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VIF Brief

PROJECT 2025

WHAT A TRUMP ADMINISTRATION
PORTENDS FOR INDIA



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PROJECT 2025

What a Trump Administration Portends for India

As the US Presidential race reaches the home stretch, the political rhetoric becomes shriller, accentuating the polarization in American society. Almost every major US media outlet has become an extension of one or the other campaign. Channels piously claiming to report only the facts, and the truth are selective with the first and economical with the second. They cover events of their preferred candidate, editing out gaffes in interviews. The other candidate is selectively quoted out of context. Opinion polls are cherrypicked. It is a textbook lesson of how misinformation and disinformation can be nurtured in a free press. There is therefore a rich irony in the capacity building exercise that the US State Department has launched in India through the US Consulate General in Hyderabad, with a grant of US\$175,000, to provide Indian journalists with hands-on training in “countering disinformation, consulting multiple sources, and utilizing fact checking resources”.

The election campaigns do not cover issues in depth, indulging more in generalities and mutual recriminations. The Trump campaign, however, has a backroom operation by a dedicated

group of conservative activists working to prepare the ground for a future Trump Administration. Over 50 conservative think tanks, coordinated by the well-known Heritage Foundation, are involved in this effort, which includes former senior officials of past Republican Administrations. Their “2025 Presidential Transition Project” – Project 2025 in short – is structured on four pillars.

Pillar I is the policy agenda, encapsulated in a “Mandate for Leadership”. It continues a four-yearly tradition (since 1980) of policy briefs prepared in the hope of victory of a Republican President. It is a 900+ page volume, whose chapters cover every federal department and agency, with details of its structure, staffing, allocation of business and its interface with other federal structures. It spells out the actions to be pursued for correcting or reversing current practices and policies. This includes bureaucratic reorganization and fundamental changes in policies – from tax and regulatory reform to revamping social policies, eradicating “woke” ideologies to restructuring national defence to more sustainable foreign policy strategies. It presents a consensus view of the conservative agenda, but also highlights differences in the conservative movement on some issues, which the next President has to resolve.

Pillar II is the creation of a personnel database. The dictum, “personnel is policy”, is particularly relevant in the Trump context. It recognizes that much of the chaos of Trump’s first presidency – staff turnovers, policy flip-flops, dissents and leaks – was caused largely by a mismatch in ideology between the President and many officials in his Administration. The conservatives believe that a “cultural Marxism” has permeated all federal institutions in recent years, suppressing conservative values, freedom and liberty, and making it impossible for a Republican President to carry out his agenda.

The dominance of an unaccountable bureaucracy is (in their view) facilitated by the fact that the legislature (the US Congress)

has abdicated its oversight responsibilities. The Mandate points out that the US Congress has not passed an annual budget, as required under law, since 1996! Instead, party leaders negotiate a multitrillion-dollar spending bill — of several thousand pages — and vote on it before it can be properly read, debated or amended, under pressure of time running out on the previous “omnibus” spending bill, and the threat of a government “shut-down”. This voluntary disempowerment of elected representatives means that effective power passes to an “administrative state” – a group of unelected bureaucrats, who exercise unchecked policymaking power on environment, energy and immigration; promote “woke” policies in education and health; and set priorities in foreign affairs, global strategy and federal budgeting, often evading the control of the President.

The aim of Pillar II is to find suitable replacements for the current personnel in federal structures. To this end, a nation-wide search was launched for candidates committed to the conservative cause and willing to serve the next Republican Administration. According to reports, many thousands of applications were received. These applications were screened, and short-listed applicants underwent a rigorous training schedule (Pillar III) from an online “Presidential Administration Academy”, staffed by senior experts from these organizations, on structures and issues of governance. A filtered database of about 20,000 candidates will be presented to the President-elect’s team in November, to facilitate a streamlined appointment process for federal employees in the transition team, as well as in the Administration in January 2025. The new Administration must fill its ranks with these political appointees, who should have the tools, knowledge, and support to overcome the obstructionism of status quo bureaucrats. According to the Mandate, the Trump Administration appointed fewer political appointees in its first few months in office than any other recent presidency, leaving career employees in charge in many posts. Pillars II & III provide scope to correct this.

