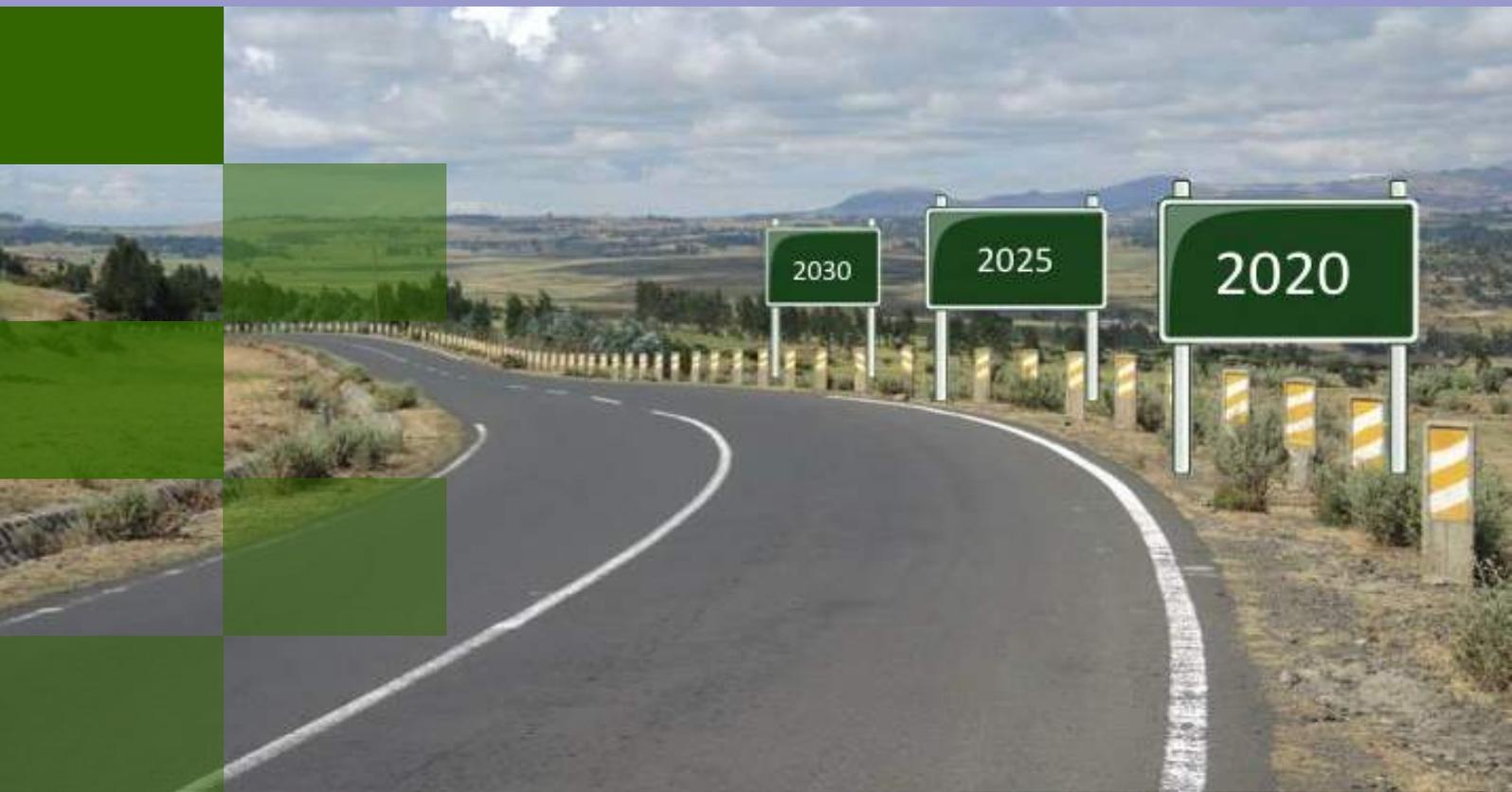


Trends. Threats. Projections

# The US Elections Trump, Hillary & India

Amit Gupta



September 2016



International Strategic and Security Studies Programme  
**National Institute of Advanced Studies (NIAS)**

