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## **IDIOSYNCRASY OF THE AMERICAN PRESIDENTS AND THEIR ASIA-PACIFIC POLICY/POLITICS: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY PRESIDENTS**

### **What is idiosyncrasy?**

Idiosyncrasy is unusual behavior or reaction of a person group of people towards certain phenomenon. The use of term idiosyncrasy is widely observed in pharmacy and medical where it refers to unusual patterns and behavior of any medical treatment. However, with the advent of international relations it is being used as it has a wide range of effect on international relations and foreign policy. Idiosyncratic traits with regard to the politicians are widely based on their belief systems, personality traits, prejudice and preferences but they are not confined to it only and age, gender, race, training, stress, motivation and cognitive style are also responsible for idiosyncratic traits (David, 2015).

An idiosyncratic personality type person believes that it is important not to be someone else, marching your own beat, taking unconventional steps, showing to be original and standing out from the crowd. Similarly, according to Oldham & Lois 1995 there are following six major traits and behaviors of an idiosyncratic person.

1. An idiosyncratic person is individualistic in its nature and follow own feelings and belief system
2. They are self-directed persons and only require very close relationships
3. They possess and generate eccentric way of living
4. They are mystics and often believe in supernatural
5. Speculative and theoretical thinking is their important trait
6. Although they are inward personality but they are very much influenced by the way other react to their actions (Oldham & Lois, 1995).

In an order to understand the idiosyncrasy in the realm of international relations and foreign policy it is important to understand the term political psychology which is the root of the term idiosyncrasy. The term political psychology is the application of psychology on the study of politics. Political psychology deals with explaining political issues from psychological perspective. This lead to the development of the construct idiosyncrasy to explain how political decision making is influenced by psychological and personal attributes such as belief system, personality traits and preferences (Kegley et al., 1999).

### **Types of Idiosyncrasies in foreign policy decision making**

It has been observed that idiosyncratic personality traits are associated with foreign policy decision making. There are mainly four factors or dimensions of idiosyncrasies that influence the decision making.

### **Cognitive idiosyncrasies**

A person's decision making is largely influenced by the normative structure of the society and individual's adaptability with it. Thompson, Neale & Sinauceur, 2004 provided the factors with regard to cognitive idiosyncrasies that influence one's decision making and negotiation power. According to Thompson, Neale & Sinauceur, 2004 there are four major pillars or dimensions of cognitive idiosyncrasies such as framing, anchoring, and availability and over evaluating.

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Cognitive idiosyncratic personality traits often minimize certain pieces of information that are not compatible or align with their prior knowledge and belief system. According to Peter et al 2009, conceptual complexity and integrative complexity leads towards the development of cognitive idiosyncrasies.

### **Social perception idiosyncrasies**

A second type of idiosyncrasies is based on social perception that influence the political decision making with regard to framing international relations and foreign policy. It mainly focuses on the people, social objects and events present in the society that determine the idiosyncratic personality traits. According to Thompson, Neale & Sinauceur, 2004 the social perception idiosyncrasies are present at two major level. In the first place it is at the self of an individual and secondly it is based on others in connection with individual.

**Self:** Illusion of transparency and perspective approach

**Others:** rigid perception, extremism, fundamental attribution errors and coercion

Leader's belief system is influenced by the intersection of aforementioned two factors at the self and other's level. These two factors further come into play at the policy outcome where it is influenced by strategies, tactics and movements of the leaders.

### **Motivational idiosyncrasies**

Third type of idiosyncrasies is based on motivational idiosyncrasies where it is influenced by personal goals and particular social goals. Thompson, Neale & Sinauceur, 2004 set four major motivational goals for a leaders

- Self-realization that include egocentrism and self-serving
- Closure that includes need for closure and bittersweet effect
- Cooperation include future interaction, social value and common guidelines
- Responsibility

### **Emotional idiosyncrasies**

When a person misperceive a particular situation, it is said to be associated with emotional idiosyncrasies. Emotional idiosyncrasies results in mismatch between feeling and actions and reasoning. Thompson, Neale & Sinauceur, 2004 identified three major dimensions of emotional idiosyncrasies such as:

- Wrong reasoning and emotions
- Inaccurate beliefs during emotional states
- Imperfect cause and effect relations between emotions and behavior

So, it is not difficult to infer that idiosyncratic personality traits are major determinants of the policy making in foreign policy. All of these does not come into play at once rather they are functional at different levels during the course of policy framing in foreign policy. However, it is important to mention here that analysis of such idiosyncrasies on the foreign policy in general and Asia-Pacific in particular is very rarely available. Therefore, in the course of the current study researcher himself contextualized some key factors of personality or idiosyncrasy that come into play are determined which are explained in the methodology section.