Pillar IV consists of forming agency teams and drafting transition plans to enable the new President to hit the ground running immediately after taking oath.

Most authors of the Mandate have held senior positions in the Trump Administration (and/or earlier Republican Administrations) and are familiar with (and in agreement with) his thinking on the issues involved. This has led to it being described as Trump's manifesto. Trump has himself denied all knowledge of its contents – a wise political move, to avoid having to defend its more controversial recommendations. Nevertheless, it continues to be quoted or misquoted to prove Trump's malefic intentions for the country.

It is claimed that almost half of the recommendations of the 1980 edition of the Mandate were implemented by the Reagan Administration. It is also claimed that 64 percent of the policy recommendations of the 2016 edition were implemented in the first year of the Trump Administration.

Two themes dominate Project 2025: fleshing out Trump's MAGA philosophy and crushing the challenge from totalitarian China.

The Trumpian philosophy is an eclectic mix of social conservatism, corporate tax cuts, trade protectionism, immigration restriction, energy deregulation and a combination of offensive and defensive realism in foreign policy.

The social conservatism is strong and unflinching. Every element of woke culture, flowing from Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Diversity, Equity, Inclusion (DEI), has to be eradicated from government institutions and disincentivised in civil society. The Administration should promote programmes and funding to incentivise preservation of the nuclear family and disincentivise

familial breakdown and single-parent families. Pornography in speech, print and digital products should be outlawed.

CRT, which has become the dominant social ideology in the Biden Administration, is unconstitutional and discriminatory. The DEI policies that it has inspired do not address racism in public policy; instead, they accentuate group identity over shared human traits, divide people into oppressor and oppressed groups, and promote intolerance. Critically, by prioritizing equal outcomes over equal opportunities, DEI promotes mediocrity over meritocracy. Conservatives see its impact on the declining standards of American universities, deteriorating professionalism in the armed forces and a vitiated atmosphere in corporate workplaces.

The extension of DEI to gender issues raises another red flag. The mandate declares that terms like sexual orientation and gender identity (“SOGI”), gender equity, gender awareness, abortion and reproductive rights should be deleted from every federal rule, regulation, contract or grant.

Big American tech corporations come in for special targeting. They have “bent to the will of the woke agenda”. They prey on children, to get them addicted to their mobile app platforms, which are specifically designed to create the digital dependencies that fuel mental illness and anxiety, to fray children’s bonds with their parents and siblings. Federal policy should end this child abuse.

The economic agenda comprises an extension of the Trump tax cuts that Biden did not reverse, initiatives to expand opportunities for workers and small businesses, create jobs, spur investment, and increase wages and productivity; expanding the manufacturing base through industrial policy; pursuing self-reliance in strategically important sectors; promoting fair and balanced trade; and replacing “environmental extremism” with energy dominance. Overdue tax and regulatory reform need to be enacted, but the agenda should also include antitrust enforcement against corporate monopolies,

cracking down on the crony capitalist corruption that enables America's largest corporations to profit through political influence rather than competitive enterprise and customer satisfaction.

Decoupling from China is a part of the economic strategy, as well as a geopolitical goal. This goal should be tied to that of strengthening mutually beneficial ties with the Western Hemisphere neighbourhood of the US, which should incentivize shifting global manufacturing and industry from more distant points around the globe (especially China) to Central and South American countries. "Re-hemispherizing" manufacturing and industry closer to home will address supply-chain issues, and bring economic improvement to economically strained parts of the Americas. [This means countries in China's neighbourhood eyeing direct or indirect benefits from China-plus-one strategies should reassess their viability].

A number of US economists have declared that Trump's economic agenda would be far more inflationary than Biden's (and presumably Harris', since she has not indicated much change). Republican-leaning economists scoff that such fearmongering is political advocacy in the garb of economic science. Inflation, they point out, never exceeded 2% during the Trump Administration, whereas the Biden Administration has presided over the highest inflation in 40 years. Aggregate real household net worth increased 120% during Trump for the bottom 50% of households and only 16% for them under Biden. Groceries were cheaper, mortgages more affordable and gas prices lower. This explains the popular perception, that Democratic campaigners are struggling to counter, that the economy was better under Trump.