Indian Institute of Science Campus, Bengaluru - 560 012, India

# The US Elections

## Trump, Hillary & India



**Amit Gupta**

Associate Professor, USAF Air War College, Alabama, US

There is global interest in the 2016 US elections because of the candidacy of Donald Trump. If one leaves aside the outrageous and distasteful statements of Mr. Trump there are some ideas that he has put forward that are quite revolutionary from an American foreign policy perspective. Similarly, Hillary Clinton, thanks to the Bernie Sanders candidacy, has been moved significantly to the left in the context of her foreign economic policy. What are these key shifts, to what extent are they enforceable, and what implications are there for India?

### Trump's Foreign Policy

Parts of Trump's foreign policy are questionable or simply unworkable. A 35-45% tariff on Chinese goods would decimate the American economy and take away the purchasing power of the American consumer who has been able to maintain high living standards because of the lowering of costs of consumer goods that occurred due to shifting manufacturing to China. Mr. Trump is not in favor of significantly raising wages in the United State—for, by example, raising the minimum wage—and, therefore, creating a situation where tariffs create higher costs without a commensurate increase in wages. It is unlikely that such measures could be permitted by the American business community.

*“Trump has taken away the Iraq war as an embarrassment for the Republican Party by stating that the war was a mistake. In doing so he has removed the albatross from the party's neck because the organization had to support the decision to go to war”*

Similarly, his views on nuclear weapons go against the established position of the United States on proliferation issues. Mr. Trump simply views nuclear weapons as a bigger bomb and is not only willing to contemplate using such a weapon but also advocates nuclear proliferation by South Korea and Japan. The United States' long standing policy has been to discourage proliferation and the institutions of American foreign policy would be appalled if Japan or South Korea would go nuclear because it would escalate the arms race in North East Asia. Further, while in the past American presidents have made threats to use nuclear weapons the official policy of the United States remains Mutual Assured Destruction and the first countermeasure against nuclear strikes by other nations has become the construction of a national missile defense shield.

On the other hand, Trump has taken away the Iraq war as an embarrassment for the Republican Party by stating that the

war was a mistake. In doing so he has removed the albatross from the party's neck because the organization had to support the decision to go to war, as well as the narrative that the US had been kept safe, at the cost of growing public anger against this position.

By expressing skepticism toward NATO Trump also has started a process that will lead to the normalization of relations with Europe. In the past, NATO was considered indispensable to contain the Soviet Union, the fact that the bulk of America's trade was with Europe, and the emotional ties that came from America having a population that was by and large of European origin. Trump has now questioned the basis of the Atlantic alliance—something that the foreign and defense policy institutions in Washington see as heresy. Yet if elected he may possibly shift the policy to make NATO pay its fair share in defense expenditure and to start accommodating Russia.

Most confusing, however, is what exactly Mr. Trump wants to do in the Middle East? He has vacillated between getting out and continuing bombing campaigns (and some suspect even using nuclear weapons against ISIS) while on the other hand talked about putting troops on the ground to fight the war in Syria and Iraq against ISIS. Either one will see a quick US effort and, most likely, not the type of painstaking coalition building that Bush Sr. and Jr. carried out in the first and second Gulf wars.

