



Trump's Resurgence: Implications for Economic, Security, and Socio-Political Dynamics in South Asia

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Abstract

This paper examines the implications of Donald Trump's return to power for the politics of South Asia. It assesses the historical context of Trump's presidency, the factors that informed his resurgence, and the political dynamics in South Asian theatre. The paper also assesses the impact of Trump's policies on South Asia, examining economic ties, security, and defense dynamics, as well as religious and cultural tensions. It examines some immediate challenges and opportunities that the return of the Trump presidency poses for South Asian countries, as well as the role of media and public perception in their response to Trump's policies.

This paper examines the primary issues, including how various internal and external factors, as well as the distinct characteristics of a leader, contribute to political shifts in the South Asian region. It argues that reducing regional tensions or supporting stability, democracy, and development cannot be achieved without understanding these dynamics.

The paper concludes by outlining potential scenarios and forecasts for South Asian politics as Trump regains power. It also guides South Asian leaders in navigating the challenges and opportunities presented by Trump's return to the center stage.

Keywords: *Challenges and opportunities, economic relations, political implications, public perception, religious and cultural factors, security dynamics, South Asian politics*

1. Introduction

Nepal is a small, landlocked country in the Himalayas with a unique and significant geographic presence in South Asia. It is now in this geographical region that Nepal's foreign relations and economic diplomacy strategies become easy to understand, given its geopolitical surroundings between the two Asian giants of India and China. This research examines the significance, practices, and challenges of economic diplomacy in Nepal's geopolitical context.

Nepal's economy relies heavily on agriculture, tourism, and remittances. While these sectors have made significant contributions to national economic development, they are often considered less developed. This presents a challenge to diversify and develop sustainable developments across the country's various sectors. Furthermore, at the national level, there is a need to introduce new models of strategic economic diplomacy, particularly for countries like Nepal that continue to be plagued by unemployment, inflation, and a vicious cycle of underdevelopment.

There is no universal definition of economic diplomacy; however, at its most comprehensive, it can be considered a

state strategy to achieve its economic goals through international interaction. It encompasses trade, investment, and development cooperation activities within both bilateral and multilateral contexts. Economic diplomacy is imperative for small nations like Nepal to leverage sustainable growth, prosperity, and national sovereignty (Thapa, 2016, pp. 45–67).

In this paper, the strategic significance of Nepal in the South Asian geopolitical theatre has been examined through an analysis of geopolitical variables and economic policy dynamics. It also assesses the effectiveness of Nepal's economic and diplomatic efforts, as well as the drivers and constraints of its economic diplomacy. It also offers policy prescriptions to enhance its diplomatic endeavors.

1.1. Research Method

The research methodology employed in this paper uses secondary data collection. This approach was chosen to provide a comprehensive overview of existing knowledge and perspectives on the research topic. Diverse sources, including books, journals, articles, newspapers, websites, and official documents such as the Constitution of Nepal, were used for secondary data collection. These sources were selected based on their relevance, credibility, and contribution to the existing

body of knowledge on the subject matter. Utilizing a qualitative approach affords a unique opportunity for in-depth analysis of prevailing ideas, facilitating a multifaceted picture of economic diplomacy. It enables the exploration of complex themes and the identification of patterns and trends within the data. The research aims to offer valuable insights and a deeper understanding of the subject by analyzing secondary sources.

This paper is significant in Nepal's geopolitical context, as it sheds light on its efforts in economic diplomacy and evaluates its potential for advancing national objectives. Its findings and recommendations will inform and inspire policymakers and planners to adopt more effective and proactive economic diplomacy activities for future Nepal.

1.2. Conceptual Framework

This section presents a conceptual framework, key concepts, and theories related to Nepal's economic diplomacy debate. It offers a basic framework that connects realities with economic diplomacy strategies.

The framework provides a reasonable basis for describing the context and interrelationships of geopolitical factors, economic and diplomatic initiatives, and their outcomes. It aims to explain the theoretical links between the research focus and Nepal's role as a buffer state engaging in economic diplomacy. The framework outlines the key terms used in the subsequent discussion.

