

THE FUTURE OF THE INDO-PACIFIC SECURITY ARCHITECTURE: A SCENARIO PLANNING APPROACH IN RESPONSE TO U.S. FOREIGN POLICY IN THE TRUMP 2.0 ERA

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Abstract

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President Donald Trump's second presidency marks a significant shift in the foreign policy orientation of the United States, which has had a far-reaching impact on the security configuration in the Indo-Pacific region. This study aims to analyze the impact of Donald Trump's leadership on U.S. foreign policy and its implications for the security dynamics of the Indo-Pacific region. Using a literature review approach and scenario planning framework, this study examines the adaptive responses of countries in the Indo-Pacific region in the face of geopolitical uncertainty posed by Trump's unilateralist and "America First" policies. By integrating PESTLE analysis and regional security theory, the study maps four possible future strategic scenarios: Fortress Pacific, Hedging Archipelago, Echo Chamber Alliance, and Age of Disorder. The results show that regional nations are seeking to strengthen regional self-reliance and cooperation, while mitigating the uncertainty of U.S. security commitments that have the potential to undermine regional stability. This paper provides conceptual contributions in the form of adaptive scenario-planning-based analytical models, as well as offers strategic recommendations for Indo-Pacific countries in dealing with the dynamics of great power rivalry in the post-Trump era.



INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, the Indo-Pacific region has gained increasing global strategic significance due to increasingly complex geopolitical dynamics and competition between major countries. The region has undergone a significant transformation in security and alliance orientation, accompanied by strong economic development, especially after the election of Donald Trump as President of the United States in 2016 and his second term in 2025. Trump's second term marks a significant transformation in U.S. foreign policy, moving away from the previous administration's multilateral approach and shifting to a strategy characterized by unilateralism and 'America First Policy.' This creates uncertainty regarding the ongoing US commitment to the region and raises concerns among key US allies and partners (Beeson, 2020). This uncertainty is further exacerbated by the US exit from the Trans-Pacific Agreement (TPP) and its confrontational stance towards China in terms of trade and maritime security (Leksyutina, 2019).

In recent years, the U.S. has managed to position itself as a friend and guarantor of security for the region. The Indo-Pacific Strategy (IPS) serves as a strategic asset for the United States and its allies in the region, including Japan, South Korea, the Philippines, and Australia. The findings show that the goal of IPS has always been to build strong relationships based on democratic principles, ensure freedom of movement, and reduce regional threats such as the influence of China and North Korea (Grossman, 2024).

However, given the changes surrounding the Trump administration 2.0, it is important to reevaluate the strategic posture of the Indo-Pacific countries. A number of countries, including Japan, South Korea, and Australia, are beginning to consider reformulating their foreign policy, not only in anticipation of changes in US policy but also in response to China's increasingly aggressive influence in the region (Atanassova-Cornelis, 2018). In this context, there is a large gap between the region's need for security assurances and strategic leadership and the increasingly unpredictable reality of U.S. foreign policy. This mismatch poses a serious threat to regional stability and raises an intellectual and practical urgency to understand the future scenarios that may occur under strategic uncertainty (Sutter, 2018).

A number of countries such as Japan, South Korea, and Australia have begun to reformulate their foreign policies. This was done not only to anticipate a shift in US policy, but also to respond to China's increasing assertive influence in the region (Atanassova-Cornelis, 2018). In this regard, there is a significant gap between the needs of the region's countries for security certainty and strategic leadership, and the increasingly unpredictable reality of U.S. foreign policy. This imbalance presents a real challenge to regional stability and poses an academic and practical urgency to understand future scenarios that may occur under the shadow of strategic uncertainty (Sutter, 2018).

This study uses the conceptual framework of scenario planning as developed by Ringland (1998) and Lindgren & Bandhold (2003), to analyze possible future developments without relying on a single prediction. This approach is combined with strategic analysis tools such as PESTLE and supported by regional security theory to understand the positions and responses of key countries in the Indo-Pacific to fluctuating US foreign policy (Chughtai & Iqbal, 2018). With this approach, the research seeks not only to map the response of regional

actors to Trump's policies, but also to explore various strategic scenarios that may arise in the context of ongoing U.S.-China tensions (Ratuva, 2017).