### **Foreign policy decision making**

Foreign policy is one of the most important features of modern globalized world as it is impossible for any state to flourish without establishing sound relations with other states. Before analyzing different factors and theoretical basis of decision making it is important to define foreign policy.

Sum of official external affairs by an independent actor (state) in international relations is called foreign policy (Hill, 2013).

Foreign policy refers to those decisions of a state that are influenced by outside actors and in return effect actors outside the country (Joyce, 2010)

So, all the decisions taking by an independent state that effect the countries and entities outside that country is referred to as the foreign policy. However, formulating foreign policy is not a simple task of external affairs rather there are many factors that influence the factors of conducting foreign policy.

An important area of the study of international relations is to study the factors of decision making in the foreign policy. In this modern international political system where nations and countries are hostile to one another it is

important to take your decisions with precision and accuracy otherwise consequences are very bitter. Hence, an appropriate decision during the time of crisis is highly needed to guide the course of action of a state for the attainment of national interests and to deal with important international entities (Roy, 1970). Foreign policy decision making is not a simple action or inaction rather it is a complex way of thinking and behaving. Foreign policy decision making can be defined as “a situation where choices are made among many alternatives and often weighed in accordance with possible outcome (Baumann & Deber, 1989).

So, it is not difficult to infer from above arguments that foreign policy decision making is not a simple task and it further becomes very important when such decisions are taken by the super power.

### **Idiosyncratic Personality and decision making in foreign policy**

After discussing different models of decision making in foreign policy it is important to discuss and explain how personality of the leaders play a part in formulating the foreign policy and affect the international relations. Personality traits or irregular personality traits such idiosyncratic personality traits are very influential in order to explain its relations with political decision making and it is the essence of the current study.

In an order to understand the foreign policy decision making the role of personality is most persuasive than other internal and external factors and in an order to understand the foreign policy of a country it is important to analyze the personality traits of the concerned leaders (Jensen, 1982). Idiosyncratic variable accompanied by other personality traits are most powerful determinants of the decision making in the foreign policy. There it is important that the role of personality must be kept in mind to analyze a particular foreign policy. There are multiple ways and in which the role of personality in external affairs is more widely visible. Jensen, 1982 identified following areas where the role of personality and idiosyncratic trends are more noticeable in formulating foreign policy.

- If leader takes more interest in foreign affairs and foreign policies than usual the role of personality comes into play in foreign policy.
- The second important condition is the crises situation where personality of leaders suddenly comes into play regarding the solution of those crises situation. Crises situations are often accompanied by ambiguous information which leads the leader to sway his personality traits rather than being rational.
- According to Jensen, 1982 the other models of decision making are more useful where democracies and where power is not centralized. The role of personality traits comes into play where power centralized such dictatorship, presidential system and monarchy.
- In the same context Herman, 1980 also provided the evidence that personality traits, idiosyncrasies and cognitive mapping are closely linked and come into play where perception of the leader towards the world is more important.
- Ambition of a person is also linked with showing the role of personality traits in foreign policy. Where a certain ambition is prevailing the reckless man can lead towards showing idiosyncrasies playing a key part in foreign policy (Schulze, 1998).

So, it is not difficult to infer from the above comments that personality plays a very key role in establishing foreign policy. The other models discussed are also very important but in some conditions the personality traits and idiosyncratic variables also come into play.