Economic diplomacy is "the intentional use of economic instruments to promote and achieve foreign policy goals." It is a foreign policy dimension in which states pursue economic pursuits to advance national objectives. State agencies increasingly drive these activities, but non-state actors also do them. Sought national interests through economic diplomacy include political security, economic development or growth, and social welfare. Economic diplomacy refers to the policies and practices developed by developing countries to foster economic relations with other countries.

Buffer states are not megastates; they are small or medium-sized states situated between two or more great powers that seek to leverage their relative geopolitical position to achieve specific national goals or outcomes. Typically, such buffer states will make concerted efforts to neutralize threats posed by powerful neighbors, clear of being drawn under their domination. To achieve this, they typically adopt a multi-directional engagement policy with external powers, focusing on contextual factors.

Contextual factors play a significant role in shaping states' foreign policy choices and initiatives, including those related to economic diplomacy (Chand, 2018). Some important contextual factors include geopolitical imperatives, historical legacies, domestic political arrangements, institutional designs, and national perceptions of external powers.

As a small buffer state between the two immense powers of India and China, Nepal's foreign policy choices and initiatives are significantly shaped by its geopolitical context, including the competing Sino-Indian security dynamics. Nevertheless, it

has engaged in economic diplomacy focusing on China since the mid-2010s.

Hence, the framework's theoretical goals are twofold: first, to contribute to the study of buffer states by expanding the scope of analysis to include their economic diplomacy initiatives and contextual factors, and second, to provide a particular understanding of Nepal's economic diplomacy with China as a buffer state underpinned by geopolitical imperatives.

2. Findings and Discussions

2.1. Historical Context of Trump's Presidency

The historical landscape surrounding Donald Trump's presidency is crucial to understanding his resurgence and how he is perceived in public discourse. A look back reveals that Trump had established himself as a credible political figure and thus a threat by the end of his first term as President of the United States. Viewing the above questions through a historical lens, key events of the past can be considered pivotal in shaping the present's outcome and concerns. Trump's actions as president and the domestic and international consequences of his leadership style impacted the portrayal of all political figures in the U.S. through anecdotal evidence of incompetence or absurdity while concurrently granting them broader geopolitical importance (Gill, 2019, pp. 1–18).

Central to crafting the present narrative is the need to discuss the impact of events that began to unfold during Trump's final year in office, notably the COVID-19 pandemic and the ensuing social justice movement. In a caricaturist fashion, these events gave rise to portrayals of Trump as ranging from a naive fool to a volatile madman. They dramatically complicated any attempt to view his actions and those of those around him soberly and in a measured manner. The restraints Trump's administration has placed on South Asia, as well as the actions of U.S. leaders before and after Trump became president, need to be examined to reveal the present concern (Saramo, 2017). Questions about the future course of U.S. relations with South Asian countries, particularly those involving Trump himself, are significant because Trump's actions during his presidency and subsequent actions were crucial in establishing the basis for those relations. In summary, viewing the present through the lens of the past is necessary because past actions are essential to understanding the present and facilitate some speculation about the future.

2.2. Factors Contributing to Trump's Resurgence

The political resurgence of Donald Trump is a concern for many nations, including countries in South Asia. The trajectory of American politics is a crucial consideration in this context. This section aims to understand the factors contributing to Trump's resurgence in politics in the context of an evolving American political landscape. It argues that the political recovery of Trump and his rapid growth in support, following concerted attempts to discredit him, demonstrates the existence of a particular political milieu now prevailing in the United States that has either not been acknowledged or has been underappreciated. This milieu is influenced by social movements, political partisanship, and historical events,

particularly economic sentiment, which re-energize the basis of Trump's support (Biegon, 2019, pp. 517–539).

While the politics of emotive grievance had earlier eroded support for Trump, this grievance is currently being leveraged by, and in convergence with, media efforts to reshape Trump's messaging. There is also an apparent rebranding of Trump post-presidency, considering the different modes of social and print media engagement platforms offered to politicians and electorates alike.

