

The Analysis of COVID-19 as the Turning Point of America's Foreign Policy in the Asia-Pacific Region

Yu Tian

Loughborough University, London, E20 3BS, UK
Email: yutian.max@163.com

ABSTRACT

In 2020, the global outbreak of COVID-19 has triggered an unprecedented global crisis in modern history. COVID-19 is seriously destroying the economy, causing social and geopolitical, and other fields into danger and turbulence. America is now also facing challenges from domestic and international levels.

The world was recently attracted by American political change conspicuously. The former president Donald Trump's unique policy made world unrest. Hence, Joe Biden's new foreign policy about the Asia-Pacific region has attracted much attention. Asia-Pacific area is always the hot spot in the world whenever on the military or economic level. The situation is changed in recent years due to the world becoming multipolar. China and Russia are gradually becoming stronger than before so America's Asia-Pacific policy is facing unprecedented challenges. This paper uses the case study, literature review and comparative analysis to pay more attention to the issues related to the change in American international relations and security in the Asia-Pacific region. The large-scale comparative study shows that COVID-19 has changed America's Asia-Pacific policy.

Keywords: COVID-19, international relations, China and Russia rise, American foreign policy

1. INTRODUCTION

Asia-Pacific region is a really key strategic location for America. However, the world has transited from unipolar to multipolar. America is facing a new challenge in this area which is different from the Cold War period. However, the bipartisan system of America is controlling the trend of policy [1]. The outbreak of COVID-19 in 2020 has changed the American society and American comprehensive national power. These are the reasons for the change in the American Asia-Pacific policy. The current relevant research focuses on COVID-19 and the foreign policy perception of the American public and elites. But these only considered the impact of the pandemic and ignored the actual situation. This paper will examine how the COVID-19 has an impact on America's foreign policy in the Asia region. In recent years, the comprehensive national power of China and Russia are growing prodigiously. In order to contain and control the changes in the Asia-Pacific region, Donald Trump and Joe Biden have different policy tendencies towards the region. Donald Trump showed his difference from the other American president [2]. His policy had aroused chaos in the world, especially in the business field. However, Joe Biden returned to America's

traditional policy. Politically, due to the different ruling ideas of the two major parties, it is not easy for one party to implement its own policies. However, the two parties' purposes are similar to each other: that is to maintain America's advantage in the Asia-Pacific region and to deter the potential rising countries in this region. By comparison, it can be seen that America's Asia-Pacific policy has changed dramatically under the pandemic. From the research, people can get the future trend of American Asia-Pacific policy.

Through the case study, literature review, and comparative analysis on this paper, it is found that the American Asia-Pacific policy has indeed changed significantly before and after the COVID-19, making this coronary disease a turning point of the United States policy. The significance of this paper is to see the changes of the American Asia-Pacific Policy under COVID-19, which can reduce the misjudgment of American Asia-Pacific policy by countries in the Asia-Pacific region and avoid serious consequences.

2. AMERICA'S FOREIGN POLICY IN ASIAN REGION

America's Asia Pacific strategy is devoted to balancing the Asia region. Nevertheless, the pattern of the world is changed especially in some potential countries, such as China, Russia, and North Korea, etc. Hence, America's foreign policy in the Asia Pacific not only keeps the balance but also keeps them within control[3]. With the rise of China, America always has been afraid of being threatened by its own security and influence.

2.1. America's Foreign Policy in Asian Region Before COVID-19 Outbreak

America's Asia-Pacific policy is mainly to avoid a positive military confrontation with China, support and rely on the allies around China to balance and restrict China's influence in the region, prevent China from becoming the leading country in the region and maintain the comparative advantage of the United States in the

region, including deter Russia and North Korea[4]. It is noteworthy that former president Donald Trump had changed the rules and built a new pattern of America's Asia Pacific strategy that broke American tradition. His policy was fulfilled with trade sanctions which mean reduces America's disadvantage in business. Also, his policy reduced the cooperation with alliances.

2.2. America's Foreign Policy in Asian Region After COVID-19 Outbreak

American foreign policy in the Asia region had not changed the Asia-Pacific situation but it accelerated the conflicts between domestic and foreign countries. America has abandoned the part of Donald Trump's foreign policy when Joe Biden won the election. After that, America has returned to traditional policy such as back to the international organizations, strengthened the relationships with its alliances and negotiated with some countries in Asia.

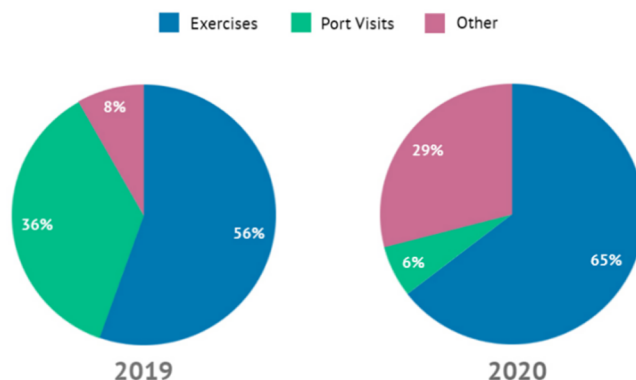


Figure 1 An illustration for the U.S. military activities in the Indo-Pacific region [5]

The figure above shows the percentage of American military activities in the Indo-Pacific region in 2019 and 2020. Over the past year, there were significant changes in the "other" part.

