



## US POLICY TOWARD THE INDO-PACIFIC REGION

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### Abstract

US policy toward the Indo-Pacific region has undergone a long formation process due to the impact of strategic, security and economic factors. During the Cold War, the US strategy mainly focused on Europe and East Asia to deal with the Soviet Union and the Socialist Bloc. However, since the end of the Cold War, changes in the global geopolitical structure have highlighted the importance of the Indo-Pacific region. This region has an important strategic geopolitical position with sea routes connecting Europe, the Middle East and East Asia, along with the strong increase of China's influence. In addition, fluctuations in regional security such as disputes in the East Sea, the East China Sea, the rise of India and changes in the security structure in the Southeast Asian region have prompted the US to adjust its strategic policy. From the Rebalance (Pivot) strategy to Asia - Pacific under President Barack Obama to the "Free and Open Indo-Pacific" strategy under President Donald Trump and Joe Biden shows that the US is focusing on maintaining an order based on international law, building new alliances and strengthening its role in the region to deal with challenges from rivals, protecting US interests in a region that is becoming the focus of global power competition.

**Keywords:** The US, Indo-Pacific, policy.

### INTRODUCTION

#### Content of US policy toward the Indo-Pacific region

In 2011, the US under President Barack Obama announced the Pivot strategy, shifting its focus from the Middle East and Europe to the Asia-Pacific region, focusing on increasing its military presence and economic cooperation in the region to maintain US strategic influence and cope with the increasing influence of great powers like China. However, this strategy only focuses mainly on the Pacific region, while the Indian Ocean region has not yet been given due attention. Then, under President Donald Trump, the Indo-Pacific Strategy was officially announced in April 2018 with the goal of building a "free and open" region<sup>1</sup>. This concept expands the US strategic scope to include the Indian Ocean region and emphasizes the connection between the two oceans. The name change to "Indo-Pacific" reflects a shift in America's strategic approach with recognition of India's growing importance in the regional power structure. Under President Joe Biden, the Indo-Pacific Strategy was officially announced in February 2022, showing the bipartisan inheritance of previous US strategies and visions for the region, especially President Barack Obama's Pivot Strategy and President Donald Trump's Free and Open Indo-Pacific Vision. The Indo-Pacific Strategy under President Joe Biden maintains a similar focus but with a different approach, placing more emphasis on multilateral cooperation and diplomacy. The Joe Biden administration has reaffirmed the US commitment to the region, emphasizing the importance of alliances and partnerships. This policy continues to focus on containing China's growing influence, especially in the areas of technology, cybersecurity, and climate change. US policy toward the Indo-Pacific from 2011 until now has been adjusted in each period but still focuses on the following contents:

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**Promoting freedom and openness in the region:** The US seeks to maintain the Indo-Pacific region as a free and open space where countries can operate according to internationally recognized rules and norms, considering this a core factor in maintaining freedom of navigation and aviation to ensure global connectivity and economic development. The strategy aims to prevent any country from imposing control or restrictions on vital sea routes and airspace, thereby protecting free access to strategic trade routes and ensuring the region is free from any unilateral domination. The US stressed that all countries, large or small, must comply with international rules to maintain peace and stability in the region.

**Strengthening intra-regional and extra-regional linkages:** The US emphasizes the importance of creating a global network of cooperation, in which the Indo-Pacific region is closely connected with other strategic regions to maintain the global balance of power and promote common security and development goals. The US focuses on deepening relationships with US allies (Australia, Japan, South Korea, Philippines, Thailand) and leading partners in the Indo-Pacific region (India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Mongolia, New Zealand, Singapore, Taiwan, Vietnam), while expanding cooperation beyond the region to build a strong network of US allies and partners. Furthermore, the US focuses on strengthening connectivity and cooperation with Pacific island countries to ensure the stability and development of these countries, enhancing US presence and influence in the region. The US also supports India's leadership role in South Asia as an essential part of its strategy to maintain the balance of power and promote regional stability, including supporting India's initiatives to enhance security, economic development and regional cooperation. In addition, the US focuses on strengthening flexible cooperation groups such as Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (the Quad) to promote strategic coordination and security cooperation, effectively responding to challenges and threats. Moreover, the US supports ASEAN's central role in maintaining regional peace and stability, and strengthens relations with ASEAN and South Asian partners to address

<sup>11</sup> Alex N. Wong (2018), "Briefing on the Indo - Pacific Strategy", <https://2017-2021.state.gov/briefing-on-the-indo-pacific-strategy/>.

common issues such as maritime security, climate change, and economic development.

**Promoting economic prosperity:** The US places a high priority on promoting economic cooperation through the implementation of comprehensive frameworks and initiatives to develop a free, fair and sustainable trade, strengthening the US position in the Indo-Pacific<sup>2</sup> such as the Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP), the Blue Dot Network (BDN), the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity (IPEF), etc. which includes boosting the digital economy with the goal of promoting innovation and enhancing global competitiveness. The US also focuses on establishing and maintaining high labor and environmental standards to ensure fair working conditions and sustainable environmental protection. In addition, data management content is considered a key element in the strategy with the goal of strengthening global supply chains and increasing resilience to economic shocks. Furthermore, the US pledged to reducing emissions and promoting the use of clean energy as part of efforts to cope with climate change. Finally, the US promotes improvements in infrastructure, from transportation to technology, to support equitable economic development and strengthen connectivity between countries in the region and globally.