### **Objectives of the study**

- To analyze the role of idiosyncrasy of 21<sup>st</sup> century American presidents and their Asia Pacific policy

### **Methods and Material**

The current study is based on qualitative inquiry to understand the role idiosyncrasy of the USA presidents on their Asia Pacific policy. The topic of the study is purely of the qualitative nature without the involvement of any quantitative variables and cause and effect between the variables (Newman, 2000). The study tries to explore the idiosyncratic trend of the USA foreign policy towards Asia Pacific which signifies the use of qualitative inquiry for the current study.

In addition to qualitative inquiry the current study is based on exploratory research design where the objective of the study is to explore a certain phenomenon without any focus on any causal association between the variables (Gibbs, 2002). This type of study fits into the scope of the current study where researcher is not interested in establishing any predictive relationship between the variables but only tries to explore the idiosyncratic trend of USA foreign policy towards Asia Pacific. So, primarily the study is a combination of qualitative and exploratory inquiry.

### **Nature of data**

The current study is based on secondary data and is based on review of the empirical scientific literature on the area of the study. Normally, research is conducted by using primary data but the objectives of the current study compelled the researcher to opt for secondary data as primary data or responses of the participants or students are less important. However, conducting secondary research is not an easy task and require selection of pertinent documents to be analyzed. For this purpose following are some of key documents that researcher selected for the current study.

- Peer reviewed research articles
- Books written on USA foreign policy in 21<sup>st</sup> century
- Reports of international and regional organizations
- Biographies of the selected USA presidents to see how idiosyncrasy is applicable
- Personality analysis of 21<sup>st</sup> Century USA presidents and what are their key personality traits.

### **Analysis of documents**

In the current age of scientific research a large amount of data is being produced and written by the researchers, hence properly utilizing those data pieces is an important task (Andrews et al, 2012). Before analyzing the secondary data it is important to validate the source of the documents being utilized and whether or not the document fits into the scope of the current study (Boslaugh, 2007). In the course of the current study this was kept in mind and before studding any document or research articles it was thoroughly observed and checked for accuracy in line with the objectives of the current study.

Thematic analysis is presented for the current study after analyzing a wide range of the documents. Themes were generated after regarding the key Asia Pacific policy of the USA presidents (Clarke & Cossette, 2000). The analysis pattern is based on two major themes which was further categorized.

Ever since the end of the cold war USA presence in the region is very important factor and after the incident of 9/11 the situation further demanded the presence of USA in Asia-Pacific as a security perspective from American perspective. In addition to that growing economic importance of the region also compelled the American think thank to remain in touch with this region. This situation was the driving force behind the formulation of USA policy towards Asia-Pacific and 21<sup>st</sup> century USA presidents laid strong emphasize on designing policies for this region. There are few main levels where all three USA presidents i.e. G.W. Bush, Barack Obama and Donald Trump's policy towards Asia-Pacific can be compared. Following are the discussion point to compare their policies.

### **General Asia-Pacific Policy**

Right after coming into the office each of the three 21<sup>st</sup> century presidents adopted a certain policy towards this region. In the first place Bush administration adopted the policy of unilateralism and preemptive war. This policy was in general for entire world but due to ongoing security crises particular to Asia-Pacific.

However, Obama administration adopted a policy "Asia Pivot" which was later termed as policy of rebalance in Asia. This policy was aimed at creating a balance in bilateral and multilateral relations with different powers of Asia-Pacific region. This was done so as to rebalance the policy adopted by Bush administration by focusing on only few partners in the region.

Similarly, trump administration's primary policy towards this region was the concept of "Indo-Pacific region". This concept was popular in an order to support Trump's doctrine of "America First". This policy of Trump administration focused on ties with Japan, India and Australia in the region to counter the terrorism and strengthen the economic ties between USA and Asia-Pacific region which he termed as Indo-Pacific region.

### **Security policy for Asia-Pacific**

The main agenda and essence of 21<sup>st</sup> USA presidents' foreign policy is the security policy and with respect to the region of Asia-Pacific it further intensified.

In the first place Bush administration was the first to confront this challenge and his administration referred to it as "war on terror". Right after 9/11 Bush administration started war on terror and in the first place attacked on Afghanistan to capture Usama Bin Laden and later they attacked on Iraq to trace weapons of mass destruction. In order to do so they established stronger ties with different regional powers and organization.

