

US foreign policy under Trump and possibilities for India

Paper: III

Topic: International relations, Foreign policy, Diplomacy,

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- After the stunning upset win over Hillary Clinton in the election on 8 November, President-elect Donald Trump met the incumbent Barack Obama on 11 November to prepare for his swearing-in and assumption of Charge on January 20 next year.
 - The world waits with bated breath to discover what changes Trump will introduce in pursuit of foreign policy. **India is equally concerned and wishes to find out how Trump will be different from his predecessor in his approach towards India and Asia.**

Changes in world policy dynamics in trumps Regime.

- One of the most significant changes that could possibly emerge is in America's relations with Russia. During the campaign, Trump has said that the US and Russia should collaborate to deal with the problem of ISIS and Islamist terrorism.
- He repeatedly — and consistently — expressed admiration for Russian President Vladimir Putin. He said he would “look at” lifting sanctions against Russia and recognising Crimea as part of Russia. He described NATO as “obsolete and expensive” and suggested America may not come to the aid of vulnerable NATO allies if they are attacked. Trump's distancing from his NATO allies could seriously damage US credibility and trust which would require a long time to repair.
- Given Trump's Russia rhetoric, his penchant for making deals, his lack of set ideology, it is likely that he will lift sanctions in exchange for Putin's cooperation in Syria.
- Stable and improving ties between the US and Russia could have significant geopolitical implications for relations between Europe and Russia, Russia and China, Russia and the Middle East and of course relations of India with Russia and China.
- Europe might, notwithstanding the aggressive stance of some EU member states, try to establish near-normal working relations with Russia. This would significantly reduce Russia's dependence on China for its energy exports and economic sustenance.

Bilateral relations:

- Economically, the US and China are joined at the hip. Bilateral trade between the two is to the tune of more than USD 500 billion per annum. China holds the largest volume of US government treasury bonds to the tune of USD 1.25 trillion.
- There might hence be limited possibility for Trump to take any stringent penal action against China. He has said more than once that US manufacturing jobs have gone away to China (and Mexico) and need to be brought back.
- However, his rhetoric against China and particularly the fact that his most committed supporters and voters who have lost jobs and seen factories closing down would want those jobs back to the US might force him to take some tough measures.

Trans Pacific Partnership Agreement, NAFTA and role in Asia.

- Trump's declaration that he would walk away from the Trans Pacific Partnership Agreement could signal a move towards isolationism and dilution of commitment to Obama's Pivot to Asia, if not totally abandoning it. His pronouncement that Japan and Republic of Korea should pay for their own defence and, if required, manufacture nuclear weapons could introduce great uncertainty in the geopolitical scenario in the region. On the contrary, China's One Belt

One Road (OBOR) initiative could continue to bring a larger number of countries of Asia, Africa and Europe into the expanding Chinese orbit. Europe has recently signed on to the OBOR project. This could spell uncertain and difficult times for the US and its allies which could have far reaching consequences for regional security and stability.

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- If Trump were to fulfill his campaign promise to jettison NAFTA, construct a wall on the southern border with Mexico and make the latter pay for it, severely restrain the number of Muslims entering America from terror infested countries, abandon the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership etc, it could have an unforeseen impact on the international standing and credibility of the US and significantly alter the balance of power and configuration of alliances in different parts of the world.

Relations with India:

1. Trump's Presidency is expected to herald far-reaching changes in relations with countries in the periphery of India which could have a significant impact on India as well.
2. There is a general perception in India which is fairly widely shared by perceptive analysts even from the Democratic camp that Republican Presidents have usually been more supportive of stronger relations with India.
3. It also needs to be kept in mind that over the last more than a decade, India-US ties have evolved into a "global strategic partnership" based on shared democratic values and increasing convergence of interests on bilateral, regional and international issues.
4. During the campaign, Trump has made only positive remarks about India. He has only once spoken tangentially about the loss of service jobs to India. He has, however, stated that he loves India and that with his election "India will have a true friend in the White House."
5. It can be expected that bilateral ties in different areas including political, strategic, defence and economic will get further strengthened. The only areas where India could experience some negative headwinds is in the quantum and fees for H1B visas, and if Trump, as per his promise, decides to bring down the corporate tax in the US from the current 35% to 15%. This might encourage some US companies based in India to migrate back to the US, thus adversely impacting on the "Make in India" programme of the Indian government.
6. Trump has said during his campaign that Pakistan is the most dangerous place on earth because of its support to terrorism.
7. He has promised to take decisive action against terrorism and extremism including from Pakistan. This would be helpful for India. Trump's election has led to tremendous consternation amongst the people of Pakistan.
8. Trump has also stated that because of the worsening security situation and increasing attacks by Taliban, he would station US troops in Afghanistan for an extended length of time to restore normalcy and peace.

Conclusion:

- Any action that Trump takes to improve relations with Russia and to put pressure on China and Pakistan, in economic or security areas, would be beneficial for India. However, his proposal to dissociate from TPP and reduce engagement with Asia would tempt China to become even more assertive and aggressive with its neighbours in Asia, including India. It would also provide China with openings to enhance its presence in the western Pacific and Indian Ocean more quickly. This would be to India's detriment.

- It is ironic and somewhat inconceivable that Trump would like America to become “Great Again” by withdrawing into its own shell. America has always embraced greatness by reaching out beyond its shores and borders and promoting political, security, economic, cultural cooperation and people-to-people contacts. It will be necessary for US to maintain a similar posture in the world if it wants to propagate its values of democracy, pluralism, freedom, human rights, secularism, tolerance and expand its influence. The next few months will be crucial in this regard.

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