar, Thailand and other countries to allow political liberalization and to protect freedoms of citizens (Liow, 2017).

However, 2016 saw the election of Donald Trump and a very different attitude to global affairs and therefore the US's role in Asia. Trump's "America First" policy was a significant shift as compared to the policies that the previous Presidents experienced or executed – focusing on multilateralism, diplomacy, and leadership. President Trump's approach to international relations was heralded as 'America first' where the US embraced the use of power to seek self-interest by focusing on the economic and political benefits than engaging the international community as a unified entity. This shift transformed the US-Asia relationship and the administration adjusted its policies, its objectives and its modality of dealings with major partners in Asia.

Another withdrawal of the United States from a trade agreement that occurred at the early period of Trump's presidency was from the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) in January 2017. Trump had specifically campaigned very hard against the TPP, he had argued that such agreements would cost the Americans' their jobs through outsourcing as well as unfair trade competition. The withdrawal from the TPP expressed and encapsulated Trump's general aversion to participating in multi-national trade pertaining to the fact that he often condemned such agreements as being unfavourable to the United States. It became apparent that this move had huge implications for the US's economic power in Asia as it marked the turning away from the economic integration policy introduced by Obama. It also had the effect of setting the stage for the rise of China as the TPP's primary advocate of economic integration in the region through the formation of economic groups such as the RCEP and BRI.

In the sphere of security, Trump was both similar to his predecessor but also different, when it came at the Asia strategy. On the one hand, the administration preserved the standard set of the mutual military alliances with Asian countries supporting the defence of Japan and South Korea and continuing the military drills in the region. This disparity suggests, that while there were certainly changes that took place during the Obama administration, there was a relatively concrete sea-change in the specific thematic orientation of the discourse under Trump. In the economy, which is one of the major sub themes, the administration sought equal burden-sharing insisting that countries such as



Japan and South Korea pay for their own security. Such an approach resulted in long debates over the sharing of costs for alliance and risks introduced uncertainty in the alliances. Furthermore, Trump's shift to bilateral rather than multilateral activities was also concerning in the context of changing Obama's diplomatic approach to Asia security by ending dependence on regional organisations and initiatives.

Another deep-rooted aspect of the Trump's Asia policy was the shift of the US strategic approach from the "Asia-Pacific" to the "Indo-Pacific", with the integration of India into the scheme. The Indo-Pacific was the plan to challenge China's rise in the region, especially in its BRI and assertiveness in the South China Sea. The Trump government particularly aimed at fixing its relations with other democratic nations in the region such as Japan, Australia and India through reintroduction of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue or the QUAD. The QUAD was regarded as an entity for strategizing on countering China's growing might and for asserting the concept of freedom of navigation in the Indo-Pacific region.

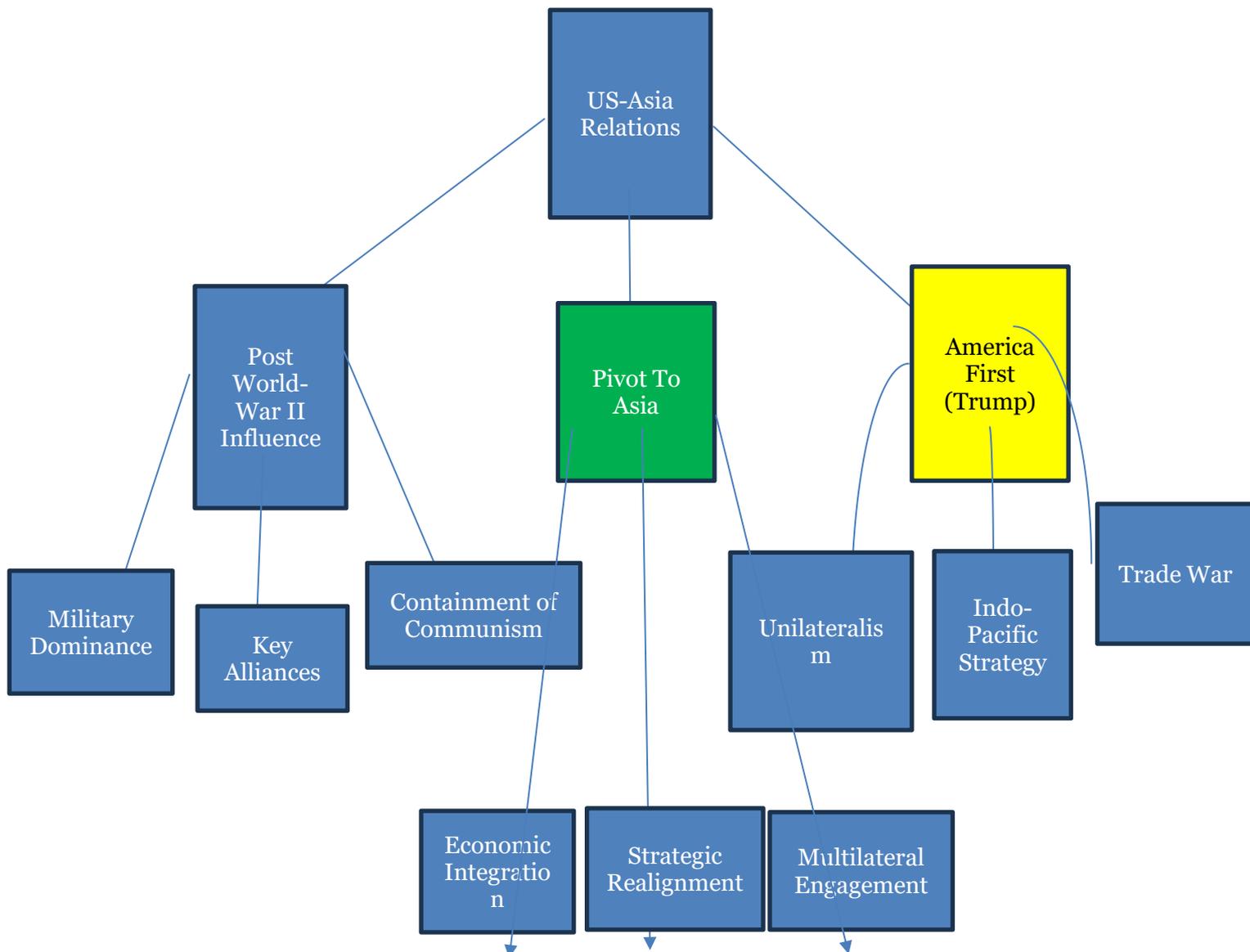
Nevertheless, the Trump administration's policy towards Asia was not without its difficulties and problems. Perhaps one of the areas which the Trump administration was most polarizing was the area of China policy. Trump's relationship with China thus consisted of a trade war in which hundreds of billions of dollars of goods had tariffs placed on them, resulting in an escalation of economic tensions. Its consequences were not limited to the US-China relations but also affected the whole region since it entailed the problem of global value chains and created a great amount of uncertainty. The Trump administration also focused more on conflictual aspects of relations than its predecessor, for instance on China's military build-up in the South China Sea, repression in Xinjiang and Hong Kong, and foreign interference. All these moves aggregated to worsening of the relations between the US and China and escalation of tension in the region.

