America and the Indo-Pacific Trump and Beyond (Harsh V. Pant and Kashish Parpiani)

VANSHIKA SIROHI[1]

'America and the Indo-Pacific: Trump and Beyond' by Harsh V. Pant and Kashish Parpiani, published in 2022, is an excellent book that provides a detailed analysis of the United States foreign policy in the Indo-Pacific region during the Trump administration and beyond. The book offers a comprehensive understanding of the geopolitical landscape of the Indo-Pacific region and the US policy towards it. The book is divided into four chapters, each focusing on different aspects of US foreign policy in the Indo-Pacific region. It covers topics such as the US-China rivalry, the Free and Open Indo-Pacific strategy, US-India relations, and the role of regional powers like Japan and Australia. The authors provide a detailed account of the various initiatives taken by the Trump administration, such as the US-China trade war, and their impact on the region.

In the book's introduction, the authors highlight the significance of the Indo-Pacific region as a global economic powerhouse and a geopolitical flashpoint. They argue that the Trump administration's "Free and Open Indo-Pacific" (FOIP) strategy marked a significant departure from the previous US approach to the region, as it sought to counter China's growing influence and assertiveness. The authors also examine the various components of the FOIP strategy, including its focus on infrastructure development, security cooperation, and economic integration. They explore the challenges and opportunities facing the US in the Indo-Pacific, such as the rise of China, the increasing importance of India, and the changing dynamics of regional alliances.

The first chapter of the book, named "Obama's Asia and Trump's Campaign", examines the Obama administration's "Pivot to Asia" policy and the evolution of US strategic thinking towards the Indo-Pacific region leading up to the 2016 US presidential election. The authors argue that the Obama administration's pivot to Asia was driven by the recognition of the region's growing economic and strategic importance, as well as concerns over China's assertiveness. However, the policy was criticized for its lack of resources and clear strategic vision. The chapter also discusses the 2016 US presidential election and how the campaign of the then-candidate Donald Trump signalled a departure from the traditional US approach to foreign policy. The authors note

---

[1] The author is Postgraduate student at Jindal School of International Affairs (JSIA) and an Assistant Researcher at the Centre for Security Studies (CSS).

that while Trump's campaign rhetoric was often focused on domestic issues, he also expressed a desire to reset US relations with China and prioritize American economic interests. The authors argue that the Trump administration's Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) strategy, which replaced the pivot to Asia, was driven by a more confrontational approach towards China and a desire to build a coalition of regional partners to counter Chinese influence. Overall, the chapter lays out an overview of the evolution of US strategic thinking towards the Indo-Pacific region under the Obama and Trump administrations and sets the stage for a deeper exploration of the Trump administration's FOIP strategy in the rest of the book.

The second chapter, "The Trump Presidency and China", focuses on the Trump administration's approach towards China, which is a central aspect of its Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) strategy. Here, the authors contend that the Trump administration's approach towards China was marked by a shift towards a more confrontational stance, driven by concerns over China's growing economic and military power, as well as its assertiveness in the region. They note that the Trump administration implemented a range of policies aimed at countering China, such as tariffs and restrictions on Chinese investments in the US. The chapter also examines the implications of the US-China trade war and the Trump administration's policies towards Taiwan and the South China Sea. The authors note that these policies contributed to a deterioration in US-China relations and raised concerns about the potential for conflict in the region. A detailed analysis of the Trump administration's approach towards China and its impact on US-China relations and regional stability is provided in this chapter. The authors suggest that while the FOIP strategy may have succeeded in containing China in the short term, it is uncertain whether it can lead to a more stable and cooperative relationship in the long term.

The third chapter begins by examining the Trump administration's Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) strategy and its implications for the Indo-Pacific region. The authors assert that the FOIP strategy was a departure from previous US approaches to the region, as it sought to counter China's growing influence and assertiveness by building a coalition of like-minded countries. The chapter provides an in-depth analysis of the various components of the FOIP strategy, including economic, security, and diplomatic aspects. It also examines the challenges and opportunities facing the FOIP strategy, such as the complexity of regional alliances, the increasing importance of India, and the potential for regional competition and conflict. The authors note that while the FOIP strategy has succeeded in building greater cooperation among regional partners, it faces significant challenges in terms of implementation and achieving its strategic objectives. The authors propose that the long-term success of the strategy will depend on the ability of the US to navigate regional complexities and build sustained partnerships with regional actors.

The fourth and last chapter of the book, titled, "Trump and South Asia", deals with the Trump administration's approach towards South Asia and its impact on regional security and stability. In this chapter, the authors highlight how the Trump administration's policies towards South Asia

were shaped by a desire to stabilize Afghanistan, counterterrorism, and contain China's growing influence in the region. The chapter digs into the various components of the Trump administration's South Asia policy, including its approach towards Pakistan, India, and Afghanistan. The authors note that while the Trump administration's approach towards South Asia was marked by a greater emphasis on strategic cooperation with India, its policies towards Pakistan were more confrontational and discuss the implications of the Trump administration's decision to withdraw US troops from Afghanistan and its impact on regional security and stability. The chapter provides a detailed analysis of the Trump administration's approach towards South Asia and its implications for regional security and stability. The authors suggest that while the Trump administration's policies towards India may have laid the foundation for a more strategic partnership, its confrontational approach towards Pakistan and the withdrawal from Afghanistan have raised concerns about regional stability and the potential for increased conflict.

While concluding the book, the authors summarise the key themes and arguments of the book and offer insights into the future of US policy towards the Indo-Pacific region. They argue that the implementation of the FOIP strategy faced numerous challenges, and its long-term success remains uncertain. The conclusion also examines the implications of the Biden administration's approach towards the Indo-Pacific region and the potential for continuity and change in US policy. The authors bring forth that while the Biden administration is likely to adopt a more cooperative approach towards regional partners, it will also face similar challenges as the Trump administration in implementing a coherent and effective strategy towards the region. In the epilogue, the authors claim that the Biden administration's approach is likely to prioritize cooperation with regional partners and seek to rebuild alliances and partnerships that were strained under the Trump administration. The chapter examines the various components of the Biden administration's approach towards the region, including economic, security, and diplomatic aspects. It also discusses the potential challenges and opportunities facing the Biden administration in the Indo-Pacific region, such as the ongoing pandemic, regional security concerns, and China's growing influence. The authors recommend that the Biden administration will need to navigate these challenges carefully and build sustained partnerships with regional actors to achieve its strategic objectives.

In my opinion, one of the strengths of this book is the authors' ability to provide a well-balanced analysis of US policy in the Indo-Pacific region. They acknowledge the strengths and limitations of US policy while highlighting the region's complexities and challenges. Additionally, the authors offer valuable insights into the implications of the Biden administration's foreign policy towards the Indo-Pacific region. The book is well-researched, and the authors have incorporated a variety of sources, including government reports, academic papers, and interviews with policymakers. The writing style is clear and engaging, making the book accessible to a wide range of readers.

In a nutshell, "America and the Indo-Pacific: Trump and Beyond" is a must-read for individuals who are interested in international relations, foreign policy, and the Indo-Pacific region. This could include scholars, researchers, policymakers, and students studying these fields. Additionally, anyone interested in understanding how U.S. policy has changed under the Trump and Biden administrations, and its implications for the region, may find this book informative. It offers a well-balanced analysis of the region's complexities, challenges, and opportunities and provides valuable insights into the future of US policy in the region.