However, Obama administration took a different stance and war on terror was replaced with "countering violent extremism". This was the beginning of a new approach where the target of the policy moved from preemptive war to protective war and Obama administration. For this purpose Obama administration broadened the scope of their military alliances and deputed many forces in different regions of Asia-Pacific. However, contrary to what is known as soft measures to counter violent extremism Obama administration started a war against Syria.

Trump policy towards war on terror or countering violent extremism took a twist by focusing on maritime security and focus was south china see. In addition to that an important feature of Trump policy on war on terror is the peace talks with Afghan Taliban and withdrawal of security forces from the region.

### **Bilateral Ties in Asia-Pacific/important allies**

Bilateral ties have been an important features of all the US administration in Asia-Pacific. All three presidents established good ties with different countries in the region.

Bush administration was in need of immediate partners in this region and for this purpose Bush administration's two major partners in this region were Japan and Australia. Both japan and Australia supported Bush administration in their efforts regarding war on terror. Both partners provided human resource in both Afghanistan and Iraq. However, other countries such as Thailand, India and South Korea were also involved in many agreements.

Similarly, Japan and Australia remained important allies for Obama administration and Obama administration started building stronger ties with India. Despite that both Japan and Australia were the key allies of Obama administration and South Korea as well.

However, Trump administration in this region took a shift from existing partners. Japan remained the most important actor but role of Australia started to minimize. However, India and Taiwan emerged as two major partners in this region for Trump administration.

### **Multilateral engagements**

Regional organizations are very important in international relations and 21<sup>st</sup> century USA presidents took this significantly and built stronger ties with different regional organizations in Asia-Pacific.

Bush administration was very efficient in building stronger ties with ASEAN and APEC right after 9/11. APEC was more related to security domain but ASEAN and Bush administration established economic ties. East Asia Summit was another important multilateral partner of Bush administration for both security and economic ties.

On the same token Obama administration was keenly involved with ASEAN and APEC for countering violent extremism and economic gains.

Trump on the other hand gave much importance to ASEAN and also started building ties with other regional organization such as SAARC and Mekong countries. ARF (ASEAN Regional Forum) is also an important multilateral partner in this region.

### **China and 21<sup>st</sup> Century USA administration**

China is an important element for any USA presidents in Asia-Pacific and china remained the primary target of the 21<sup>st</sup> century presidents.

Bush adopted the policy towards as the strategic partners, before that Clinton administration termed China as competitor. This suggests that Bush administration was in favor of maintain good ties with China. Bush administration also provided favor to the ASEAN and East Asia Summit to strengthen the ties with China, by 2008 China was 2<sup>nd</sup> largest trading partner of USA.

Obama is famous for his two pronged policy towards china. On the one side stronger economic ties were established with China and on the other hand countering china by both military means and trade war with China by supporting regional competitors of china.

Trump also applied more or less similar strategy towards China. Along with building economic ties with China Trump administration is also trying to counter china in the region. In an order to do so China started to favor India and Taiwan in the region. However, to sum up 21<sup>st</sup> Century presidents' policy towards China it is important to mention that all of them used two pronged policy by increasing economic ties as well as countering in the region.

### **Personality comparison**

All the 21<sup>st</sup> century presidents possess a different type of personality and idiosyncratic expressions. An important aspect of the current study was to see the personality traits of the current study.

Bush's personality is very optimists, energetic and authoritative. However, he was very much interactive during his office hours with other colleagues.

Obama's personality is termed as double edge sword. He is full of confidence and specially possess persuasion characteristic which he very much used during his tenure. He was also very much polite to his colleagues with humble orientations.

Trump personality is termed as dauntless which is based on hyper confidence features and easily irritable. An important trait of such personalities is experimental attitude and experimenting different idea and policies.

### **Conclusion**

Asia-Pacific region gained importance after the 9/11 and growing power of China. All in all it is pertinent to conclude that Asia-Pacific of 21<sup>st</sup> century presidents is mainly driven by war on terror along with raising economic ties with the region. On the other hand election campaign, ideology of the political party and strong personality influence are the main idiosyncratic factors that lead towards the development of Asia-Pacific policy of the 21<sup>st</sup> century presidents of USA.

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