Under Trump, the U.S. strategy in Southeast Asia was not as coherent as before, with the Trump administration also pulling back from participating in regional multilateral organisations. Although the administration pursued high level of diplomacy with some of the countries in ASEAN, particularly Vietnam and the Philippines, its strategy towards the organisation can be described as dismissive and confined to competition with China. The lack of participation of the administration in major summits in the region and use of the bilateral approach instead of the multilateral one provoked doubt on the so-called 'pivot' of the United States to Asia as a permanent strategy (Kolmaš & Kolmašová, 2019).

During the same period, the US relationship with South Asia and especially India and Pakistan was formed mostly by the administration's priorities in Afghanistan and counterterrorism. Trump's strategy for South Asia was unveiled in 2017, in which the US sought more decisive cooperation from Pakistan against Taliban and other terrorist groups, which lead to a brief halt in the supplying of military assistance. Meanwhile, the administration attempted to enhance the American – Indian relations, as it viewed India as a powerful counterweight to China in the South Asia. The US and India has observed dynamic growth in terms of defence cooperation on economic partnership and on the common foreign policy concerning regional and international issues.



The current study aims at presenting a critical evaluation of the foreign policy measures employed by the Trump's administration and the effect that these measures have on particular countries in Asia. The systematic and transactional nature of the foreign policy under the administration was simultaneously advantageous and disadvantageous in the Asian context convenient by the economic relations, security, and geopolitical disposition. As such, the following analysis examines the country-specific effects of Trump's policies in an attempt to offer insight into how the administration altered the structure of America's relations with crucial players in Asia. It will also assess how those policies and strategies impact on the region's geopolitics and on the future US-Asia relations (Park & Stangarone, 2019).



(Model Developed by the Author)



Model Representation of Trump Policies Towards Asia



Developed by Author

US-China Trade War

• **Tariffs and Trade Barriers**

Tariff Escalation: Tariffs in the value of \$370 billion worth of Chinese goods were set by the Trump administration in 2018 with equal emphasis placed on vociferous products such as steel, aluminium, Electronics etc. This was to correct trade deficits and prevent the kind of practices in trade, as understood by the US, that China was engaging in like theft of intellectual property and imposition of forced technology transfer.

Retaliatory Tariffs: China retaliated by implementing the same on American products in categories such as agriculture, automobiles and many others. Such rise to this level led to a trade war that affected both businesspeople and the common consumer in the two nations.

Strategic Decoupling and the Global Supply Chain

Decoupling Efforts: The trade battle brought about more pressure for strategic decoupling in that both countries started to try and minimize the extent of their exposure to one another. This brig to mean that supply chain partners had to look for other markets and sources of supply in a bid to reduce risk that come with dependence on each other.

Supply Chain Disruptions: The introduction of tariffs coupled with trade barriers lead to disruptions of the global value chains; industries were impacted. Senior management and purchasing personnel in organizations identified that cost was a critical factor that rose due to the changes in trade patterns as firms tried to redesign supply systems (Kawashima, 2017).



Military & strategic Volatility

• **United States Naval Power in the South China Sea**

Freedom of Navigation Operations (FONOPs): Thus, the Trump administration stepped up naval activities in South China Sea to respond to China aggressive actions and its vast territorial claims on Seas and to defend international norms of open seas. This include periodic patrols and military manoeuvres in the territorial waters of the surrounding islands.

Military Presence: The intended increase of the ratio of US naval force is to prove the willingness to steadfastly support regional counterparts and to respond for the growing military activeness of China in the region. It also sought to reify the US strategic imperatives of free shipping lanes and no change in maritime borders by force.

Taiwan and Hong Kong Related Conflict

Support for Taiwan: During the Trump presidency, the United States provided more support to Taiwan in terms of arms sales and even reached-out in diplomats' level which escalated tensions with China. This involved, for example, the acquiescence in key arms sales and official American trips to Taiwan.

Hong Kong Protests: American backed the Hong Kong protests against the Chinese ruling while condemning Beijing over its handling of the dissent. The administration imposed sanctions on Chinese officials and companies that the Chinese authorities have been cracking down the demonstrations and eroding the 'one country, two systems' principle (Sutter, 2019).

Diplomatic Rivalry

• **China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)**

Strategic Opposition: Another initiative was a effort by the Trump administration to challenge what has become known as the 'Belt and Road', or BRI- a massive infrastructure and investment project designed to increase Chinese influence through development projects across Asia, Africa and Europe. The US frowned at the BRI as debt-trap diplomacy and sought to offer a competitive development financing model such as the Blue Dot Network.