Previous research has highlighted the complexity of security dynamics in the Indo-Pacific region, particularly with the shift in U.S. foreign policy under President Donald Trump. For example, Beeson (2020) analyzed the impact of the "America First Policy" on the regional security architecture and found that it introduced uncertainty among U.S. allies, especially related to its commitment to multilateral security agreements. Similarly, Leksyutina (2019) focuses on the economic implications of the U.S. exit from the Trans-Pacific Agreement (TPP) and its influence on the Indo-Pacific, which shows China's growing dominance in shaping the region's economic landscape. However, the studies do not integrate a scenario planning framework to assess the various possible future paths for the region, given geopolitical and economic changes. This study fills in these gaps by using scenario planning, combined with PESTLE analysis and regional security theory, to evaluate potential future scenarios and the responses of key countries in the Indo-Pacific to U.S. foreign policy uncertainty.

This study aims to analyze the impact of Trump's leadership on security dynamics in the Indo-Pacific, identify various strategic scenarios that may occur as a consequence of changes in U.S. foreign policy, and provide relevant policy recommendations for countries in the region in response to geopolitical uncertainty. The key research question is: How might the Indo-Pacific countries' response to U.S. foreign policy uncertainty under Trump affect regional stability? The geographical focus of this study includes countries such as Japan, Australia, Indonesia, South Korea, China, and the Philippines (Tan, 2017).

A major contribution of this article lies in its approach that combines scenario planning with a theoretical framework of regional security to assess strategic uncertainties in the Indo-Pacific. This approach differs from previous studies that tend to rely on a single historical or policy analysis. This study offers an alternative scenario mapping based on a combination of mutually influencing political, economic, and security factors, which are relevant in the contemporary context and the future of the region (Southgate, 2021). Thus, this article makes a scientific contribution to the development of a literature-based foreign policy analysis method that is adaptive to uncertainty, as well as adds to the academic treasure of the security dynamics in the Indo-Pacific under Trump's leadership (Motaher & Khaled, 2025).

RESEARCH METHODS

This study uses a literature review approach with conceptual strategies based on scenario planning and strategic foresight. The selection of this strategy is based on the need to analyze the dynamics of strategic uncertainty in the Indo-Pacific region without relying on single empirical data, but rather by constructing a plausible narrative framework based on the synthesis of scientific sources and multidimensional strategic analysis. This approach is relevant for generating alternative predictions of the future based on the dynamics of the geopolitical, economic, and military realities of the region, as suggested in the scenario-based strategic planning literature (Hines & Bishop, 2015).

The data sources used in this study are entirely based on scientific literature and secondary policy documents. In addition, the study also refers to relevant international geopolitical and security strategy books, particularly those that review U.S. foreign policy

under Trump and its impact on regional security. Primary data such as interviews, surveys, or direct observation are not used, according to the characteristics of a conceptual approach based on a literature review (Boell & Cecez-Kecmanovic, 2015).

The units of analysis in this study are the key countries in the Indo-Pacific region, namely Japan, South Korea, Australia, Indonesia, the Philippines, and China. These countries were selected based on their strategic positions in security alliances and dependence on U.S. foreign policy, as well as their level of participation in regional cooperation mechanisms such as ASEAN, the Quad, and RCEP. The analysis focused on how these countries formulated policy responses to the changing geopolitical orientation of the US during the Trump presidency (Singh, 2018).

The data analysis technique in this study uses a scenario planning analysis approach combined with strategic analysis tools such as PESTLE (Political, Economic, Social, Technological, Legal, Environmental). Each tool is used to identify internal and external factors that affect the strategic position of a country in different scenarios. The analysis process is carried out manually with the help of strategic matrix visualization. Statistical software is not used because the approach is conceptual qualitative (Rafinejad, 2007).

With this methodological structure, this study ensures the validity and consistency of the scenario-based literature review approach that is able to provide strategic projections and evidence-based policy recommendations. The techniques and tools used are designed to capture the complexity of regional dynamics in a post-Trump context with academic precision and practical relevance (Hines & Gold, 2014).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study identifies several key thematic categories that describe policy trends, strategic configurations, and regional implications. These findings are grouped into four broad themes: (1) the uncertainty of the U.S. commitment to regional security; (2) the rise of regionalism and strategic autonomy of Indo-Pacific countries; (3) the scenario of changing the security order after TPP and FOIP; and (4) the U.S.-China strategic rivalry as a key determinant of regional response.

First, there is a consensus that Trump's "America First" approach weakens the United States' multilateral commitments, particularly in terms of trade agreements and security alliances. The withdrawal from the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) and protectionist rhetoric creates uncertainty in the regional economic and security order, as reviewed in a study by Tan (2017) and Antonescu (2019), who note that countries such as South Korea and Singapore must navigate the dilemma of dual relations with the US and China (Tan, 2017; Antonescu, 2019).

