

## **Biden is risking his Indo-Pacific strategy.**

At a time when America's global pre-eminence is being severely challenged by China, the future of the present U.S.-led international order and America's own standing are likely to be settled in the Indo-Pacific region, especially Asia. This explains why Joe Biden is the third successive U.S. President to commit to shifting America's primary strategic focus to the Indo-Pacific. Yet, it is far from certain that he will succeed where his two predecessors failed.

### **Strategy on the Indo-Pacific**

If anything, Mr. Biden is getting increasingly distracted from the Indo-Pacific by Russian moves. The escalating U.S.-Russia tensions over NATO's forward policy, with Ukraine as the flashpoint, threaten to become the defining crisis of the Biden presidency. The crisis, which has the makings of a drawn-out and dangerous confrontation, could deepen the involvement of an already overstretched U.S. in European security.

The White House released its long-delayed 'Indo-Pacific Strategy' document on February 11, the same day it publicly warned that Russia could launch an invasion of Ukraine within days. A Russian invasion into the Ukrainian heartland would leave Mr. Biden little time for the Indo-Pacific, which explains why the 19-page document was hurriedly released on a Friday afternoon, amid criticism that the President lacks clarity on an Indo-Pacific policy despite being in office for more than a year.

Mr. Biden's Indo-Pacific strategy, as a bare-bones paper for public consumption, offers a bird's-eye look at how his administration views the Indo-Pacific landscape. With its brief or nebulous references to key regional issues and challenges, the document does not provide adequate clarity on the thrust and direction of U.S. policy in the region.

In fact, it reads more like a watered-down version of the 'United States Strategic Framework for the Indo-Pacific' of former President Donald Trump's administration. More significantly, it comes without the assumptions, objectives and actions that were distinctly defined under each topic in that strategic framework, which was declassified in the final days of the Trump presidency with just light redactions.

The fact is that Mr. Biden's Indo-Pacific strategy document is essentially an exercise in public diplomacy, while the Trump administration's once-secret strategic framework was formulated to advance its policy of a 'free and open Indo-Pacific' (FOIP) — a concept originally authored by then-Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe. The strategic framework's declassification was apparently aimed at underscoring that the successor administration was inheriting a coherent, comprehensive and realistic strategy on the Indo-Pacific.

The FOIP vision remains the centrepiece of Biden's Indo-Pacific strategy. The document, however, confirms a Biden-initiated shift of the Quad toward geo-economic and other larger issues — from “global health security” and climate change (Mr. Biden's pet concern) to “critical and emerging technologies, driving supply-chain cooperation, joint technology deployments and advancing common technology principles.” Such a broad and ambitious agenda threatens to dilute the Quad's strategic focus on the Indo-Pacific.

### **A more conciliatory approach**

Mr. Biden thus far has not made his long-anticipated China strategy speech to lay out the administration's approach to a country that is a military, economic and technological challenge on a scale that the U.S. has not seen before. While largely hewing to the China policy set by his predecessor, Mr. Biden's approach, however, appears more conciliatory.

While the Trump administration launched an ideological offensive against China as a predatory communist state without political legitimacy or the rule of law, Mr. Biden assured Chinese President Xi Jinping in a virtual summit meeting last November that the U.S. will not seek to change China's political system. That reassurance is embedded in the Indo-Pacific strategy paper, which unequivocally states that, “Our objective is not to change the PRC [People's Republic of China] but to shape the strategic environment in which it operates...”

The Indo-Pacific strategy document acknowledges that China “seeks to become the world's most influential power” and that “our allies and partners in the region bear much of the cost of the PRC's harmful behaviour”. Yet it declares that the U.S. will seek to “manage competition with the PRC responsibly” and “work with the PRC in areas like climate change and nonproliferation”.

The strategy paper, while supporting “India's continued rise”, has couched its reference to China's military actions against India since 2020 not as “aggression” (a term that the White House uses almost every day to describe Russia's moves against Ukraine) but in neutral language — as “the conflict along the Line of Actual Control with India.” And the background press briefing on the paper's release referred to “China's behaviour in the Line of Actual Control.”

Since taking office, Mr. Biden has treated China with more respect than Russia. For example, last year he imposed two rounds of sanctions on Moscow and even called Russian President Vladimir Putin a “killer”. While turning Russia's troop buildup against Ukraine into a major international crisis, Mr. Biden has not uttered a word on a bigger military buildup — by China along the Himalayas — that threatens to unleash war on America's strategic partner India.

## Shifting focus

Today, Mr. Biden is pouring military resources into Europe and focusing on containing Russia's regional ambitions at the cost of countering China's drive to gain global pre-eminence. And although Mr. Biden has deserted Ukraine to its fate by ruling out coming to that beleaguered country's direct defence, Washington has been in the lead in sounding the drumbeats of war.

If the U.S. is to meaningfully pivot to the Indo-Pacific, it will have to exercise strategic restraint in Europe, not ratchet up tensions with Russia through NATO expansionism or military drills. Last autumn's U.S.-NATO military exercises near Russia's Black Sea coast incensed Moscow, foreshadowing the present crisis.

The U.S. should be addressing its strategic overstretch, not seeking to exacerbate it through greater entanglement in European security. With its relative power in decline, it must conserve its strength to focus on retaining its global pre-eminence, including by making the strategic trade-offs required to remain the leading power in the Indo-Pacific. Economically and strategically, the global centre of gravity is shifting to the Indo-Pacific. Building a stable balance of power in the Indo-Pacific has become more crucial than ever for international security. Yet, the U.S. still prioritises NATO so as to dominate European security, while the bulk of its economic aid and military assistance goes to West Asia and North Africa.

Unless Mr. Biden prudently recalibrates foreign policy objectives with available resources and capabilities so as to mitigate America's strategic overreach, he will not only sap U.S. strength to deal with the bigger challenges in Asia, including to American leadership, but also undermine his newly unveiled Indo-Pacific strategy that seeks to make the U.S. role in that most important region "more effective and enduring than ever".

Brahma Chellaney is a geostrategist and the author of nine books, including the award-winning 'Water: Asia's New Battleground'

---

Committed To Excellence

---

## Expected Question (Prelims Exams)

- Q. which of the following country released its Indo-Pacific strategy document?
- (a) China
  - (b) India
  - (c) Russia
  - (d) U.S.A.

## Expected Question (Mains Exams)

- Q. Discuss the significance of indo-pacific region in context of india as an emerging global economy of the world.

(250 Words)

World

Committed To Excellence

**Note: - The question of the main examination given for practice is designed keeping in mind the upcoming UPSC main examination. Therefore, to get an answer to this question, you can take the help of this source as well as other sources related to this topic.**