Strengthening Alliances: Concerning the BRI, the US undertook efforts to build partnerships with the countries of the Indo-Pacific region and other nations to show potential partners viable options other than Chinese funding streams for infrastructure projects and investments (Kubo, 2019).

Shifts in Global Alliances

Realignment of Alliances: The United States saw the emergence of an elevated conflict with China by drawing changes in the alignment of some nations which felt that they have to adjust their outlook of the relations they have with China and actually lean towards the direction of the United States. This realignment was observed through the enhanced approval of American leadership and sponsorship of activities as well as a measured attitude towards China rising power.

Global Diplomatic Impact: The diplomatic relations between the US and China impacted the diplomatic relations around the world: countries tried to avoid being in a conflict with both superpowers, but at the same time did not want to offend either one of them. This gave us a much more intricate and bipolar structure to international relations where countries had to manage their economic and security based on a period of growing Sino-American rivalry.



Japan

Security Alliance Strengthening

- **Deepening Military Cooperation**

Under the Trump administration, a key focus was on deepening military cooperation between the US and Japan. This was achieved through an enhanced strategic partnership under the US-Japan Security Treaty. The administration emphasized strengthening this treaty to address evolving regional security threats. Key measures included:

Joint Military Exercises: The US and Japan increased the frequency and scope of joint military drills. These exercises aimed to improve interoperability, ensure preparedness for potential conflicts, and showcase a unified stance against regional threats. Notable exercises included large-scale naval and air operations designed to bolster defence capabilities and readiness (Siracusa, 2019).

Expanded US Military Presence: The US augmented its military deployments in Japan, including additional troops and advanced equipment. This expanded presence was intended to bolster deterrence, support regional stability, and reassure both allies and partners of America's commitment to regional security.

Japan's Increased Défense Spending

In response to the Trump administration's calls for greater burden-sharing, Japan significantly increased its defence spending. This rise in expenditure was a strategic move to enhance Japan's military capabilities and address regional security challenges. Key aspects included:

Rising defence Budget: Japan's defence budget saw substantial growth, reflecting a strategic shift towards a more proactive defence posture. This increase aimed to address concerns over regional threats, particularly from North Korea and China.

Modernization Efforts: Japan invested in upgrading its Self-defence Forces, including the acquisition of advanced technologies and the modernization of its military infrastructure. This included new defence systems, improved cyber capabilities, and enhanced naval and air assets.

Alignment with US Demands: Japan's increased defence spending aligned with Trump's demands for allies to contribute more to their own security. This commitment was seen as a positive response to the US's strategic expectations and demonstrated Japan's dedication to maintaining a strong defence capability.

Trade Relations

- **Bilateral Trade Negotiations**

Trade relations between the US and Japan experienced significant shifts following the US withdrawal from the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP). The withdrawal from TPP, a major multilateral trade agreement, necessitated a re-evaluation of US-Japan economic relations. Key developments included:

Bilateral Trade Talks: The US and Japan embarked on direct bilateral trade negotiations to address new economic dynamics and trade issues. These talks aimed to resolve trade disputes and enhance economic cooperation in the absence of the multilateral TPP framework.

Focus on Key Issues: Negotiations focused on critical areas such as reducing



trade barriers, increasing market access, and addressing specific trade concerns related to agricultural and industrial goods. The goal was to create a more balanced and equitable trade relationship (Holland, 2018).

US-Japan Trade Deal

In response to the shifting trade landscape, the US-Japan trade deal was finalized in October 2019. This agreement marked a significant development in US-Japan economic relations. Key points included:

Agreement Highlights: The deal focused on lowering tariffs and improving market access for key sectors, including agriculture and industrial goods. Specific provisions included increased access for US agricultural exports to Japan and reductions in tariffs on Japanese industrial products.

Economic Impact: The trade deal aimed to enhance economic cooperation between the US and Japan, compensating for the loss of the TPP. It sought to address trade imbalances and foster a more balanced economic relationship between the two countries.

Diplomatic Engagement

Partnership in Regional Security

The Trump administration continued to emphasize a strong partnership in regional security with Japan, aligning with the broader Indo-Pacific Strategy. This strategic alignment aimed to ensure stability and address regional security challenges. Key aspects included:

Continued Cooperation: The US and Japan maintained close collaboration on regional security matters, working together to address threats from North Korea and China. This included coordinating responses to regional crises and enhancing security cooperation through bilateral and multilateral forums.

Strategic Alignment: The partnership was integral to the broader Indo-Pacific Strategy, which sought to promote a free, open, and inclusive Indo-Pacific region. The US and Japan worked together to support regional stability, uphold international norms, and counterbalance China's growing influence.

Indo-Pacific Strategy

Japan played a significant role in the Indo-Pacific Strategy, which was a central element of US foreign policy under the Trump administration. Key elements of this strategy included:

Regional Stability: The Indo-Pacific Strategy aimed to reinforce regional stability by fostering strong alliances and partnerships, promoting economic growth, and supporting a rules-based international order.

Strategic Collaboration: The US and Japan collaborated on various initiatives within the Indo-Pacific framework, including regional security arrangements, economic partnerships, and diplomatic efforts to address common challenges and advance shared interests (Cullen, 2017).



South Korea

Military Relations between the United States and the Republic of Korea

• **Joint Military Exercises**

Nevertheless, with regard to the DPRK, the Trump administration continued to develop the military and political cooperation with the ROK which involved a series of military drills. These exercises were a crucial part of the US-South Korea combined staff talks, the purpose of which was to increase the readiness of American and South Korean armed forces. Key aspects included:

Annual Drills: Annual massive exercises like the 'Foal Eagle' and the 'Ulchi Freedom Guardian' with a participation of tens of thousands of troops were held by the US and South Korea. In these exercises, both contemporary powers sought to model contingency operations; for instance, Japan aimed at preparing to defend Japan against an incursion from North Korea—moreover, doing all it could to ready both militaries for any happening.

