CUTS International Breakfast Roundtable Discussion

Private Dining Hall, First Floor, Main Building, India International Centre (IIC)
19 March 2025, Wednesday | 08:30 - 10:00 AM (IST)

- **Key Discussion Points:**

1.	**Indo-Pacific Under Trump 2.0: Strategic Challenges & Opportunities –** ***Opening Remarks by Kate O Shaughnessy, Research Director at Perth USAsia Centre***
2.	**Africa and West Asia Under Trump 2.0: Implications for connectivity, technology and prosperity** ***Opening Remarks by Carice Witte, Founder and Executive Director of SIGNAL Group***
3.	**India-US Bilateral Relations: The Road Ahead** ***Opening Remarks by James Carafano, Senior Counselor to the President and E.W. Richardson Fellow; The Heritage Foundation***

AGENDA

Indo-Pacific Under Trump 2.0: Strategic Challenges & Opportunities

The second Trump administration is likely to double down on its Indo-Pacific strategy, but it will face significant structural and geopolitical challenges. One of the biggest obstacles is the evolving security landscape in the region, particularly with China's growing military assertiveness. The South China Sea remains a flashpoint, with Beijing expanding its artificial islands and increasing naval patrols, while tensions over Taiwan are at an all-time high. Trump's more confrontational stance on China could lead to heightened military brinkmanship, requiring a delicate balance between deterrence and diplomacy.

Additionally, economic competition will intensify as China strengthens trade ties with Indo-Pacific nations through the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) and Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Unlike Biden's measured approach, Trump's hardline trade policies could alienate some regional partners wary of getting caught in the crossfire of the US-China economic rivalry. To maintain influence, the US will need to offer tangible economic alternatives, possibly revamping trade frameworks like the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF) to provide incentives for allies and neutral players in the region. Without a clear economic strategy, Washington risks ceding economic ground to Beijing despite its military and diplomatic efforts to counter China's influence.

Africa and West Asia Under Trump 2.0: Implications for connectivity, technology and prosperity

A more transactional and unpredictable U.S. policy in West Asia under Trump's second term could pose significant challenges to the region's strategic interests, particularly in energy security, connectivity, and technological cooperation. Efforts to cut Iranian oil exports and potential disengagement from regional conflicts could disrupt India's access to critical energy supplies and impact initiatives like the Chabahar port, a key gateway to Central Asia. At the same time, shifting U.S. priorities could influence the trajectory of major connectivity projects such as the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC) and the I2U2 framework, both of which aim to bolster trade, infrastructure, and technology collaboration.

In Africa, Trump's second term could lead to significant policy shifts with global ramifications. The African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) faces a critical moment with its renewal looming in September 2025. Additionally, Trump's executive order halting all foreign aid due to concerns over accountability has significantly impacted Africa, which relies on foreign assistance for critical health and economic programs.

India-US Bilateral Relations: The Road Ahead

As the United States enters another Trump administration, India's strategic and economic engagements with Washington DC will face both new challenges and opportunities. The previous Trump administration saw deepening security and defence cooperation, yet differences persisted on trade and technology issues. While India remains a key partner in the Indo-Pacific strategy, the future trajectory of the relationship will be shaped by issues like trade imbalances, technology cooperation, supply chain resilience, and strategic autonomy in global geopolitics.

Decoding the US-India COMPACT framework, major defence procurements, and the TRUST initiative focused on AI, semiconductors, and space. Both nations set an ambitious $500 billion trade target by 2030, reinforcing their commitment to economic and industrial collaboration. Lastly, with the US advocating for "reciprocal" tariffs, India may face renewed pressure to reduce trade barriers, particularly in non-agricultural sectors like steel, pharmaceuticals, and electronics.