The Republicans' antipathy to "environmental extremism" is strongly expressed. "Environmentalism" policies, it asserts, impact most the aged, poor, and vulnerable. The Mandate does not directly confront the science of climate change; it argues instead that stewardship and conservation is the answer; not economically regressive environment policies. Banning fuels that run almost all

of the world's cars, planes, factories, farms, and electricity grids means effectively abandoning confidence in human resilience and creativity in responding to the challenges of the future.

This leads to the argument that America's vast reserves of oil and natural gas should be exploited to ensure US dominance of the global energy market. Domestically, it would mean millions of jobs and higher wages for blue-collar workers without a college education [a core support group for Trump] and reinvigoration of America's industrial and manufacturing sector – driving investment into regions that suffered de-industrialization from globalization. The achievement of “full-spectrum strategic energy dominance” would help compensate for the costs of decoupling the American economy from China. US control over global energy prices would gradually rebalance power away from Russia and “terrorist regimes” of the Middle East, build powerful alliances with fast-growing nations in Africa, and provide leverage to counter Chinese ambitions in South America and the Pacific. The message is, therefore, electoral, economic and geopolitical. US policies in Europe, working to move the energy centre of gravity from the west to the east of the continent, also tie in with broader geopolitical designs.

As in Trump's first term, trade is an important focus area. Peter Navarro, a close Trump aide, who was widely known in the Trump Administration as its chief China hawk and trade czar, writes in the Mandate that “chronic” trade deficits make the US “the globe's biggest trade loser and victim of unfair, unbalanced, and non-reciprocal trade”. Trade policy must play an essential role in an American manufacturing and defence industrial base renaissance. As everywhere else in the policy document, China's example provides the main argument. China's “economic aggression” in the form of tariffs, non-tariff barriers, dumping, counterfeiting and currency manipulation weakens US manufacturing and defence industrial base. One consequence of this is that, unlike during the World Wars, the US cannot provide the weapons and matériel

needed for a major war. [Though not mentioned in the Mandate, the US is living this experience today.] Offshoring suppresses the real wages of American blue-collar workers and denies them the opportunity to climb up the economic ladder. It is therefore essential that, with adversaries, allies and partners alike, trade policy should be strictly guided by reciprocity, whereby “we coax other countries into lowering their trade barriers if possible and raise ours as necessary”. All unfair advantages of trade partners will be countered, from tax policy to currency manipulation to domestic standards and subsidies. In his recently published memoir, Trump’s USTR, Robert Lighthizer, describes in detail the Trump Administration’s negotiations on trade with partners, including India. If Trump comes into office again, India has to brace itself for a repeat of the 2016-20 experience, though its economy may now be better prepared to absorb some of the consequences.

The foreign policy segment of the Mandate is of special interest, particularly in view of the many prevailing myths about Trump’s world view. The overarching comment on US foreign policy is a blistering criticism of the US State Department: “large swathes of the State Department’s workforce are left-wing and predisposed to disagree with a conservative President’s policy agenda and vision”. The Department “believes it is an independent institution that knows what is best for the US, sets its own foreign policy, and does not need direction from an elected President”. It is a harsh indictment, but diplomats who have worked with different US Administrations have often encountered State Department actions at odds with understandings reached with the White House or the US National Security Council. The Mandate’s recommendation is to “reforge the department into a lean and functional diplomatic machine that serves the President and, thereby, the American people.”

China is like a rash that runs through every part of the bulky document. Every department or agency is tasked with countering

China's malign actions and intentions. The Mandate declares that China's Communist dictatorship is engaged in a strategic, cultural, and economic Cold War against America's interests, values, and people. American elites, including Wall Street, Hollywood, Big tech, have all been complicit in allowing this. Wall Street ignored China's serial theft of American intellectual property and cheered the elimination of American manufacturing jobs. Even worse, this engagement was on Chinese terms: "they stole our technology, spied on our people, and threatened our allies, all with trillions of dollars of wealth and military power, financed by their access to our market". Big Tech then came along to become a tool of China's government. In exchange for cheap labour and regulatory special treatment from Beijing, America's largest technology firms funnel data about Americans to the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), hand over sensitive intellectual property with military and intelligence applications, let Beijing censor Chinese users on their platforms and even to dictate their corporate policies about mobile apps.