Adjustments to Exercises: At the same time, maintaining the number and selection of the core exercises, the Trump administration occasionally changed the scale and schedule of these drills in order to support diplomatic efforts with North Korea. For example, some forms of exercise were reduced or delayed during such time to allow for stabilization of such things such as negotiations.

Negotiations Over Cost-Sharing

Another major problem during the Trump presidency was the revision of the sharing of the costs of American troops in South Korea. The SMA pays for the operational expenditures of the about 28500 US troops stationed in South Korea through what is referred to as the 'Host Nation Support costs'. Key points included:

Increased Demands: The Obama and Trump's administration negotiated for a much higher level of the contribution of South Korea towards the expenditure incurred on the stationing of the US forces. For a while, Trump insisted that South Korea was to contribute as much as \$5 billion a year, more than prior deals.

Extended Negotiations: These demands resulted into protracted and bitter bargaining process, whereby the US proposed an upward adjustment of the contribution while South Korea only requested a minor adjustment. These talks were formal, some of them tense, which is quite suitable to convey the overall concept of Trump's approach to the sharing of the burden among friends.

Interim Agreements: Thereby, in 2019 an interim one-year SMA was agreed on where South Korea contribution was to be raised by about 8.2% to \$924 million. But an attempt was made to negotiate a longer-term deal, which spoke to the internal dynamics of the alliance concerning who bears the costs most.

North Korea Diplomacy

Presidents' meetings with the leader of North Korea

Undoubtedly, one of the most public and media focuses of Trump's policy towards Asia was the direct dialogue with North Korea, including the three meetings of the heads of the states – President Trump and Kim Jong-un. These meetings were very historical where the president of United States was holding a meeting with the leader of North Korea for the first time in history. Key details include:



Singapore Summit (2018): The first meeting was in June 2018 in Singapore. As a direct outcome of the meeting, North Korea released a joint statement in which the country agreed to the “denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula”, even though this was described as ‘TOPICAL’, lacking precise and specific pledge and deadlines.

Hanoi Summit (2019): The second summit was held in February 2019 in Hanoi in Vietnam. This meeting did not reach the end in a decision as both parties failed to see an eye to eye with the differences on the level of denuclearization of North Korea and the extent to which the US would remove the sanction on the North.

Implications: All those summits had a clear impact on the relationship of both the United States and North Korea on the Korean Peninsula’s security situation. Though they eased tensions and established a new level of east-west communication, they proved unable to get a positive movement on dismantlement (Tao, 2017).

The Facilitator: The Role of South Korea

South Korea has been an active party on these US-North Korea dialogue where it has acted as an intermediary and forerunner to diplomacy. President Moon Jae-in of South Korea was a key figure in bringing Trump and Kim together, with several important contributions: President Moon Jae-in of South Korea was a key figure in bringing Trump and Kim together, with several important contributions:

Diplomatic Bridge: South Korea in particular served as an intermediary between the US and North Korea and made every possible effort in order to ease tensions on the Korean peninsula. We are now familiar with Moon’s administration actively participating in shuttle diplomacy by negotiating between Washington and Pyongyang.

Inter-Korean Summits: Before the summit meetings between US and North Korea, there were several meetings between Moon and Kim Jong-un that paved way for the US-North Korea interaction. With the help of these summits, it was possible to establish a more suitable climate for the Trump-Kim meetings.

Ongoing Mediation Efforts: After the summits South Korea kept on pressing for a resumption of the talks and never ceased to seek ways of keeping the channels of communications open no matter what. Moon’s administration always advocated for the diplomatic solution of the nuclear problem of the North Korean state, adhering to the general line of the USA and at the same time seeking the achievement of its own objectives of the peaceful and reunification of the Korean Peninsula.

Trade Relations

• Negotiations of the US Korea Free Trade Agreement (KORUS)

US-South Korea trade relations were also looked at during the Trump administration and especially on the changes that were made on the US-Korea Free Trade Agreement, KORUS. Trump had been fiercely anti-KORUS during the presidential campaign and claimed that this was one of the worst ever deals for the United States, wherein South Korea is posed to gain at the expense of the US workers. Key developments included:

Revision of KORUS: It is important to note that in 2018 the US and South



Korea had to re-open the agreement of KORUS. Some of the changes made in the new deal responded to some of the views the Trump administration had including those in automotive trade, and currency.

Automotive Sector Changes: Among others, the American automotive industry recognized the changes where the new KORUS agreement has revised that at least tripling the number of American vehicles that could be shipped to Korea with no conforming to those standards. As well, South Korea committed to prolong the 25% tariff on Korean-made pickup trucks to the US to 2041.

Steel Tariffs: In addition to staking \$1.1bn, South Korea committed in the trade dealing to cap its steel exports to the US and avoid the tariffs that Trump had imposed through Section 232 of the US code. This was viewed to be a major sacrifice made and a victory that made sure that South Korea retained market access to America while at the same time shielding it from the wider effects of tariffs in the steel sector.