Second, the results of the study show that this uncertainty actually encourages regional countries to strengthen regional autonomy strategies. Japan, for example, is taking a more active role in encouraging the continuation of the CPTPP and the strengthening of the Quad in response to US uncertainty, as examined by Akaha and Hirata (2021) (Akaha & Hirata, 2021). Australia, on the other hand, is beginning to consider a more independent regional security approach without always relying on U.S. alliances (Brissenden & Clayfield, 2016).

Third, the literature shows the development of new strategic scenarios after the implementation of the Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) strategy by Trump. This scenario

includes increased military escalation in the South China Sea, concerns about US isolationist policies, and escalation of trade war with China (Leksyutina, 2019; Ratuva, 2017). Analysis of the FOIP strategic document and US defense policy during the Trump administration shows inconsistencies in the direction of foreign policy, as criticized in the studies of Stepanova (2018) and Thu (2020) (Stepanova, 2018; Thu, 2020).

Fourth, the rivalry between the US and China is proving to be the dominant factor shaping the regional security configuration. Chong's (2017) study shows that China's dominance in the Belt and Road initiative as well as the US military response has changed the perception of threats and prompted Southeast Asian countries to seek new collective security approaches (Chong, 2017). On the other hand, the second-generation Indo-Pacific strategy shaped in the context of Trump 2.0 is predicted to focus on strengthening defense alliances and limited economic engagement, as reviewed by Motaher & Khaled (2025).

In terms of methodological trends, the majority of studies use a case study approach and policy document analysis, with some drawing on international relations theoretical frameworks such as offensive realism and institutional liberalism. Some studies have also adopted scenario analysis as a predictive tool, especially in the context of alternative foreign policy under Trump (Chughtai & Iqbal, 2018); (Haenle, 2022).

Overall, the results of the synthesis show a thematic convergence on the issue of U.S. leadership uncertainty, the transformation of the Indo-Pacific security order, and the need for regional nations to formulate scenario-based alternative strategies in the face of geopolitical pressures in the post-Trump era.

The results of the literature synthesis in this study also reveal that the impact of Donald Trump's foreign policy on the security of the Indo-Pacific region gives rise to a complex dynamic pattern, involving various adaptive responses from countries in the region. From the use of PESTLE (Political, Economic, Social, Technological, Legal, and environmental) it was found that security dynamics in the Asia-Pacific region are influenced by various political factors including the US transactional foreign policy under the Trump administration, which calls into question its commitment to NATO and AUKUS, as well as its increasingly intense rivalry with China. Economic factors include trade wars and tariffs against allies (such as Japan, the Philippines, and Vietnam) as well as pressure to increase defense spending that could potentially disrupt the global defense industry's value chain. Meanwhile, the social aspect shows the rise of nationalism in the US and China which is fueling tensions, coupled with a decline in public trust in the US security umbrella. Technology poses new challenges in the form of cyber wars, AI races, and technology decoupling. Legal and environmental factors can be seen from the weakness of multilateral agreements and the low priority of climate security and disaster response.

To address future uncertainties, scenario planning is underway with two main uncertainties: whether the U.S. will remain a reliable security partner, and whether Asia-Pacific nations will respond in a coordinated or fragmented manner. The scenario matrix generates four possible futures:

First, the Fortress Pacific scenario projects the U.S. remaining engaged as a reliable security partner, while Indo-Pacific nations respond in a coordinated manner. This allows for the optimization of interoperability through joint exercises, the development of joint defense

technologies (e.g., cyber defense, UAVs, free ITAR drones), and the strengthening of ASEAN's role as a balancing force in the region.

Second, the Archipelago Hedging scenario emerges if the US withdraws, but regional countries are able to build self-sustaining capacity through strengthening ASEAN+3 cooperation (including ADMM+), investment in the domestic defense industry, and digital and cyber sovereignty programs. Regional diplomacy will be focused on aligning positions on conflict points such as Taiwan and the South China Sea, including the threat of gray zones.

Third, the Echo Chamber Alliance scenario occurs when the US maintains its military presence, but the countries of the region respond asynchronously. This can lead to mistrust and policy misalignment, which increases the risk of escalating conflicts in the region, especially in Taiwan and the South China Sea.

Fourth, the Age of Disorder scenario indicates the worst-case scenario: the U.S. is completely withdrawing while the Asia-Pacific is fragmented. China can capitalize on the power vacuum, escalate maritime clashes, and force smaller countries to submit through military and economic threats. This will trigger an arms race and regional instability.