TikTok comes in for special mention: used by 80 million Americans every month and overwhelmingly popular among teenage girls, it is, in effect, a tool of Chinese espionage.

The same is asserted to be true of many US colleges and universities. Every year, more than 300,000 Chinese nationals attend US universities or are hired at national laboratories, innovation centres, incubators, and think tanks. Huawei, "an instrument of Chinese military espionage," is now partnering with University of California Berkeley on research with "important future military applications." China is also engaged in "conquest by purchase," as it uses revenues from its trade surpluses to buy American real estate, companies, and financial assets.

The Mandate declares that the response to the Chinese threat has to be radical and not piecemeal. It asserts that the policy of competition and cooperation has failed; the US objective should be strategic decoupling and the use of all levers to thwart China's

thrust for global dominance. It reveals that a full spectrum of policy options had been drawn up in 2020 for a potential Trump second term. The next US President should strongly consider adopting all of them as a package:

- Strategically expand tariffs to all Chinese products, increasing tariff rates in a manner and at a pace that will not expose the US to lack of access to essential products like key pharmaceuticals.
- Provide financial and tax incentives to American companies to onshore production from China to the US.
- Prohibit Chinese state-owned enterprises from bidding for US government procurement contracts.
- Ban all Chinese social media apps such as TikTok and WeChat.
- Prohibit all Chinese investment in high-technology industries.
- Prohibit US pension funds from investing in Chinese stocks.
- Prohibit the inclusion of Chinese sovereign bonds in US investors' portfolios.
- Systematically reduce and eventually eliminate any US dependence on Chinese supply chains that may be used to threaten national security such as medicines, silicon chips, rare earth minerals, computer motherboards, flatscreen displays, and military components.
- Sanction any companies, including American companies like Apple, that facilitate China's surveillance and censorship capabilities.
- Reinvigorate and expand a crackdown on China's use of e-sellers (including third-party sellers) and major warehouses such as Amazon, eBay, and Alibaba to flood US markets with counterfeit and pirated goods.
- Compel the closure of all Confucius Institutes in the US, which serve as propaganda arms of the CCP.
- Significantly reduce or eliminate the issuance of visas to

Chinese students or researchers to prevent espionage and information harvesting.

- Universities taking money from the CCP should lose their accreditation, charters, and eligibility for federal funds.

In the defence agenda, China should be the top priority for US conventional and nuclear defence planning. Chinese subordination of Taiwan should be made prohibitively difficult. China is pursuing a strategic breakout of its nuclear forces, significantly shifting the nuclear balance and forcing the US to learn how to deter two nuclear peer competitors (China and Russia) simultaneously for the first time in its history. China and Russia, in addition to their vast and growing ballistic missile inventories, are deploying new hypersonic glide vehicles and investing in new ground-launched, air-launched, and sea-launched cruise missiles that uniquely challenge the United States in different domains. Considering these growing threats, the incoming Administration should treat missile defence as a top priority.

The conservative movement is more divided on Russia and the Ukraine war. According to the Mandate, one school of conservative thought holds that Russia presents major challenges to US interests and the post-Cold War security order in Europe. The US should continue military and economic aid, and even commit NATO and US troops, if necessary, with the goal of defeating Russia and pushing it back to the pre-invasion border. Another school of thought believes that support for Ukraine is not vital to America's national security interests: Ukraine is a corrupt nation, not in NATO. European nations directly affected by the conflict should support the defence of Ukraine – not the US. This viewpoint favours a quick negotiated settlement between Ukraine and Russia.

The Mandate says a third line is emerging from these competing positions, which focuses on the core interest of the American people. Any US military engagement must promote US interests, be fiscally responsible, and protect American freedom, liberty, and sovereignty

– all the while recognizing that China is the greatest threat to US interests. Applying these yardsticks to Ukraine, continued US involvement must be fully paid for and limited to military aid, while European allies address Ukraine’s economic needs. It should have a clearly defined strategy that does not risk American lives. Importantly, the new President should resolve differences on this issue, so that the US could chart a new path recognizing China as the defining threat to US interests in the 21st century.

In his campaign speeches, Trump has only said that the war would not have happened under his watch (a credible claim, despite the litany of angry rebuttals) and that he would end the conflict very quickly. The conclusion that he would force Ukraine into a capitulatory settlement is convenient campaign propaganda. He is unlikely to do to Ukraine what Biden did to Afghanistan.