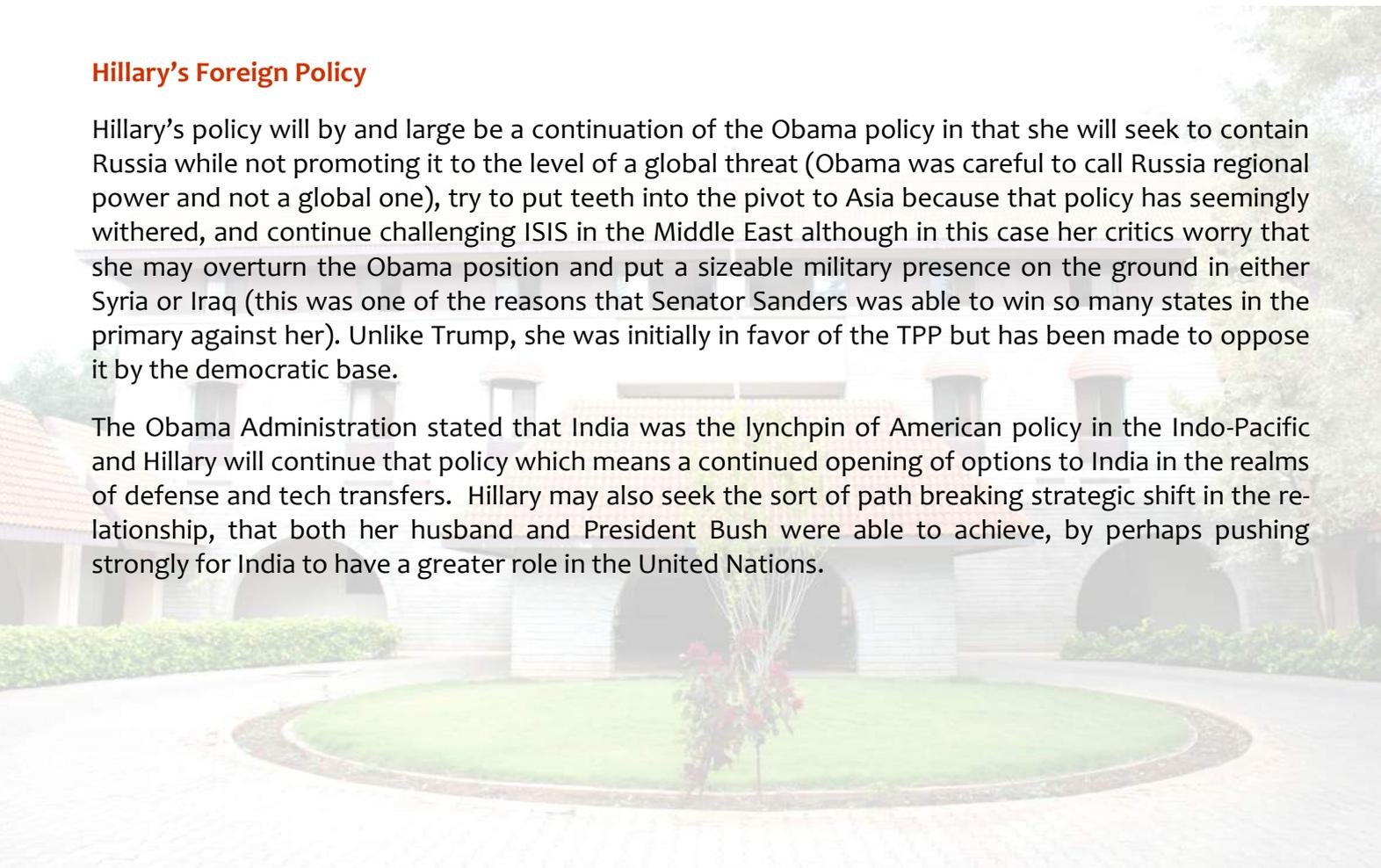
Lastly, Trump has stated that he will reject the Trans Pacific Partnership and go with a treaty that is more beneficial to US interests. The rejection of the TPP would be a blow to both Republicans and Democrats who are pro-business but is hugely popular on both the right and the left in the United States.

### Hillary's Foreign Policy

Hillary's policy will by and large be a continuation of the Obama policy in that she will seek to contain Russia while not promoting it to the level of a global threat (Obama was careful to call Russia regional power and not a global one), try to put teeth into the pivot to Asia because that policy has seemingly withered, and continue challenging ISIS in the Middle East although in this case her critics worry that she may overturn the Obama position and put a sizeable military presence on the ground in either Syria or Iraq (this was one of the reasons that Senator Sanders was able to win so many states in the primary against her). Unlike Trump, she was initially in favor of the TPP but has been made to oppose it by the democratic base.