In both years, the three main activities of American military activities in the Indo-Pacific region were: exercises, port visits and others, with exercise taking the largest (56% in 2019 and 65% in 2020). The minimal activities of the military were port visitors.

Interestingly, between 2019 and 2020, spending on all three of the most frequent activities had changed. Port visits fell significantly, with the transport budget declining by two-thirds. Overall, the figure indicates that American military activities have had to increase in two areas in order to avoid unnecessary activity.

US troops overwhelmingly skewed to Asia Pacific region

Split of about 165 thousand US troops stationed internationally at the end of 2020

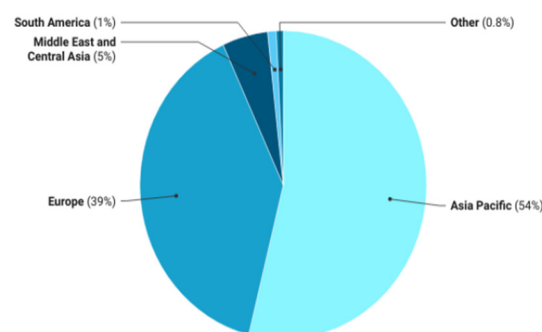


Figure 2 An illustration for the US troops overwhelmingly skewed to the Asia-Pacific region [6]

Figure 2 shows the number of American troops in different regions and the pie chart explains what type of region America allowed troops into.

Looking at the pie chart first, it is clear that the Asia-Pacific is the most important region. 54% of American

troops stayed here. The second region is Europe, in which NATO was led by America.

Figure 2 gives more detailed information about why America pays more attention to the Asia-Pacific region. 5% of American troops are in the Middle East. Only 1% of troops are in South America and, 0.1% in other regions.

Overall, America gradually puts more troops in the Asia-Pacific region because America feels challenged more than other regions before.

2.2.1. Donald Trump administration's foreign policy in the Asian region

Donald Trump administration's foreign policy in the Asia region is unique. In the aspect of diplomacy and security, the allies were required to bear more defense burden. Economically, he advocated trade protectionism, abandoned multilateralism, and focused on bilateralism; Politically, it is reflected in the proposal of the India Pacific strategy. The Trump administration had expanded the Asia Pacific policy and put forward the India Pacific policy[7]. His policy caused escalated situations in the Asia region, for instance, South Korea and Japan trade war, China and America trade war, and other trade conflicts. The Trump administration defined China as a "strategic competitor" and took continuous measures to suppress it, stifled technological innovation and curbed the growth space and level of China's economy, controlled China's growth within the scope of the international dominance of the United States. The former U.S. President Donald Trump regarded China as the first competitor. He has launched a trade war with China, also imposed sanctions on Chinese enterprises in the United States. Huawei's 5G technology made Trump think it posed a serious threat to the United States. Trump kept sanctions until Biden came to power[8].

2.2.2. Joe Biden administration's foreign policy in the Asian region

Biden continued to the concept of the Democratic Party that means he inherited the former president Obama's policy. To change the unilateral tendency of the Trump administration, the alliance relationship is handled in the way of multilateralism and international cooperation. While continuing the Trump administration's "India Pacific strategy" framework, the Biden administration also focused on strengthening the "Four-nation dialogue mechanism" and strengthening cooperation between South Korea and Southeast Asian countries. The Asia-Pacific allies of the United States have also expressed their desire to restore and consolidate alliance relations with the new government[9].

3. THE ANALYSIS OF COVID-19 AS THE TURNING POINT OF AMERICA'S FOREIGN POLICY IN THE ASIA-PACIFIC REGION

COVID-19 is a new type of virus and it spread fast between people very easily. COVID-19 is also seriously destroying the economy, causing social and geopolitical, and other fields into danger and turbulence. The pandemic had to make America begin to adjust its policy in the Asia-Pacific region due to some problems outbreak in America. The United States has always resisted and refused to recognize China's vaccine, united with some allies to boycott it, and distorted some pictures of Chinese vaccinations with words [10].

The reasons for the change of America's Asia-Pacific policy are as follows:

COVID-19 caused a series of social issues in America that made American administration had to shift a part of the attention to deal with it. These problems were truly stopped America's progress from the Asia-Pacific area.

