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Pakistan's Strategic Realignment: Facing the Trump Presidency and Beyond

The US Presidential elections have always been immensely significant for third-world countries. Currently, the whole world is preparing itself for President-elect Donald Trump's presidency over one of the world's superpowers. Pakistan's significant geopolitical location would also significantly impact its domestic and foreign policy decisions.



Transactional Nature of Pak-US Relations

Pak-US relations have always been transactional and evolved in response to regional and global storms. Therefore, it would be cogent to hold that they were always a function of factors extraneous to bilateral ones. The US has always used Pakistan to achieve its regional ambitions in South Asia. As soon as these storms subsided, the US prioritized other regional countries over Pakistan. All the US presidents have always pursued a similar approach

toward Pakistan. Just like the whole globe, the Pakistani state is also preparing to repair its relations with the United States under the presidency of President-elect Donald Trump.

The new team advocates stronger ties with India, which could be detrimental to Pakistan

The Shift in US Policy: Growing Ties with India and Hostility Towards Pakistan

Pakistan's novel regional policy and its tilt towards China and Russia have further impinged its strained relations with the United States. Pakistan's hope to mend its ties with the US under the presidency of Donald Trump is merely a sham. Pakistan would likely be viewed through China, and Russia's lens under his new government. He holds nefarious designs against China. In his electoral campaign, he hinted to impose more than 60 percent tariffs on China. Moreover, President-elect Donald Trump's administrative staff includes people who hold a hostile approach toward China.

The new team advocates stronger ties with India, which could be detrimental to Pakistan. The inclusion of individuals like Mike Waltz and Marco Rubio demonstrates a clear US tilt towards India, obviously at Pakistan's expense. Many analysts have already stated that such appointees in President-elect Donald Trump's upcoming administration are likely to sustain a hard-line approach toward Pakistan. Most likely, the past statements and concerns of individuals like Rubio and Waltz will dominate their approach toward Pakistan as well.

A former senior advisor to the White House on South Asian Affairs, Joshua White, holds, "Trump's senior appointees will likely be quite skeptical — if not hostile — toward deepening US-Pakistan ties, given their experiences in Afghanistan, their valuation of the US-India relationship, and their concerns over Pakistan's relationship with China." Marco Rubio, known for his role in abstaining the US from helping Pakistan over the Kashmir issue, has recently presented legislation in the Congress to elevate India's status to a US ally. This augurs burgeoning defense, strategic, and technological cooperation between the two sides. Shuja Nawaz, a political and strategic analyst, also holds that Pakistan's role and utility to the United States would be limited in the upcoming government. He stated, "Pakistan's utility to the US is primarily in counter-terrorism. It's unlikely to rank high in terms of positive engagement."

Pakistan's Strategic Realignment and Its Future with the US

Pakistan is forging cordial relations with Russia, a rising superpower and the US' strong rival. The Pakistani state holds a strong urge to establish strong ties with Russia. Moreover, it also seeks BRICS membership. President-elect Donald Trump strictly criticizes the rise of BRICS. He has recently threatened to impose 100 percent tariffs on the BRICS countries for their de-dollarization attempt. He wrote on his social media forum Truth Social,

“The idea that the BRICS Countries are trying to move away from the Dollar while we stand by and watch is OVER. We require a commitment from these countries that they will neither create a new BRICS currency nor back any other currency to replace the mighty US dollar or they will face 100% tariffs and should expect to say goodbye to selling into the wonderful US economy.”

Therefore, Pakistan’s attempts to join BRICS will further alienate the new US administration. The incarceration of Imran Khan, founder of Pakistan Tehreek e Insaaf and the country’s former Prime Minister, would be another bone of contention between the two countries. Richard Grenell, Trump’s special envoy for foreign missions, reiterated his support for Khan. He posted on his social media account in November this year, “Release Imran Khan.” Recently, he reiterated his support for Mr. Khan by posting on his X account and tagging a Geo News story, “I’ll say it again. Free Imran Khan.” He also threatened to ban USAID for the GEO and Jang Group, a Pakistani media outlet.

Moreover, there is a widespread belief that Imran Khan and President-elect Donald Trump have developed close friendships during their previous tenures. Therefore, Imran Khan’s release would be a top demand of the Trump administration to the Pakistani government. On the other hand, the Pakistani establishment is resolute in prosecuting Imran Khan for his alleged involvement in his party workers’ violent attacks on civil and military installations throughout the country. Releasing Imran Khan would enfeeble Pakistan’s military’s standing in the country and encourage citizens to hold more such violent protests in the country.

Therefore, Pak-US relations are likely to struggle even under the Trump government in the United States. Pakistan has no other option than to strengthen its ties with Russia and China. BRICS membership is also mandatory for Pakistan to expand its diplomatic influence and diminish its dependence on the US-dominated Western monetary institutions.

Taut Bataut, December 29, 2024

Taut Bataut – is a researcher and writer that publishes on South Asian geopolitics