Emphasis on Trade and Outright Elimination of Deficits

The renegotiation of KORUS was of a broader plan of Trump administration towards fixing trade relations and reducing trade imbalances. Trump often noted that the United States has a trade deficit with South Korea which he deemed as unfavourable. These concerns were supposed to be solved by change in the terms of KORUS that would guarantee better access to the Korean market for the American business and overall decrease in trade deficit. Key points include:

- **Improved Market Access:** The modifications of KORUS gave increased and improved access to the Korean market for American products going specifically to automotive and agricultural industries, which were the two principal irritants.
- **Currency Agreement:** There was also a side letter on currency(Printed and Trading), under which South Korea agreed not to debase the worth of Korean won as a way of boasting export business. This was a big concern for the Trump administration, as it feared that foreign governments will manipulate their currencies to weaken the dollar and thus undermine American competitiveness.
- **Long-Term Impact:** Having analysed the impact of the renegotiated KORUS with reference to the Trump Administration, it is possible to underscore that, although the new agreement met some of Trump's concerns about the trade deficit, it situated the US-South Korea economic partnership. According to it, the volume of bilateral trade was preserved at a high level, thus keeping the stability of both economies on the proper level.

India

Strategic Partnership Enhancement

- **Strengthening defence Ties**

The US-India relationship during Trump's regime upgraded considerably and defence cooperation was one of the major developments. Defence cooperation emerged as the pillar of cooperation in the two countries' relations as they joined concerns over prospects of the security threats to the region in general and those emanating from China in particular. Key aspects included:

- **Arms Deals:** The US turned into one of India's biggest arms providers and during the Trump presidency, there were several record defence deals. Some



of the impressive deals were the East West's deals in manufacturing and supplying Apache helicopters, MH-60R Seahawk helicopters and P-8 Poseidon Maritime Patrol Aircraft. These acquisitions not only increased India's fire power but exposed the strengthening of strategic relations between the two countries.

- **Joint Military Exercises:** They also strengthened the military cooperation reach through the mutual participation in more military exercises. The Malabar naval exercise initially was between the US and India later it was taken to Japan indicating an overall security cum partnership. These exercises were important and helpful when it came to increasing cooperation in between the US and India armed forces and coordination in a range of mission types such as naval security and humanitarian assistance and disaster relief.

Development of the QUAD

A major move under Trump was the resurrection of the Quad or Quadrilateral Security Dialogue group which comprises of the United States, India, Japan, and Australia. The QUAD has been believed to be a part of the US plan to contain China's increasing power in the Indo-Pacific region. Key points include:

- **Strategic Counterbalance to China:** The QUAD was reassured as an organization for aligning security politics and planning of the four democracies with an aim to preserve the free, open, and inclusive Indo-Pacific region. The Trump administration considered India as one of the critical partners in the endeavour, because of its geographical location and developing defence power.
- **Collaborative Security Initiatives:** The QUAD meetings which in this case include security issues such as maritime security, counterterrorism and cyber security showed the member countries' willingness to adhere to international rules and norms, and ensure that anyone that seeks to use forceful means to achieve a certain goal in the region is checked. Since then, India has proactively involved in the QUAD which was taken as the indication that India was supporting the stand of the US and its partners with respect to regional security issues stemmed from China's aggressiveness.

Geopolitical Alignment

Beijing's Control in Asia

One of the most important trends of the development of the US – India cooperation during the Trump presidency is the common frustration of the two states with China's increasing power in the region. Each country saw China's aggressive moves especially in the Pacific territories of South China Sea & Indian Ocean forsooth & the borders of India as posing threats contrary to the objectives of the two. Key aspects included:

- **Border Tensions:** The India China Himalayan border clash in June 2020 exposed the Indian security dilemma and the need for the India-US relationship. The Trump administration remained squarely behind India during this crisis, for reaffirming that it has an interest in a resolving the crisis peacefully and decrying China's aggressive actions.
- **Regional Influence:** The US and India had a common goal of checking China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which both of them considered a tactic



of China's geo-economic influence through debt-trap diplomacy as well as strategic infrastructure investments. The two countries supported each other in another model of development and the construction of other more responsible infrastructures in the other countries of the region.

Collaboration on Global Issues

Apart from the issue of security in the Asia-Pacific region, the US and India cooperated on various issues in the sphere of climate change, counterterrorism, and disease control and prevention. Key points include:

- **Climate Change:** However, after Trump administration left the Paris Agreement, both the US and Indian governments kept promoting clean energy partnerships and climate change adaptation. Another important aspect of the bilateral agenda in the sector was the focus on renewable energy, particularly solar energy in India: the US backed up India's renewable energy targets through the provision of technology and investment.
- **Counterterrorism:** Both the States and India actively developed their cooperation in counterterrorism, that being particularly with an emphasis on the financing of terrorism and the fighting of terrorist organizations. Both the countries held military training, exchanged intelligence and cooperated to counterterrorism in South Asia including measures against global terrorism groups operating from Pakistan.
- **Global Health:** The US and India also partnered inter alia in global health diplomacy, especially in the management of the COVID-19 crisis. The two nations supplied the vaccines, with India as the producer which helped in enhancing production of vaccines and delivery of vaccines to respective population. It was common to emphasise the significance of the partnership in combating multiple global threats and issues.

Pakistan

Security and Counter Terrorism Cooperation

• Shifts in US-Pakistan Relations

Relations between the US and Pakistan was somewhat turbulent during the Trump years because of the Trump administration's strategic interests in Afghanistan and its counterterrorism policy in South Asia. During Trump's presidency, the US began to perceive Pakistan primarily through the prism of the Afghan war and the country's relationship with the Taliban and other militants present on its territory. Trump's administration was even more aggressive than the previous US administrations and blamed Pakistan for not doing enough to fight terrorism and for providing shelter to militants. This posture became quite apparent during the August 16, 2017, speech by Trump outlining his policy on the South Asia Strategy in which he specifically accused Pakistan of providing support to the groups which were causing havoc to Afghanistan. The administration insisted that Pakistan should do more against these groups and tied Pakistan's actions to the US's desire for stability in Afghanistan.