**Strengthening regional security:** The US is committed to enhancing security in the Indo-Pacific region by consolidating and expanding its military deterrence capacity through military modernization and increasing America's military presence in the region to ensure the ability to respond quickly and effectively to threats. An important part of this strategy is to strengthen defense cooperation with countries in the region, especially US allies (Japan, South Korea, Australia, Philippines) to improve the military capabilities of these countries through training programs, technical assistance and equipment provision. In addition, to contribute to resolving potential conflicts, the US encourages and supports peaceful dialogues among relevant parties to seek peaceful and sustainable solutions to current disputes, and emphasizes the importance of maintaining a stable security environment to create favorable conditions for economic development and multilateral cooperation in the region.

**Building resilience against transnational threats:** The US focuses on building the resilience of the Indo-Pacific region to respond to global challenges such as climate change and pandemics. This emphasizes the development and implementation of international cooperation strategies to enhance the ability to effectively respond to these threats. The US increases support for countries in the region to build emergency response mechanisms, improve public health systems and promote environmental protection initiatives. In addition, the US implements research projects and develops advanced technologies to predict and respond to the impacts of climate change, and to enhance the capacity of countries in preventing, combating and controlling epidemics. The US also encourages countries and international organizations to increase coordination in sharing information, experiences, and necessary resources to protect public health and ensure sustainable development.

## REVIEWS

US policy toward the Indo-Pacific region has achieved some important success such as: *First, in terms of politics and foreign affairs*, the US attaches importance to protecting common rules and standards, supporting institutional reform, capacity building, and the business environment; changing its "political approach", considering "America First", reducing involvement and requiring allies and partners to share more responsibility. *Second, in terms of economy and trade*, the US values free and open trade in the Indo-Pacific based on the principles of balance, fairness, reciprocity, and sharing common values of market economy to ensure the region continues to prosper. *Third, in terms of defense and security*, the US Government and its system of allies and partners in the region must not only focus on dealing with individual risks and threats (terrorism, North Korea's nuclear weapons, the Afghanistan issue, etc.) but also maintain and strengthen the current world order based on international law, and deal with broader challenges such as the East Sea and East China Sea issues. *Finally, on democracy and human rights*, the values of freedom, democracy and human rights are often emphasized or "harmoniously balanced" by the US with economic interests and other values.

Besides the results achieved, US policy toward the Indo-Pacific region still has limitations, making it difficult for the US to consolidate its position as the "world's No. 1 superpower" and form mechanisms to restrain regional opponents, including: *First*, the US foreign policy has many inconsistencies. For example, President Donald Trump implements the "America First" policy with the tendency to promote domestic protectionism, while President Joe Biden is interested in promoting and forming stronger US bilateral and sub-multilateral cooperation mechanisms with allies/partners in the Indo-Pacific region, which has negatively affected political trust with the network of US allies/partners in the Indo-Pacific region, forcing these countries to choose "dynamic balance" in great power relations, even "swinging" between the US and China<sup>3</sup>. *Second*, the US promotes bilateral and sub-multilateral cooperation frameworks with its network of allies/partners in the Indo-Pacific region such as Japan, South Korea, Australia, the Philippines, etc., but has not yet been able to form an "Asian NATO" model that ensures unity and effectiveness in responding to regional opponents. *Third*, the US's force mobilization in the Indo-Pacific mainly focuses on a number of traditional allies such as Japan, South Korea, Australia, and the Philippines, directly challenging the country's strategic initiative in promoting its economic and military presence in the region<sup>4</sup>. *Fourth*, tensions in US-China relations have increased in many areas, especially economics, trade and technology; the level of economic connectivity and interdependence between China and the West has declined due to the impact of US policies. *Finally*, resources for implementing US policy towards the Indo-Pacific tend to be scattered due to having to simultaneously resolve many hot spots of conflict in the world such as Russia-Ukraine and Israel-Hamas, and domestic issues such as fiscal pressure,

<sup>2</sup> Vu Phuong Anh, Tran Thi Ha Phuong (2024), "US multilateral foreign policy toward the Indo-Pacific region", <https://tapchiconsan.org.vn/web/guest/the-gioi-van-de-su-kien/-/2018/990802/chinh-sach-doi-ngoai-da-phuong-cua-nuoc-my-tai-khu-vuc--an-do-duong---thai-binh-duong.aspx>, accessed on April 29th, 2025.

<sup>3</sup> The Study IAS (2024), "Impact of Trump 2.0 on US Economic Policy and ASEAN's Future", <https://www.thestudyias.com/blogs/impact-of-trump-2-0-on-us-economic-policy-and-aseans-future/>.

<sup>4</sup> Alexander Gillespie and Robert G. Patman (2023), "Approach with caution: why NZ should be wary of buying into the AUKUS security pact", <https://theconversation.com/approach-with-caution-why-nz-should-be-wary-of-buying-into-the-aukus-security-pact-203915>.

internal division between the Democratic - Republican parties, affecting the US position in the Indo-Pacific region<sup>5</sup>.

## Conclusion

In general, US policy toward the Indo-Pacific region has undergone a long-term development process, reflecting important strategic adjustments to adapt to the transformation of the global power structure. From President Barack Obama's Pivot Strategy to Donald Trump and Joe Biden's Free and Open Indo-Pacific Vision, the US has constantly built and strengthened its role through maintaining order based on international law, developing strong alliances and promoting cooperation in the fields of economics, security and environment. These adjustments are aimed at countering China's growing influence and protecting US interests in a region that has become the focus of global power competition. The policy shows the continuity of the US strategic commitment to the region, and affirms the key role of the Indo-Pacific in international security and development. Besides the achievements, US policy toward the region still has limitations, making it difficult for the US to consolidate its position as the "world's number 1 superpower" and form a mechanism to restrain rivals in the region.

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<sup>5</sup> Mordechai Chaziza (2023), "The Global Security Initiative: China's New Security Architecture for the Gulf", The Diplomat, <https://thediplomat.com/2023/05/the-global-security-initiative-chinas-new-security-architecture-for-the-gulf/>.