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DONALD TRUMP'S ANTICIPATED RETURN TO U.S. PRESIDENCY AND ITS IMPACT ON SOUTH ASIA

Introduction to Trump's Return

- Donald Trump is expected to be sworn in as the 47th President of the United States in January 2025. His re-election has raised global concerns, with many expressing curiosity and "nervousness" about the potential implications. However, his return is expected to offer continuity in U.S.-South Asia relations, especially in terms of cooperation with India.

Opportunities and Challenges for South Asia

- Trump's leadership style and focus on great power politics may create both new opportunities and challenges for South Asia. His policies, which are typically less focused on issues like democracy and human rights, could strengthen strategic partnerships in the region, especially those aimed at countering China.
- However, the region will have to navigate the complexities of his foreign policy, particularly his confrontational stance towards China and his shifting priorities on regional issues.

Factors Shaping U.S.-India Relations

Progressive Strengthening of U.S.-India Ties

- The relationship between India and the United States has evolved significantly since the early 2000s. India was recognized as a net-security provider in South Asia in 2009, and the two nations have steadily strengthened their strategic ties.
- The U.S. has worked to support India's role in countering China, particularly through its Indo-Pacific strategy, and initiatives like the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) projects in Nepal and aiding Sri Lanka during its economic crisis.

Divergences Under the Biden Administration

- Despite improving ties, there have been some divergences in the U.S.-India relationship. The Biden administration's emphasis on human rights and democracy has caused friction, particularly with India's internal policies and its collaboration with Russia. U.S. sanctions on



countries like Bangladesh and Myanmar have pushed them closer to China, while scrutiny of Indian firms working with Russia has impacted projects in Sri Lanka, creating challenges for India's regional engagement.

Trump's Likely Policy Directions

Focus on Reciprocity and Burden-Sharing

- Trump's foreign policy is centered on reciprocity, burden-sharing, and competition with China. His approach is likely to be less focused on human rights and democracy, which could reduce the existing irritants in the U.S.-India relationship. The U.S. under Trump may focus more on strategic cooperation and enhancing India's regional leadership by providing supplementary assistance to avoid tensions over political and democratic issues.

Capacity-Building and Development Assistance

- Trump's second term could prioritize strengthening defense cooperation and capacity-building in South Asia, with particular focus on countries like Sri Lanka, Myanmar, and even the Taliban, though the extent of U.S. engagement may vary. Reduced U.S. assistance could pose challenges for Bangladesh, particularly during its political transition, as the country may face a reduction in foreign support.

Implications of Trump's China Policy

Increased Pressure on South Asian Countries

- Trump's confrontational stance towards China will exert pressure on South Asian countries, limiting their ability to balance relationships with both the U.S. and China. South Asia may find itself increasingly politicized as it navigates demands from both the U.S. and China, with countries in the region facing a difficult balancing act.

Impact of Global Crises and Economic Stability

- Trump's success in addressing global crises, such as the Russia-Ukraine war and tensions in West Asia, could lead to reduced food and fuel inflation in the region. This would be a positive economic outcome for South Asian countries, as these issues have significantly impacted regional stability.

Conclusion: Opportunities and Challenges for South Asia

Navigating Regional Shifts

- Trump's second term is expected to deepen U.S.-India cooperation in South Asia, creating both opportunities and challenges. South Asian nations will need to navigate the shifting dynamics of U.S.-India relations and respond to the broader structural changes in global



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power relations. Trump's policies may test South Asian countries' ability to balance their strategic priorities with the competing interests of the U.S., India, and China.

Source: <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/trumps-return-and-the-south-asia-outlook/article68982740.ece>



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