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EXPRESS VIEW ON INDIA AND TRUMP 2.0: DELHI'S CHALLENGES

Impact of Trump's Return on U.S.-India Relations

Strengthened Cooperation Against China

- Donald Trump's foreign policy is likely to prioritize countering China's growing economic and military influence, which aligns with India's strategic interests in the Indo-Pacific region. Under his administration, the U.S. is expected to push back more aggressively against China's assertiveness, particularly in the South China Sea and along India's borders.
- This alignment offers India an opportunity to enhance its leadership role in South Asia and collaborate with the U.S. in maintaining regional stability. Strengthened ties under frameworks like the Quad and increased defense cooperation, such as joint naval exercises and military technology sharing, will serve as robust deterrents against China's ambitions.

Reduced Focus on Democracy and Human Rights

- Unlike Joe Biden's administration, which emphasized democracy, human rights, and press freedoms, Trump is expected to take a more pragmatic approach. This shift may help India avoid friction over its support for certain regimes, such as Sheikh Hasina's government in Bangladesh or Myanmar's military junta. By de-emphasizing ideological differences, Trump's policies could create a more favorable environment for India to focus on its strategic priorities in South Asia without external criticism from the U.S. on its domestic political matters.

Support for India's Regional Leadership

- Trump's foreign policy emphasizes burden-sharing, which encourages allies like India to take on greater responsibility in regional security and development. This policy aligns well with India's aspirations for leadership in South Asia and the Indo-Pacific.
- The U.S. will likely provide support in terms of military aid, intelligence sharing, and technological advancements while allowing India to take a more prominent role in countering China's influence in neighboring countries such as Nepal, Sri Lanka, and the Maldives. Enhanced collaboration in regional development and infrastructure projects will further solidify this partnership.

Enhanced Economic and Strategic Cooperation

- Economic and strategic ties between India and the U.S. are likely to grow under Trump's leadership. Initiatives such as the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) in Nepal and financial assistance to Sri Lanka could continue, offering India opportunities to align its

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regional interests with those of the U.S. Trump's administration may also focus on expanding energy cooperation, particularly in renewable energy, nuclear energy, and defense technology.

- This collaboration could also extend to critical areas such as semiconductor manufacturing, digital trade, and infrastructure development. India's efforts to attract foreign direct investment and bolster its "Make in India" initiative would align well with Trump's focus on fostering bilateral trade relations.

Alignment on Afghanistan and Pakistan

- Trump's reduced interest in Pakistan, especially after the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan, will likely ease one of the historical irritants in India-U.S. relations. This diminished focus on Pakistan's strategic importance to the U.S. aligns with India's goals of diplomatically isolating its western neighbor.
- Additionally, both countries share concerns over terrorism emanating from Pakistan, paving the way for stronger counter-terrorism cooperation. Trump's policies may also allow India to exert more influence in shaping the post-Afghanistan geopolitical landscape.

Conclusion

- Donald Trump's return to the White House presents both significant opportunities and challenges for India-U.S. relations. Strengthened cooperation against China, reduced ideological friction over democracy and human rights, and increased support for India's regional leadership create a conducive environment for deeper strategic ties.
- Enhanced economic collaboration and diminished focus on Pakistan further strengthen this partnership. However, navigating these opportunities will require India to adopt a pragmatic and forward-looking approach, ensuring it balances its domestic priorities with the demands of an evolving global order. By fostering flexibility in trade policies, engaging diplomatically on immigration issues, and proactively strengthening its partnership with the U.S., India can solidify its position in the new geopolitical landscape.

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