In July, former Secretary of State, Mike Pompeo, and his Republican colleague, David Urban, whose consultancy firm reportedly represents senior advisors of Ukraine’s President and top US defence manufacturers, published a “Trump peace plan” for Ukraine. It involves further ramping up financial and energy sanctions against Russia to force compromise, a \$500 billion “lend-lease” programme to enable Ukraine to buy US weapons (thus benefiting America’s defence industry) and fast-tracking Ukraine’s admission to the EU, to help modernize its economy. Funding post-war Ukraine reconstruction with Russia’s frozen Central Bank’s reserves and demilitarizing Crimea are among other proposals. Pompeo and Urban also advocate Ukraine joining NATO “as soon as possible”, but European NATO members should assume most of the burden of protecting it – the US would contribute at most 20% of a \$100 billion fund for arming Ukraine.

Trump has not commented on this plan, which in any case is not acceptable in entirety to any of the stakeholders. The situation on the ground has also changed since the plan was advanced. However, the thought process behind it accords with what Trump

has been saying in different contexts.

For the longer-term, the Mandate's recommendation is that the region of Europe, Russia and Eurasia – “relatively wealthy and technologically advanced societies” – should be expected to bear a fair share of its security needs and the global security architecture. NATO should be transformed so that its European nations develop conventional deterrence against Russia, relying on the US primarily for its nuclear deterrent, so that the US force posture in Europe can be reduced. In this endeavour, the US should build stronger alliances with the Central European countries on the eastern flank of EU, which are more conscious of Russian aggression. [This process was initiated by the Republican Administration of George W Bush, when it got NATO to hold out the prospect of Ukrainian membership, but it was Trump who gave it impetus: thinning US forces in Germany, strengthening force presence in Poland, introducing sanctions to deter new West European energy linkages with Russia, and personally endorsing the Polish-led Three Seas Initiative for expanding Europe's LNG import capacities to reduce energy dependencies on Russia (and increase dependency on the US). A decisive shift in the EU's political, economic and energy centre of gravity is well underway.]

Amplifying transatlantic trade is in US national interest, both for its economic value and for weaning Europe away from dependence on China. However, as with all friends and adversaries, this should be on the basis of reciprocity and fair trade. UK has historically been aligned with US positions; hence trade with post-Brexit UK should be given special attention, “before London slips back into the orbit of the EU”.

In short, therefore, the strategy is to tie Europe into a security architecture with Russia, give greater weightage to Central Europe, wean Europe away from China and keep UK and EU apart.

The US has strong economic and strategic interests in the

Arctic region. With seven of the eight Arctic nations now in NATO, the alliance should include the Arctic as a theatre it should defend. Russia has declared that the Arctic is vital for economic and military reasons. NATO's Arctic strategy should ensure that Russian use of Arctic waters and resources does not exceed "a reasonable footprint". Also, the US should work with like-minded Arctic nations, including Russia, to raise legitimate concerns about China's Arctic ambitions.

There are, therefore, nuances in the approach to Russia. A European security architecture that would fold Russia into it; a European conventional deterrent, with a US nuclear umbrella against Russia; using NATO to check Russian ambitions in the Arctic, even while working with Russia to counter Chinese ambitions there; and joining with European allies, especially France, in North Africa to "keep Islamist and Russian influence out".

The Mandate acknowledges that, for the foreseeable future—and much longer than one new Administration— Middle Eastern oil will play a key role in the world economy. It spells out a multi-dimensional strategy for continued US engagement in the Middle East and North Africa.

First, prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons capability and block its regional ambitions. This means strengthening the already harsh Trump-era sanctions, increased security assistance for US regional partners and supporting "through public diplomacy and otherwise" the Iranian people in "their revolt against the mullahs" – in other words, covert and overt support for regime change.

Second, ensuring Israel has the military means, political support and flexibility to take actions it deems appropriate against Iran, Hamas, Hezbollah, and Palestinian Islamic Jihad. [The Mandate was written before the October 7 Hamas assault on Israel, but indications from the Trump campaign show that Israel's actions in Gaza, West Bank and Lebanon have not altered this position.]