• Suspension of Military Aid

Among all the courses of action that could be defined during this period, the most significant was the decision to pause military assistance to Pakistan. For instance, in January 8 2018, the Trump administration froze and or cancelled



nearly 1.9 billion in security assistance and cooperation with Pakistan is expected to continue to remain low or decrease in the future. It was beforehand couched in terms of the Obama's 'resolute', despite which it was seen as an inability of the Pakistanis to make tantamount actions against the terrorist groups including Haqqani networks and even the Afghan Taliban. , the suspensions meant a real problem for Pakistan's military/counterterrorism, as Pakistan had traditionally depended on the American cash for their defence and counter-terrorism budgetary expenses. Suspension also affected the general relationship between the United States and Pakistan and saw the two countries downgrade their relationship, with little trust being accorded. Pakistan still assisted the US in some remaining counterterrorism endeavours but the bilateral relationship reverted to one of expediency where both countries were serving their own self-interests and where the cultivation of a strong partnership over the long-term as was seen earlier in their relationship no longer prevailed.

Diplomatic Tensions

• Cross National, Cross Cultural Pakistan's role in harbouring militants

Sustained animosity between the U.S and Pakistan caused Trump to verbally attack Pakistan for providing sanctuary to militants in the region. The Trump administration accused Pakistan of harbouring terrorists organizations particularly those that were an increasing menace to the US mission in Afghanistan. This criticism was not only seen in official declarations but also manifested in the more general diplomatic attitude towards Pakistan of the administration. For example, Trump's tweets and public statements provided the examples of Pakistan's treachery, claiming that this country received money from the United States while at the same time funding the militants who fought against the American troops in Afghanistan. This 'public embarrassment' deepened an existing disenchantment in Pakistan of being under siege by American imperatives within its own government and military establishments.

Multidimensional Relationship in the Perspective of a New US-India Strategic Partnership

Adding to this diplomatic stress was the increasing US-India strategic partnership that emerged during Trump's term. But with the growing closeness of the US and India especially in military cooperation and viewpoint on China's emergence as a superpower, Pakistan appeared to be more and more diplomatically lonely. The increase in friendly relations between the US and India – through presidential visits, defence cooperation and joint stand in international organizations such as the QUAD was seen negatively in Pakistan. Pakistan chose to view the US-India relationship, not as a strategic partnership against China, but as an effort to contain and diminish Pakistan's role in the region. This perception was supported by the Trump administration's backing of India on matters such as Kashmir thus compounding the tensions between the US and Pakistan. The various factors mentioned above, arising out of the above mentioned shifts in the global strategic system, made the dynamics of the US-Pakistan relations all the more.



Economic and Military Relations

• Aftermath of Decreased USAID

The cut down of US aid was not just significant but very likely to alter Pakistan's economic structure along with the military one. Previously, Pakistan was a key grappling for US aid which was instrumental in financing its military and planned development. The cut in military aid, and less economic aid made Pakistan look for other means of support where it could get some of the badly needed aid. One of these was the trend which was vividly witnessed in Pakistan's dependence on China both for trade and defence. As one of dotted line of the BRI, CPEC was put on the strategic importance in Pakistan's economic plan, which offered huge capital input to relevant infrastructure and development projects. In the military aspect, Pakistan more and more relied on China for military supplies and technological needs, though it was gradually phasing out US military assistance. In the same manner, Pakistan pursued improved relations with Saudi Arabia and other countries of the Persian Gulf that would provide the assistance and investment Pakistan needed to counterbalance the loss of American funding.

• Implications for Regional Stability

Transformation of the US-Pakistan relations had favourable to bear impact over the stability in South Asia. Changing Pakistan's alignment and its effusion with China added to the more extensive structural rivalry in the region, especially between China and India. This process was further exacerbated by the strategic shift in the US's relations with India in the 2000s which increased Pakistan's security dilemma and brought India and Pakistan to a more hostile position. Also, the stressed relations between the USA and Pakistan, which negatively affected counterterrorism activities and did not allow discussing the Afghan peace process. Although Pakistan remained engaged in attempt to mediate in the peace talks with the Taliban, the American Pakistan relations were rather suspicious. This made it difficult for the US to get a stable outcome in Afghanistan because Pakistan's support was regarded as crucial for the success of any enduring peace settlement. Also, changes of the US-Pakistan relationship partly dissipated the regional capacity of cooperation, which in turn replaced the bipolar system of clear alliances with the more polycentric, flexible one built on the principle of convenience.

Southeast Asia (ASEAN)

• Fluctuating Engagement

List of US Participation in ASEAN Related Summits and Forums

Whereas the US's relations with ASEAN during the Trump's administration involved fluctuating level of participation in regional summits and forums. As much as the US acknowledged ASEAN's significance, President Trump used to avoid important ASEAN-related meetings, for instance, the EAS and the ASEAN Summit by merely delegating his representation to the Vice President or the Secretary of State. This was a break from the Obama era, which has at one point referred to as the 'Asia Pivot,' during which the grouping was a central focus of Obama administration in the Asia-Pacific region. This lack of systematic participation by US leaders created ambiguity to the ASEAN countries about the seriousness of the US in the region creating anxiety over reliability of the US as a



partner (Knopf, 2017).

Effects of the Dearth of American Membership in Multilateral Regional Organizations

It found that the non-attendance of the US at certain key forums linked to ASEAN had certain implications on the regional system. First of all, it contributed to the view of the United States' withdrawal from Southeast Asia, which left a power (security) vacuum that China was victorious in filling. An active China engaged with these forums while the sporadic American was able to boost its position within ASEAN. This realignment of engagement had enduring effects whereby ASEAN countries started to review their strategic positioning, by moving in and out from between the US and China. This decline of American influence also deprived the US of an opportunity to influence the regional norms and policies, something that China eagerly filled in areas such as trade, infrastructure and security.

