



CUTS International Global Affairs

Global Webinar

Trump and the Indo-Pacific

Are we going to peel onions with naked eyes?

March 6, 2025 (Thursday)

13:30 – 16:30 UTC

1. Background and Context

1.1 The return of Donald Trump to the U.S. presidency in 2025 is poised to significantly reshape global geopolitics, with U.S. domestic policies under his leadership likely to have substantial implications for its foreign engagements. Trump's "America First" agenda, emphasising economic nationalism and domestic interests, could influence how the U.S. engages with allies and rivals, especially in the Indo-Pacific region.

1.2 Secondly, Trump's focus on reducing trade deficits through steep tariffs – up to 60% on Chinese imports and 10-20% on goods from other countries – would likely intensify protectionist policies. This approach could disrupt global trade dynamics, straining U.S. economic relations with both allies and competitors.

1.3 Thirdly, potential recalibration of the U.S. engagement with regional frameworks such as the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity (IPEF), could create an opportunity for China to enhance its regional influence. In such a scenario, key regional powers like Australia, India, and Japan, may find themselves assuming greater responsibilities in fostering balance and stability in the Indo-Pacific.

1.4 Strategically, Trump's preference for bilateral agreements and burden-sharing could reshape alliances, increasing the role of regional powers in security matters. In the Indo-Pacific, this approach may elevate India's importance as a net security provider, creating opportunities for deeper cooperation within the Quad comprising Australia, India, Japan, and the U.S.

1.5 Here, it is critical to note that under Biden's presidency, a game-changing agreement called the Initiative on Critical and Emerging Technologies (i-CET) underlined the value of their bilateral collaboration in trade, technology and investment. However, Trump's second term may bring a more transactional approach to operationalise such agreements, potentially making defence deals conditional on India's commitments for more opening of these areas.

1.6 Furthermore, the Trump 2.0 administration is expected to prioritise achieving concrete results within the first two years, aiming to make an impact before the 2026 mid-term elections. While his transactional approach may bring short-term domestic political gains, their medium to long-term effects on America's allies and partners are uncertain.

1.7 Therefore, keeping the above in mind, taking into account the initial six weeks of Trump 2.0, this webinar will offer a timely and distinct opportunity to assess the immediate impacts of his administration's policy recalibrations on the Indo-Pacific. Our deliberations will bring fresh perspectives on specific issues.

2. Objectives

- To evaluate possible consequences of Trump 2.0 on traditional and non-traditional dimensions of the security architecture of the Indo-Pacific, including the future of the Quad and regional frameworks such as the IPEF
- To deliberate on potential shifts in the U.S.-India strategic partnership with an emphasis on trade, technology and investment nexus

3. Expected Outcomes

- Practical recommendations for policymakers to bolster Indo-Pacific countries' positions vis-à-vis the Quad and other regional frameworks such as the IPEF
- Improved comprehension of changing power dynamics in the Indo-Pacific and India's role in fostering regional stability

4. Discussion Topics

Session 1: Free, Open and Inclusive Indo-Pacific

- How the Trump administration may seek to integrate economic initiatives with security strategies in the Indo-Pacific, particularly through supply-chain resilience efforts
- Under Trump 2.0, would the U.S. continue to strengthen Quad, AUKUS, and such initiatives, or would it prefer more bilateral security arrangements? How would Indo-Pacific countries position their security needs within these frameworks?
- How Trump's approach to the security of Taiwan might evolve, considering his inclination to avoid unnecessary provocations while maintaining a strong stance against China?

Session 2: Navigating the Nexus between Trade, Technology and Investment in Trump 2.0

- How would Trump 2.0’s “America First” trade and economic policies reshape the United States’ trade, technology and investment relationship with its allies and partners in the Indo-Pacific? From China+1, are we going to witness USA+1?
- Under Trump, how likely the U.S. is expected to continue its commercial engagements in the Indo-Pacific through frameworks such as the IPEF? While more bilateral deals on the part of the U.S. are expected, how will they be balanced with the objectives of the IPEF?
- What is the future of China’s economic dominance in the Indo-Pacific, and how would the Trump administration’s policies affect regional competition, especially for markets in Southeast Asia and the Bay of Bengal region?

Programme Flow

Time (UTC)	Agenda	Duration
13:30 – 13:35	Welcome and Introduction	5 min.
13:35 – 14:00	Catalytic Speakers (Session 1)	25 min.
14:00 – 15:00	Open to All	60 min.
15:00 – 15:25	Catalytic Speakers (Session 2)	25 min.
15:25 – 16:25	Open to All	60 min.
16:25 – 16:30	Closing Remarks	5 min.