In the face of this uncertainty, the study recommends several strategic steps:

- 1) Enhance defense interoperability through joint exercises and cross-border defense R&D cooperation;
- 2) Encourage the development of a domestic defense industry that is free from regulatory barriers;
- 3) Strengthening national resilience (civil defense, cybersecurity, energy security);
- 4) Forming issue-based minilateral coalitions (e.g. Vietnam–India–Japan) and utilizing "strategic hedging" with external partners such as the European Union, China, and India.

The study's key findings confirm that Donald Trump's second presidency brings significant strategic uncertainty to the security order of the Indo-Pacific region. This uncertainty has given rise to various adaptive responses from countries in the region, both in the form of shifting security strategies, increasing regional autonomy, and restructuring alliances and strategic partnerships. This is in line with the formulation of the problem and the purpose of the study, which is to understand how Indo-Pacific countries respond to U.S. foreign policy uncertainty and identify future strategic scenarios that may arise as a result of these dynamics.

The interpretation of these results can be explained through a scenario planning framework that emphasizes the importance of systematically anticipating various possible future possibilities and not just predicting one specific outcome. The uncertainty arising from Trump's leadership style and "America First" policies creates an urgent need for an alternative foreign policy scenario capable of maintaining regional balance. In this context, regional security theory is particularly relevant to understand the responses of countries such as Japan and Australia that tend to increase their self-security capacity while maintaining strategic alliances with the US (Atanassova-Cornelis, 2018); (Motaher & Khaled, 2025).

Compared to previous studies, these findings corroborate a number of arguments but also introduce new perspectives. For example, a study by Hanif and Khan (2018) states that India is positioned as a counterweight to China by the US within the framework of the Indo-Pacific Strategy (Hanif & Khan, 2018). However, this approach has not fully considered how

Southeast Asian countries respond to the pressure to choose between the US or China. The study adds that many countries of the region are adopting hedging strategies to maintain flexibility and avoid involvement in major power conflicts (Wuthnow, 2022).

The scientific contribution of this article lies in the integration of strategic foresight approaches in the study of international relations, which are still rarely systematically applied in the context of regional security, especially in the Indo-Pacific. By building on alternative scenarios based on PESTLE analysis, this article provides analytical tools that are not only useful to academics, but also directly relevant for regional policymakers in responding to global geopolitical turmoil (Lai, Troxell, & Gellert, 2018).

However, this study has a number of limitations that need to be acknowledged. First, the literature review approach used does not allow the collection of primary data from policy actors in the region, so the narrative constructed is interpretive to the documents and secondary sources. Second, publication time restrictions (2018–2023) may exclude sources that are still relevant from previous periods, as well as ignore significant post-Trump changes during the Biden administration (Batyuk, 2021).

The implications of these findings demand serious attention from policymakers, particularly in formulating regional strategies that do not rely entirely on single hegemony. Indo-Pacific countries are encouraged to strengthen regional security institutions such as ASEAN, enhance intra-regional economic interdependence, and build a shared strategic narrative to confront the dynamics of great powers (Kaur, 2021). For further research, it is recommended to explore a mixed methods approach that combines scenario planning with interviews with foreign policy elites to strengthen the validity of the constructed scenarios and expand the understanding of the perception of strategic actors (Feng, 2019; Law, 2020).

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that the foreign policy of the United States under the leadership of Donald Trump created strategic uncertainties that had a significant impact on the security order of the Indo-Pacific region. Countries in the region are responding to these dynamics with a variety of strategies. Through a literature review approach and integration of scenario planning, this study identifies four possible scenarios of security approaches for the Indo-Pacific region as well as policy proposals to respond to each of them. The contribution of this article is both theoretical and conceptual, offering an integrative approach between scenario planning and regional security theoretical frameworks to understand and map foreign policy scenarios adaptively. This approach broadens the horizon of international relations studies that have so far used a lot of realist or structural liberal frameworks. In practical terms, the findings of this study also provide an analytical basis for policymakers in the Indo-Pacific to formulate more resilient strategic measures in the face of great power dynamics, as well as provide an alternative scenario map that can be used as a risk mitigation instrument in national and regional strategic planning. As a follow-up, future research is recommended to adopt a mixed methods approach that combines literature review with empirical data through elite interviews or field policy studies to deepen the analysis of the perceptions of state actors. In addition, an exploration of the responses of small and medium-sized countries not covered in this study,

such as Vietnam, Malaysia, or Pacific island countries, will enrich a more comprehensive and representative understanding of the region's strategic adaptation.

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