SCS Disputes

• Support for FON Operations

Even though the Trump administration displayed a wavering interest in ASEAN forums they were quite assertive when it came to FONOPs in the South China Sea which is an area of concern between a number of ASEAN members and China. The US navy undertook FONOPs to counter China's assertiveness in bolstering its south China sea claims and ensuring that freedom of navigation in the region was upheld, this is enshrined in the UN Law of seas. The frequency of such operations was raised in the Trump administration, which demonstrated that it is not going to tolerate the Chinese militarization of artificial islands and its efforts to limit navigation in these disputed waters. These operations were a part of the multipronged approach employed by the US in particular to contain and effectively manage China's emerging naval power in the South China Sea, to facilitate the flow of navigation through these extremely strategic waterways.

Apart from FONOPs, the US also aimed to enhance its bilateral security cooperation with the necessary ASEAN member states – involved in the South China Sea disputes – this is the Philippines and Vietnam. Such alliances were valuable because there were actors in the region who were directly affected by China's aggressive behaviour. The Trump administration restated its security assurances to the Philippines under the MDT on the basis that any armed attack against Philippine armed forces in the South China Sea would bring into play mutual defence obligations. This was somewhat reassuring to the Philippines at least, which has been squarely on the front line of the territorial disputes with China. Likewise, Vietnam improved the defence ties with the US, a country that has gradually emerged as an important counterweight for Vietnam's giant neighbour, China. This cooperation encompassed maritime security cooperation by offering security assistance involving the provision of military articles, enhanced military to military relations, as well as encouragement of the development of Vietnam's naval forces. Such partnerships have been intended to bolster the capabilities of these nations in terms of defence and in order to foster collective response to China involved in the South China Sea (Sang, 2023).

Economic Influence

Despite the porous and open structure of ASEAN economies greatly involved in



supply chain and deeply dependent on trade with the two largest economies of the world, US and China, the protectionist policy which the Trump administration starts the trade war with China influenced deeply the ASEAN region. Such are the cases of tariffs implemented by the US to the Chinese goods, which led to imposition of tariffs from the Chinese side, greatly impacting trade flows, and resulting to the creation of high economic uncertainties within the region. Southeast Asian nations many of which are hubs of the export dependent supply chains with China, were worst hit. For example, several countries such as Vietnam, Malaysia and Thailand experienced manufacturing losses as firms tried to decode the new tariff regime. But some ASEAN countries also identified the positive, because the trade war made many firms move their production factories from China to other ASEAN countries to avoid tariffs. Vietnam was one of the biggest beneficiaries of this shift thereby getting FDI by firms in their effort to diversify their supply chain from China. However, the effect of the trade war was not all positive with several blows to the stability and prospects of growth of economic regions.

Recent Efforts in Bilateral Trade with Main ASEAN Partners

Despite the adverse impacts of trade warfare, the Trump's administration launched and conducted bilateral trade negotiations with ASEAN members to boost trade relations and reduce trade deficits. Such policies were in line with other Multilateral Initiatives that the US was undertaking to sell more of its products overseas and hence cut on Trade Deficits. For instance, United States conducted trade talks with Vietnam, ending up in the signing of the relevant trade deals that include, access of American agricultural products into the Vietnamese markets, and the elimination of NTBs. The administration also firm up trade relations with other ASEAN members such as Indonesia and Thailand in areas of property rights as well as market access and trade liberalization. These bilateral endeavours were made to strengthen bilateral economic relations with ASEAN to guarantee that American players could continue to operate competitively in these buoyant markets while the fundamental trade friction with China persisted (Park J. J., 2023).

Taiwan

• Strengthening Ties

Sales and Export Licenses of Arms to Taiwan

As for the bilateral relations between the US and Taiwan during the Trump administration, the former dramatically upgraded its arms sale to the latter with a view to enhancing Taiwan's capability in the context of growing hostility between Taiwan and China. Key aspects of these arms sales included: Key aspects of these arms sales included:

High-Profile Arms Deals: The Obama administration gave a nod to arms sales packages to Taiwan to the tune of several billions of dollars. These packages consisted of; fighter aircraft like F-16, main battle tanks such as M1A2T Abrams, shoulder launched ground to air missiles like Stinger and other sophisticated surveillance and reconnaissance systems. These sales were aimed at increasing Taiwan 's capacity to repel an attack from China especially where the attack involves use of sea forces or aircraft.

Symbolic and Strategic Support: Beyond the mere steel and metal of the



arms themselves, they were also highly political – and significant for the message they sent at a time when Beijing was stepping up its military pressures on Taiwan. For arms exports, it was preventive in nature showing to China that the US is ready and will support Taiwan's sovereignty and security as China continues to flex its military muscles in the Taiwan Straits (Wilkins, 2022).

High-Level Visits: For the first time many years, the high-ranking representatives of the USA administration came to Taiwan, which strengthened their relations. On 19th of August 2020 Health and Human Services Secretary Alex Azar visited Taiwan, he was the highest level US official since 1979. This visit paves for the Trump administration's support for Taiwan and its readiness to cross the Chinese-led veto on the interaction between the US and Taiwan.

Legislation Supporting Taiwan: The administration also backed several bills which abetted the relations with Taiwan, including Taiwan Travel Act and Taipei Act. These laws led to even more often and at a higher level contacts and discussions between the US and Taiwanese authorities, which strengthened and develop diplomatic relations between the states. Passing of these acts showed that the US congress from both the parties wanted to strengthen relations with Taiwan regardless of the fact that it may offend China.

Philippines

• US-Philippines defence Relations

The Military Alliance of The Mutual defence Treaty and Joint Military Exercises

The US–Philippines defence relationship has since been governed by the Mutual defence Treaty (MDT) that was signed in 1951 and calls for the parties to respond collectively to an external armed attack on either of the parties. It is for this reason that throughout the Trump's administration the treaty has remained a vital aspect of mutual relations with military exercises still central. Key aspects include:

Balikatan Exercises: Assistance was extended to include annual bilateral military exercises such as the Balikatan 'link' or 'shoulder-to-shoulder' exercises with over 4,000 force strength of members originating from both the United States of America and the Philippines. These exercises related to interoperability, disaster response, and counterterrorism as highlights of the equation. They acted as assurances of the continual support of the US in the defence of the Philippines.