Third, wean Saudi Arabia away from Chinese influence and get more Arab states to join the Abraham Accords.

Four, pull Türkiye back into the Western fold, dissuading it from “hedging” toward Russia or China. This may need rethinking of US support for the Kurdish groups that Türkiye regards as security threats. [Trump was heading in this direction in 2019, when after a conversation with Erdogan, he announced withdrawal of US troops from Northeastern Syria. His advisers effectively sabotaged it.]

The Palestinian cause is dismissed in a single line: the Palestinian Authority should be defunded.

A burden-sharing collective defence idea is also advanced for the Middle East: America would empower Gulf partners to take responsibility for their own coastal, air, and missile defences both individually and working collectively, and then work to build a Middle East security pact, including Israel, Egypt, the Gulf states, and potentially India, as a second “Quad” arrangement. All of them have a shared interest in the region, including protecting freedom of navigation in the Gulf and in the Red Sea/Suez Canal.

The Mandate says advancing US-India relations is a crucial US objective. It references a detailed strategy paper on this by Heritage Foundation researcher Jeff Smith. India plays a crucial role in countering the Chinese threat and is an important emerging US economic partner. It is a critical security guarantor for the key routes of the Indian Ocean, and an important partner in the Quad’s coordinating efforts for a free and open Indo-Pacific. The US South Asia strategy should prioritize the long-term development of the US–India partnership over short-term tactical considerations, “including managing differences over Russia and the Ukraine crisis or the issue of CAATSA sanctions”.

The humiliating US withdrawal from Afghanistan has created new challenges, but also the opportunity to reset the US–Pakistan relationship and US counterterrorism strategy in the region. US

policy must be clear-eyed and realistic about the “perfidiousness of the Taliban regime” in Afghanistan and the “military–political rule in Pakistan”. There can be no expectation of normal relations with either. The persistent threat of terrorism and extremism in South Asia can only be addressed if the US prioritizes long-term, fundamental change in Pakistan over immediate counterterrorism goals, which have perpetuated the Pakistani military establishment’s links with extremist groups.

On South Asia, there is also the pragmatic realization that while pursuing counterterrorism and countering China’s malign influence in the region, the US will have to accept that not all its partners in the region will be “shining beacons of liberal democracy”; it has to learn to work with imperfect democracies.

On Indo-Pacific security, the US should support greater spending and collaboration by Taiwan and allies in the region like Japan and Australia, to create a collective defence model. Showing pragmatic understanding, the mandate does not suggest that India’s inclusion in such a defence pact.

The “politicization and weaponization” of the justice system and the intelligence and law-enforcement structures has become a major issue with the Republicans, in the wake of the slew of civil and criminal cases against Trump, and the influencing of social media content. Almost all the judicial cases were fast-tracked immediately after Trump announced his candidature for 2024. Most are being heard in courts located in strongly Democratic precincts, with charges brought in by attorneys elected on Democratic party tickets, and before judges appointed by Democratic politicians. The Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI) comes in for scathing criticism, as a “bloated, arrogant, increasingly lawless organization”, which views itself as an independent agency, but should be brought firmly under the administrative control of the Department of Justice. The FBI, as well as the other intelligence agencies have been accused of tailoring their analyses to their political predilections – targeting Trump and helping the Democrats. The Mandate calls for the next President to

restore independence and impartiality to the Department of Justice and end politicization of the Intelligence Community (IC).

The mandate resurrects the old controversy about the origins of COVID-19, declaring that the virus was almost certainly spawned in the Wuhan Institute of Virology. When President Trump first suggested this in April 2020, the US IC publicly contradicted him in a statement asserting that all agencies unanimously endorse “the wide scientific consensus that the Covid-19 virus was not manmade or genetically modified”. In May 2021, President Biden tasked the IC to investigate this again. Two years later, they revealed differences of view: the FBI was convinced that the virus came from a lab, while the CIA was not sure.

The mandate suggests that the next President should establish a presidential commission or congressional committee to investigate the origins of the virus; its costs, economically and in human life; and explore means of collecting damages from the Chinese Communist Party, which could run into trillions of dollars.

