

South Asia Analysis Group

Published on *South Asia Analysis Group* (<http://www.southasiaanalysis.org>)

[Home](#) > US President elect Trump and the Global Effect

US President elect Trump and the Global Effect

Submitted by asiaadmin2 on Tue, 11/22/2016 - 05:33

Paper No. 6198

Dated 22-Nov-2016

By Bhaskar Roy

Despite pundits and punters, Donald J. Trump defeated his Democrat rival Hillary Clinton to the American Presidency on Electoral College votes. He is set to be sworn in as the 45th President of the United States of America on 20th January 2016. If the election for the President and Vice President was through direct votes Clinton would have won. Leave these aside.

No American President in recent history faced so much post-election demonstrations as Trump has, especially from college-educated voters and minorities. Will this hamper the execution of his policies? The Republicans have the White House, the House of Representatives and the Senate. But all Republicans do not necessarily agree with Trump and his radical policies.

Usually, American Presidential candidates use strong terms on popular sentiments to garner support. Bill Clinton during his electoral campaign for his first term called Chinese leaders “the butchers of Tiananmen Square”. It was the early 1990s and Americans were aghast at the bloody crackdown on student demonstrators by the Chinese army at Beijing’s Tiananmen Square in June 1989. But after being elected he went to bed with the Chinese.

Trump ranted against minorities like Muslims and Hispanics/Latinos, promised to deport millions of illegal immigrants, build a wall along the Mexican border and make Mexico pay for it. He has promised to bring back American jobs from China, make American jobs from China and make American allies pay for their defence needs.

Will Trump reverse his threats or, at least, soften them? But he is not a politician. He never served in the administration or the military. He is likely to pack his team with hardliners and cold warriors like James Woolsey and Rudy Giuliani. And if there are clever manipulators in his

'A' Team he can make serious mistakes. Trump does not have a clear idea of domestic politics and the racial divide is increasing, with African Americans and other minorities bearing the brunt. On foreign policy he is even more obtuse. What is disconcerting is his character. He can be stubborn, abrasive and non-forgiving even superficially. He tends to get mixed up between "the good, the bad and the ugly", to quote from a great Hollywood movie from the yester years.

The president-elect has reconfirmed his determination to expel upto three million immigrants involved in crime or illegal entry. In the American lexicon the concept of crime extends to wrongly parking a car, for which the offender can be hand-cuffed and imprisoned.

The USA was the Promised Land where many have gone from across the world. In fact, America has been built by immigrants. A survey of Silicon Valley and institutions of higher learning will prove this point. On the other hand, low-skilled or unskilled workers service low level jobs that white America declines.

Trump's message is uncomfortable to the world because even the highly skilled or highly educated would find it difficult to enter the US.

If Trump were to actually build a wall (or fence!) at the Mexican border or expel illegal immigrants, he would not only alienate neighbours in the arc of American influence but create a political and strategic void in the immediate neighbourhood. There are other powers who can quickly fill this void and pose a threat to the US. Putting up a wall will cost America immensely.

People in America are nervous of an era of uncertainty: white supremacy, anti-immigration, anti-mainstream media and a force for racial hatred. Happenings in the US will impact the world in various ways and there is a reverse effect.

The greatest threat to the world today is radical Islamic terrorism led by the ISIS (Daesh), the Al Qaeda and the like. There is also the issue of States using terrorism or at least abetting terrorism for political objectives. Will Trump differentiate between the two for American strategic interests or will he deal with terrorism as a whole? The international community has not yet concluded on a single definition of terrorism, as in some cases one country's terrorism is another country's asset. Nor has a line been drawn between national liberation wars and terrorism.

Trump is very exercised over terrorism especially that which affects American security both at home and abroad. Here the finger points to the Islamic state and the Al Qaeda. Al Qaeda was the beneficiary of the space created in Iraq by the removal of Saddam Hussain by the US, by creating false intelligence. The US military withdrew from Iraq without completing the task, leaving the country fractured and in turmoil. Former CIA Director George Tenet was made the fall guy. He reveals a lot in his book, "In the Eye of the Storm".