Visiting Forces Agreement (VFA): The VFA which permits the deployment of American forces in the Philippines proved vital for these drills. Despite having plans of ending VFA in early 2020, the government of President Rodrigo Duterte later reversed its decision to terminate the VFA, thus illustrating the significance of defence cooperation between the US and the Philippines despite leadership quarrels.

The Effect of Duterte's Foreign Policy Shift to Beijing and Moscow

During President Duterte's term of office, the foreign policy of the PHL shifted towards China and Russia which have impacts on the defence relations between the US and the PHL. Key points include:

Duterte's Criticism of the US: Candidate Duterte was sometimes very overt about this – he would respond to any negative comments the US had for him by saying something along the lines of, 'Hey, shove it!' especially when the criticisms were over the Duterte administration's conduct of the war on drugs. This affected



the hitherto excellent relations between the two countries in a way that was unprecedented.

Engagement with China and Russia: Over the period of Duterte presidency Philippines sought to improve relations and connection with China and Russia on diplomatic and even more so on economic and military level. However, such a shift did not challenge the basic tenets of defence relationship with the US but put a somewhat uneasy strain on Duterte's strategic calculation in navigating between superpowers and minor hegemon on the one hand and milking the US defence support on the other.

Conclusion

The Trump administration a down shift in US policies toward Asia which was marked by increase of a transactional and unilateral diplomacy that affected the whole of Asia. Such activities changed the economic relations and increased geopolitical tensions; key actions, including the Trade War with China, represent a part of a coherent policy aimed at restricting China's geopolitical expansion. Parallel to this was the cementing of the conventional bilateral relationships with Japan and South Korea in addition to substance enhancement of strategic partnership with India and Taiwan; the general management of these goodwill exhibited a conscious effort to bolster the security aspect in view of evolving threats in the Asia Pacific region especially from North Korea and China. But it also witnessed an uneven approach towards Southeast Asia and the Philippines in terms of defence and counterterrorism ties on one hand, and reduced multilateral involvement on the other, which let China to gain ground. The previous and by no means successful meetings with North Korea added to uncertainty and a lack of clear organization principles in the actual foreign policy of the administration. In a nutshell, the Trump era in Asia is characterized by strengthening of the relations and revival of the tensions and shifts in the regional strategies that have left the region even more bipolar and the US's influence persistently solidified in some sphere but facing newly initiated challenges.

References

- Beeson, M. (2019). Donald Trump and Post-Pivot Asia: The Implications of a "Transactional" Approach to Foreign Policy. *Asian Studies Review*, 10-27.
- Dalpino, C. (2017). US Security Relations with Southeast Asia in the Trump Administration. *Contemporary Southeast Asia: A Journal of International and Strategic Affairs*, 39, 3-8.
- Holland, D. K. (2018). The Implications of the Trump Administration's South Asia Policy for US-Pakistan Relations. *Journal of Security & Strategic Analyses*.
- Knopf, J. W. (2017). Security assurances and proliferation risks in the Trump administration. *Contemporary Security Policy*, 26-34.
- Liow, J. C. (2017). U.S.–Southeast Asia Relations under the Trump Administration. *Asia Policy*, 53-58.
- Cullen, P. (2017). The Rebalance to Asia Under Trump. *The RUSI Journal*, 8-15.
- Kawashima, S. (2017). Japan–US–China Relations during the Trump Administration and the Outlook for East Asia. *Asia-Pacific Review*, 23-36.
- Kolmaš, M., & Kolmašová, Š. (2019). A 'pivot' that never existed: America's Asian



- strategy under Obama and Trump. *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, 61-79.
- Kubo, F. (2019). Reading the Trump Administration's China Policy. *Asia-Pacific Review*, 58-76.
- Nguyen, H. (2017). Donald J. Trump and Asia: From Campaign to Government. *Asian Affairs: An American Review*, 125-141.
- Park, J. J. (2023). The US-led security network in the Indo-Pacific in international order transition: a South Korean perspective. *The Pacific Review*, 329-350.
- Park, J., & Stangarone, T. (2019). Trump's America First Policy in Global and Historical Perspectives: Implications for US–East Asian Trade. *Asian Perspective*, 1-34.
- Pempel, J. (2019). Right target; wrong tactics: the trump administration upends East Asian order. *The Pacific Review*, 996-1018.
- Sang, T. H. (2023). Bolstering middle power standing: South Korea's response to U.S. Indo-Pacific strategy from Trump to Biden. *The Pacific Review*, 32-60.
- Siracusa, J. M. (2019). U.S.-VIETNAM RELATIONS IN THE TRUMP ERA. *Asian Affairs*, 602-618.
- Smith, S. A. (2017). U.S.-Japan Relations in a Trump Administration. *Asia Policy*, 13-20.
- SUTTER, R. (2018). The United States and Asia in 2017. *Asian Survey*, 58(1), 10-20.
- Sutter, R. (2019). Congress and Trump Administration China Policy: Overlapping Priorities, Uneasy Adjustments and Hardening toward Beijing. *Journal of Contemporary China*, 519-537.
- Tao, X. (2017). China-U.S. Relations during the Trump Administration. *Asia Policy*, 5-12.
- Torkunov, A. (2019). Strategy of the Trump Administration on Asia-Pacific. *Mirovaia ekonomika i mezhdunarodnye otnosheniia*, 63(6), 25-37.
- Wilkins, T. (2022). Adoption, accommodation or opposition? - regional powers respond to American-led Indo-Pacific strategy. *The Pacific Review*, 415-445.