Trump was a businessman before he became president. His policy tends to business and trade. Withdrawing from several international organizations made America reduce its impact on the world[11]. Alliances had long been the bulwark of the common enemy. He railed the alliances to pay more of the bill. On the other hand, he couldn't take a proper measure to prevent COVID-19, which intensified the social contradiction further.

Joe Biden as former assistance of former President Obama, has inherited Barak Obama's policy. His difference from Trump's foreign policy is as follows: he is returning to the international communities, giving up Donald Trump's trade policy and strengthening the alliances[12].

In essentially, the Donald Trump policy and Joe Biden policy are almost the same; containing and controlling the Asia region. However, the Donald Trump government's foreign policy to the Asia region doesn't have a good effect. Joe Biden government's foreign policy in the Asia region is the return to the world but it shows radical.

America's influence declined after COVID-19. Along with China and Russia's rise, America has thought of those two countries as threats. To consolidate and strengthen this region, the partial conflict will appear. As people can see, America has put a lot of money and military forces in Asia region over the past few months. This movement can truly keep the balance without bloody conflict. China is the main power country in Asia. This huge potential market creates more opportunities for the world. Losing this market will crush America's finance and trade. And, America will lose its partners due to its dangerous policy.

4. CONCLUSION

In short, America's Asia foreign policy in the Asia region is aimed at China and Russia. Nevertheless, this has become the watershed of policy in the Donald Trump government period. Donald Trump has taken America first as his goal and sacrificed other interests to protect America's interests. He also has purposed the new idea "Indo-Pacific" that expanded the Asia-Pacific policy. Reversely, Joe Biden try hard to clean up the mess when Donald Trump retired. He reunion the alliances and released the gentle policy on business policy.

Through the comparative study that America is constantly strengthening its foreign policy in the Asia region. America labeled China and Russia as the United States' leading strategic and military competitors[13]. Donald Trump is a businessman whose policy trend to trade. He thought the business is vital for America's recovery but he also ignored the importance of the alliance. When Joe Biden won the election, he chose to return to the international community. All in all, former President Donald Trump was focused on commercial sanctions. Due to the serious epidemic in the United States, Biden had to appease domestic contradictions first. He abandoned Trump's unreasonable policy.

From what is analyzed above, it appears that American foreign policy in the Asia region has a trend to right. China and Russia are gradually playing an important role in the world. The news has been reported that America's military action in this area is so frequent. It must ascertain that this competition will become more and more fierce.

This paper is an analysis of American foreign policy in the Asia region through comparison studies and cases study. This paper exists the problems of insufficiency in material, interviews and further research.

REFERENCES

- [1] F. Lindsey, The Trump Administration and the 'free and open indo-Pacific', USA: The Brookings Institution, 2020.
- [2] A. Torkunov, Strategy of the Trump Administration on Asia-Pacific. *Mirovaya ekonomika i mezhdunarodnye otnosheniya*, 63 (6), 2019, pp. 25-37.
- [3] Z.X. Jiang, China and America's relationship and the World Pattern changed- think about current China and America's relationship, *Peace and Development*, 2020, 1:20-27.
- [4] X. Peng, Analysis of the motivation of the evolution of the American "India Pacific" strategy, China: Foreign Investment in China, 2020.
- [5] 'The Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative'. (2020) U.S. Military Activities in the Indo-Pacific by type, USA: The Center for Strategic and International Studies: <https://amti.csis.org/how-covid-19-affected-u-s-china-military-signaling/donut-2-2/>.
- [6] M. Hasnain, US alliances in Asia-Pacific do not need reassurance, 2020 <https://tellimer.com/article/us-allies-in-asia-pacific-do-not-need-reassur>.
- [7] H. Wang, Trend of Trump Administration's Asia-Pacific Policy and Regional Economic Cooperation in Northeast Asia, China: Northeast Asia Research Center of Jilin Academy of Social Science, 2018.
- [8] T.Min, Huawei Versus the United States? The Geopolitics of Exterritorial Internet Infrastructure, USA: University of Washington Bothell, 2020.
- [9] S.I. Ling, H. Li, An Analysis of Biden Administration's Asia-Pacific Alliance Policy, China: Contemporary International Relations, 2021.
- [10] D. Chao, China Injects Hundreds of Thousands With Experimental Covid-19 Vaccines, 2020. <https://www.wsj.com/articles/china-injects-hundreds-of-thousands-with-experimental-covid-19-vaccines-11599834029#:~:text=A%20Chinese%20pharmaceutical%20company%20has,rigorous%20scientific%20studies%20are%20complete>.
- [11] R.Z. Lin, The COVID-19 how to change the pattern of the world, *Xinmin Weekly*, (12)2020, pp. 10-15.
- [12] S.I. Ling, Trump's Asia — Pacific Alliance Adjustments, China: Contemporary International Relations, 2020.
- [13] M. A. Nassef, United States of America's Foreign Policy in the Security of Asia-Pacific Region, America: Co-IRIS (International Relations and Islamic Studies Research Cohort), 2010.