The Islamic State was born out of Washington's move for a regime change in Syria. The result is a humanitarian disaster from which the Islamic State gained the most. Certainly Syrian President Assad was dictatorial. That is not the reason for which the US went for a regime change. (In post-war history the US supported many dictators) Assad's fault was that he was close to Russia. The American aim was to cut

Russia's finger in the Middle East, a replication of what they did in Yugoslavia.

How will the 45th President of the United States address the Islamic State challenge? During his election speeches Trump criticized the Obama administration's approach. One would agree with him to an extent. There was no clear policy. The Islamic State is losing ground in Iraq and Syria. The new President would have to concede that it is not only the US and its allies including the Syrian opposition army that helped diminish the Islamic State. Those who contributed significantly include Assad, Russia and Iran. Assad and his regime belong to the Alawite Shia denomination and naturally has ideological compatibility with Iran.

Trump would have to discard several of the existing policies in containing and demolishing the Islamic State. To do that, it will have to discard several of his own prejudices. He has shown that he is strongly anti-Iran and will roll back the Iran nuclear deal. This policy has several serious pit falls. US companies will lose business opportunities in Iran. China, Russia and European countries will vie for the pie.

With too much pressure from the US and roll back on the nuclear deal, Iran may go back to uranium enrichment and accelerate its now closed nuclear weapons programme. Trump would not have too many friends and would isolate the US on this issue.

To fight and weaken the Islamic State Trump would have to arrive at a new deal with Assad and President Vladimir Putin. And Iran may have to be accommodated. Post-elections, Trump and Putin have spoken to each other but the details are not known. Trump was very positive about Putin during his election rallies, but he will face hurdles from entrenched anti-USSR policy makers and influencers who are now anti-Russia. These alienators pushed Russia into the arms of the Chinese, much against the hope of Russians (both in the foreign policy establishment and the military-industrial complex) who do not trust China.

How the new American administration will prosecute relations with Russia is a major European question. People like former CIA Chief James Woolsey and former New York mayor Rudi Giuliani are no lovers of Russia. There are several other anti-Russian hardliners who are trying to find important positions in the Trump administration.

The Russia policy will also impact Europe and NATO. The issues of Ukraine and Crimea are hanging tire. If the cost for America's NATO in Europe is raised then Europe will tailor their Russia policy in a different way. This may ultimately work out as a win-win situation for both sides by reducing tensions by giving Russia its due space. It could give rise to a new global architecture, trilateral in dimension between the US, Russia and China. Beijing is a new avatar and growing, though their current policy is to consolidate in Asia. This may be wishful thinking, but given Trump's statements things are up in the air. If Trump is thinking about drawing a new ideological and political map he will have to tread very carefully.

With Trump's sharp focus on international (Islamic) terrorism, Pakistan as a perpetrator and

Afghanistan as a victim, is expected to loom large. International terrorism in many cases have had roots in Pakistan, including recent attacks in the US. Pakistanis worry about a possible shift in US policy towards India and away from Pakistan given an upturn in India-US trade and economic engagement especially in the defence and civil nuclear sectors.

Trump's anti-Muslim rhetoric like the campaign proposal to ban all Muslims entering the US and new talk of opening a separate registry for Pakistanis entering the US, are not exactly encouraging thoughts. He will be briefed extensively on the Pakistan-Afghanistan issue and how Pakistan used US aid money to pay the Haqqani network to kill US soldiers in Afghanistan and CIA station agents in Pakistan's border near Afghanistan.

Pakistan's reluctance to take action against the Haqqani network is a sore point in the US administration. So is the Afghan Taliban which has its Shura in Quetta and periodically attacks US interests in Afghanistan, especially US military personnel.