In short, therefore, the external agenda of Project 2025 is neither isolationist nor globalist. It recognizes that the US is today an overstretched superpower. With a competitor threatening to draw up alongside, it has to pragmatically identify its core strategic interests in different geographies. It has valuable assets and strong allies/partners, who share these interests. They need to step up and share the burden of protecting them: different sets of allies and partners joining the US in taking on China in Asia, dealing with threats from Russia in Europe, and maintaining stability in the Middle East and the Korean peninsula. The general principle is that allies must take greater responsibility for their conventional defence, with the US providing a nuclear umbrella.

The message that the US has, for far too long, allowed its allies to free ride on American munificence has been made by Trump repeatedly, harshly and sometimes crudely. It is left unsaid that this

munificence has given the US total control over the allies, so that they have no choice but to put US interests above their own, where they differ. President Macron, among others, has been periodically bemoaning the fact that Europe does not have strategic autonomy, attributing it, inter alia, to the absence of a credible European defence capability.

There has been persistent disinformation on Trump's world view, like the caricature of his love for dictators and disdain for NATO, which self-serving memoirs of his former officials have actively encouraged. The facts on the ground are that the most biting sanctions on Russia, the strong thrust to confront China, and actions to strengthen Europe's eastern flank all happened in his first term.

India has reasons to welcome elements of the agenda of Project 2025. The move towards social conservatism should please those who fret about the pernicious way in which the critical race theory is sought to be extended to Indian society. The move against "environmental extremism" would better accommodate India's arguments about phasing its energy transition. On bilateral relations, India could hope that the declared shared interests could be pursued without the forked tongue approach that has become characteristic of the Biden Administration. The latest example (and one of many) is the White House inviting a group of pro-Khalistan representatives to publicly assure them "protection from any transnational aggression on its soil" – and this, just hours before PM Modi landed in the US, where President Biden made the usual flowery remarks about shared democratic bonds and values of the two countries.

In general, Indian diplomats who have dealt with the bilateral relationship, have had a better experience with Republican Administrations in this century than Democratic ones. There will always be frictions because of asymmetry: the US, as a superpower, has multiple interests across geographies, some of which may

clash with India's. What creates doubts about the intensity of the relationship is deliberate flaunting of insensitivity to India's interests and sanctimonious lecturing on issues, on some of which the US record is at least as bad as India's. Democratic Administrations have been more prone to do this; the current one is not an exception. One can only hope that the next Administration would do better.

Project 2025 charts out a bold course of overhauling personnel, structures and policies. It targets entrenched ideas and vested interests. The problem is that, even if it is a distilled version of Trump's philosophy, many wonder if he can overcome his mercurial nature, alleged character flaws and historical baggage, to direct and oversee the implementation of such an ambitious agenda. There is bound to be determined domestic pushback. External adjustments will also be necessary, as Europe, Russia, Iran and China (among others) seek to protect their interests in the new configurations.

If Trump does win, if personnel appointments follow the plan, if the coherence of policy coordination can be managed – all huge ifs – the Project 2025 agenda could have far-reaching consequences for America and the global order.

Mandate for Leadership: The Conservative Promise can be accessed at [2025_MandateForLeadership_FULL.pdf \(project2025.org\)](https://project2025.org/2025_MandateForLeadership_FULL.pdf)

About the VIVEKANANDA INTERNATIONAL FOUNDATION

The Vivekananda International Foundation is an independent non-partisan institution that conducts research and analysis on domestic and international issues, and offers a platform for dialogue and conflict resolution. Some of India's leading practitioners from the fields of security, military, diplomacy, government, academia and media have come together to generate ideas and stimulate action on national security issues.

The defining feature of VIF lies in its provision of core institutional support which enables the organisation to be flexible in its approach and proactive in changing circumstances, with a long-term focus on India's strategic, developmental and civilisational interests. The VIF aims to channelise fresh insights and decades of experience harnessed from its faculty into fostering actionable ideas for the nation's stakeholders.

Since its inception, VIF has pursued quality research and scholarship and made efforts to highlight issues in governance, and strengthen national security. This is being actualised through numerous activities like seminars, round tables, interactive dialogues, Vimarsh (public discourse), conferences and briefings. The publications of VIF form lasting deliverables of VIF's aspiration to impact on the prevailing discourse on issues concerning India's national interest.



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