The Obama Administration stated that India was the lynchpin of American policy in the Indo-Pacific and Hillary will continue that policy which means a continued opening of options to India in the realms of defense and tech transfers. Hillary may also seek the sort of path breaking strategic shift in the relationship, that both her husband and President Bush were able to achieve, by perhaps pushing strongly for India to have a greater role in the United Nations.

“Trump has stated that he will reject the Trans Pacific Partnership and go with a treaty that is more beneficial to US interests. The rejection of the TPP would be a blow to both Republicans and Democrats who are pro-business but is hugely popular on both the right and the left in the United States”



“...neither candidate is likely to pose major problems for the Indian government since the India-US relationship has moved beyond the idiosyncrasies of a specific administration. Common interests now shape the relationship and the US has dropped its hyphenation of India with Pakistan and recognizes that Kashmir is not an easily resolvable issue.”

### Trump, Hillary and India

Mr. Trump, as of now, does not have a grand strategic vision unlike his predecessors Ronald Regan and George H.W. Bush. His goals are tactical and the approach of the George W. Bush and Obama Administrations to build up India as a counterbalance to China has not been endorsed by the Republican candidate. Where Mr. Trump and India’s interests are likely to coincide, however, are on the issue of terrorism and in investing in certain sectors of the Indian economy.

Mr. Trump is likely to push for greater commercial contacts with India particularly in the areas that he is most familiar with—construction, hotels, and entertainment. He would also work hard in areas like nuclear energy to remove the congressional roadblocks, as well as Indian constraints, that have not permitted the sale of nuclear reactors from the United States to India. A sticking point could come over outsourcing to India since Mr. Trump has made so much of his platform about economic populism though his principal targets are China and Mex-

ico with India a bit of an afterthought in his tirade. Mr. Trump, however, is not likely to bring about the type of strategic shifts that President Bush and President Obama brought to the India-US relationship since his goal is to focus on domestic issues.

Where Mr. Trump will most likely see eye to eye with India is on the issue of terrorism and that means a tougher policy towards Pakistan. He has already made it clear that he is willing to temporarily halt immigration from countries that foster terrorist activities and Pakistan would be very high on that list. This would put pressure on the Pakistani elite since most have children living in the west and, after all, it was the son of a Pakistani Air Vice-Marshal who tried to set off an explosive device in Times Square, New York—something that Mr. Trump cannot take kindly to. India can, therefore, expect even higher levels of cooperation on anti-terrorism issues so as to send a clear message to Islamabad.

But overall neither candidate is likely to pose major problems for the Indian government since the India-US relationship has moved beyond the idiosyncrasies of a specific administration. Common interests now shape the relationship and the US has dropped its hyphenation of India with Pakistan and recognizes that Kashmir is not an easily resolvable issue. A President Trump is likely to be even more unsympathetic to Pakistan on the Kashmir issue given that protestors in Srinagar have started raising ISIS flags, an action that raises the hackles of western intelligence organizations.

Some of the benefits to India of the US presidential elections may come by default especially in the case of the TPP, where India has been shut out, and New Delhi has made little progress in the case of the competing RCEP that Beijing is sponsoring. The danger is that if TPP were to get off the ground it would leave India out of one of the potentially most prosperous economic groupings of the future and stymie Indian efforts at future economic growth.

To sum up, the India-US relationship is unlikely to undergo major downturns since the relationship is better institutionalized and both candidates are seeking to be focused on domestic issues.

### About the Author

Dr. Amit Gupta is an Associate Professor in the Department of International Security Studies at the USAF Air War College, Maxwell AFB, Alabama..

Views expressed are author’s own and do not necessarily reflect those of the Department of Defense or the United States Air Force.