There is a bipartisan view in the US congress which would even go so far as to designate Pakistan as a terrorist state. It is unlikely that the US under Trump will abandon Pakistan. The road to Afghanistan and beyond lies through Pakistan. The US has invested over \$ 30 billion in Afghanistan since 2002 and military personnel. Similarly it has invested at least \$ 10 billion in Pakistan in civil and military assistance. These may be further pruned and serious pressure mounted on Islamabad and Rawalpindi to be seen to act against terrorists of concern.

The Islamic State claims that they have established themselves in what they call Khorasan or the Af-Pak region. They have also been active, and draw their members from the various terrorist outfits. Host Pakistanis including the Civilian government see the Islamic state as a serious threat. But the ways of the ISI are strange. Will the ISI open a secret channel with the Islamic state for certain objectives? It is too early to say anything, but the possibility cannot be fully ruled out.

Afghan President Ashraf Ghani is feeling increasingly neglected by the US. Ghani burnt his fingers by embracing Pakistan against the sane advice of his cabinet and security chiefs. True to their character the Pakistani military-ISI elements betrayed him. The peace talks with the Afghan Taliban came to naught. What Trump and his team must remember is that the Pakistani military still pursues the idea of Afghanistan as their "strategic depth" and they also largely control the Taliban.

Trump told the Fox News in May that he was in favour of keeping 10,000 US troops in Afghanistan because it was adjacent to Pakistan which has nuclear weapons. His advisors especially in the Pentagon and CIA should study the recent paper on Pakistan's strategic nuclear and missile industries prepared by Alpha Project of King's college, London and brief him extensively without holding back facts and softening the contents. This revealing report disclosed on-going Pakistani clandestine activities through front companies to acquire critical nuclear weapons and strategic missile technologies. Chinese entities are also involved in empowering Pakistan in these areas. This is a huge threat to not only India but to the south Asian region as a whole. Unfortunately, the Obama administration went soft on such issues, at least

publicly, keeping in view relations with Pakistan, China and other countries from which these technologies were sourced.

India-US relations are unlikely to be rolled back or seriously constricted. Trump did not demonstrate much animosity towards India except for once mentioning India along with China on bringing American jobs back home. This will be a difficult task as it is American businesses that have made investments abroad and will continue to do so. Companies have to generate profit for the US GDP, and create jobs at home. If he pursues this path he may start a trade war. All sides would be hurt.

There is a bipartisan consensus in the US congress to further upgrade political and strategic relations with India. It started taking shape towards the end of Bill Clinton's administration, firmed up more under George W. Bush and continued during the Obama administration – the India-US nuclear deal, Bush's personal intervention in India's favour in the NSG, the Next Step in strategic Partnership (NSSP) and upgraded defence relations including joint exercises and acquisition of military equipment by India from the US. The US has relaxed Foreign Military Sales (FMS) to India.

The India-US Joint Vision in the Indo-Pacific Region and Asia-Pacific is just beginning to take shape. If Trump disrupts this by any means and reason, the US policy in the entire region will be weakened.

New Delhi would have to engage with the Trump administration on Pakistan, Afghanistan, terrorism and the US policy on the Kashmir issue. Intelligence exchange between the two sides have improved, but more remains to be done. The "26/11" Pakistan based and assisted terrorist attack in Mumbai and the James Headley case need to be revisited.

Indian policy makers need not be wary about the President-elect. Under Trump, foreign policy would be more emphatically "America First". Hence, too much should not be expected on terrorism linked to Pakistan visa-vis India as American interests are linked to Pakistan also. Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi should take the earliest opportunity to have a bilateral meet with Trump. Both are strong personalities with highest priority to their respective national interests.

Perhaps, the most complex challenge to the new administration in Washington will come from China. The two countries are the biggest economic powers in the world. They are also engaged in strategic face off periodically. But they are also the biggest trading partners. The official Chinese newspaper The Global Times (November 16) wrote Donald Trump "will be condemned for his reckless, ignorance and incompetence" if he wrecks China trade ties. During his campaign Trump repeatedly attacked China promising to punish Beijing with "defensive" 45 percent tariffs on Chinese imports and to officially declare it a "currency manipulator". The Global Times also warned that if Trump was to wreck Sino-US trade, a number of US companies would be impaired.

The virulent campaign rhetoric rarely come to play once the election is over and the candidate comes to the position of power. That is when reality check comes in. Yet, Trump came to power through the votes of those who wanted a change in Washington, who saw they were left

behind in development. These were the mostly white workers without a college degree who felt they were the perennial losers in every election. He would also have to deliver to them.

Trump and Xi Jinping had cordial talks over the telephone when Xi called to congratulate.

When dealing with China it is not only China. It concerns the Asia-Pacific region starting from Japan, South Korea, North Korea to the ASEAN countries, Australia and the South China Sea. Will Washington agree to Beijing's position on the status of the South China Sea, a global common, or will they reiterate their current position? China refused to accept the International Arbitration Court's decision that China's claim on the Sea was null and void. This sea is a major route for global trade and trade upto US \$ 5000 billion passes through these waters unhindered.

Next is USA's "Asian Pivot". This has kept China worried. If Trump retracts from this, the resonance will be felt far and wide.

The third issue is Trump's view that US allies would have to pay more for the American umbrella. He went so far as to say that Japan can develop its own nukes to counter North Korean nuclear threat. Whether Trump will act on these campaign flourishes is hard to say at this moment, but they would be worrying China.

For decades after World War II China welcomed US military presence in the region, especially in Japan and South Korea. One of the reasons was if Japan was set free it would quickly militarise itself. It is said Japan is a screw driver turn away from producing a nuclear bomb. China sees a militarized Japan as a serious threat to its security and national interests in the region.

During the 1971 India-Pakistan war Henry Kissinger had asked China to militarily move against India and in favour of Japan. Mao Zedong declined as he was suspicious that in such a case Japan could do something against China. Beijing harbours the same apprehension today, especially with Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe tinkering with Japan's Post-war Constitution, pressing its involvement in the South China Sea and its partial claimant nations.

China under Xi Jinping today is very different from what it was a decade ago. It is a more powerful China, assertive and aggressive. Xi plans on his 'China Dream' very seriously and will not give an inch if he can.

On the other hand both Trump and Xi are seen as hard headed deal makers. Deals would be the watch word.

Trump's foreign policy is still to unveil. After he sits in the oval office from January 20 next year, listens to daily briefings and reads files, he will understand the enormity of the task. Till then, the world will have to wait and watch. Some, like Pakistan, may also pray.

(The writer is a New Delhi based strategic analyst. He can be reached at e-mail grouchohart@yahoo.com [1])

Tags:

President Elect Donald Trump [2]

ISI [3]

Daesh & Haqqani [4]

India-US Relations [5]

US Foreign Policy [6]

Category:

Papers [7]

Countries:

United States [8]

Pakistan [9]

India [10]

Topics:

Terrorism [11]

Strategic Affairs & Security [12]

Economy [13]

Copyright ©2012. All Rights are Reserved.

Source URL: <http://www.southasiaanalysis.org/node/2088>

Links

[1] <mailto:grouchohart@yahoo.com>

[2] <http://www.southasiaanalysis.org/taxonomy/term/1556>

[3] <http://www.southasiaanalysis.org/taxonomy/term/409>

[4] <http://www.southasiaanalysis.org/taxonomy/term/1557>

[5] <http://www.southasiaanalysis.org/taxonomy/term/968>

- [6] <http://www.southasiaanalysis.org/taxonomy/term/95>
- [7] <http://www.southasiaanalysis.org/papers>
- [8] <http://www.southasiaanalysis.org/united-states>
- [9] <http://www.southasiaanalysis.org/pakistan>
- [10] <http://www.southasiaanalysis.org/india>
- [11] <http://www.southasiaanalysis.org/terrorism>
- [12] <http://www.southasiaanalysis.org/strategic-affairs-and-security>
- [13] <http://www.southasiaanalysis.org/economy>