Trump's growth is viewed within the broader context of a populist moment that has surged worldwide, suggesting a similar correlation exists in South Asian instances. In Indo-Pakistani politics, historical grievances are closely echoed by contemporary socio-economic disparities that underpin a particular electorate's support. Therefore, examining the American context about the discussion of emerging politics in South Asia, particularly the grassroots political encounters increasingly taking place through online platforms and print media, can illuminate how public engagement is instrumental in political recuperation, even in a transnational context. While the radical right's resurgence is closely tied to the socio-political conditions prevailing in the U.S., it also warrants consideration of how its foreign policy implications may reverberate elsewhere, particularly in South Asia.

2.3. Political Landscape in South Asia

The political landscape of South Asia is viewed through the lens of the political resurgence of Donald Trump, U.S. Indo-Pacific strategy, and federal foreign policy designs for public diplomacy outreach in South Asia. The geopolitical convergence and intra-regional engagement of South Asian countries are preliminarily addressed before focusing on a South Asian country's political entity about the U.S. political ecosystem. India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan, Sri Lanka, the Maldives, and Afghanistan are the member states of South Asia, as standardized by the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC). The debates on South Asia's geographical extent often include the consideration of Afghanistan's inclusion in the region. All these countries share linguistic, cultural, and historical bonds but also suffer conflicts over space-sharing, water-sharing, and territoriality.

Nevertheless, regarding the U.S. foreign policy framework, linguistically proximate nations have often cooperated beyond the confines of South Asia, e.g., India and Bangladesh, India and Nepal, and India and Sri Lanka. The political landscape of South Asia is uneven and warped with the polity's "transatlantic tilt." Until the early 1990s, local politics were shaped by the Cold War politics of the superpowers, which were often intrusive and influential. However, political entities tend to pivot toward Atlantic democracy after 1990. As a sequential dividend, the political landscape is awash with political parties of the western-left or social-liberal genres. While these political parties tend to dominate the parliamentary space, right-leaning political parties primarily espouse the Hindutva brand of nationalism in India and Islamism in Pakistan.

The ensemble hybrid trials of democracy often accommodate political parties to local politics, but the leadership style remains instrumental in the governance quotient of democracy. "Personality-based" political parties are commonplace, and an electoral victory localizes a political dynasty's in-office political supremacy. Development politics is a misnomer, and regional proliferation of underdevelopment and poverty persists, fortifying the non-state apparatuses of terrorism and transnational criminal syndicates. Nevertheless, the democracy-governance discourse redirects international development assistance or foreign aid to the political leadership despite public concerns over a donor-driven polity. However, the public sentiment regime often shapes parochial political alliances, which are considered the key ingredient in the evolving political landscape of the polity (Tan, 2017, pp. 4–14).

3. Key Players in South Asian Politics

In light of Trump's resurgence, it is pertinent to look at the key political players shaping South Asian politics. These players are often considered political parties, leaders, and movements. However, weakened established political parties, such as the Congress Party in India, the Pakistan Peoples Party, and the Janata Samajbadi Party in Nepal, grapple with opponents who have more public support or are likely to secure more seats if an election were held today. At the same time, there is a stark difference between how electorates view newer, populist political entities, such as the Aam Aadmi Party in India, the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf, and the Janata Party in Nepal, compared to established political entities. Many South Asian electorates prefer established political entities despite their records being marred by corruption, misgovernance, and authoritarianism. How, then, is the South Asian political landscape transforming? What is the impact of external actors on the region's politics? How are party dynamics, coalition politics, and electoral strategies changing rapidly across South Asia? Beyond the above questions, what explains the foreign policy choices of some South Asian leaders that may harm their country's long-term interests but help them politically survive at home? These questions are central to analyzing key political players shaping the South Asian polity in light of the Trump phenomenon (Tan, 2017, pp. 4–14). The emphasis is on how public opinion, grassroots support, and leader-to-masses engagements affect the political survival of these players. How might Trump's political strategies, characterized by egotism, resentment, and fear, impact relationships within South Asia and influence the players involved?

4. Impact of Trump's Policies on South Asia

This section examines the impact of Donald Trump's policies on South Asia, focusing on both the direct and indirect consequences. The Trump administration made notable policy decisions regarding South Asia, including the withdrawal from trade agreements, changes in defense stipulations tied to military assistance, and a revised approach to diplomacy in the region (Gill, 2019, pp. 1–18). A core question arises: How

far do the interests and security concerns of the South Asian countries converge with Donald Trump's foreign policy? Some aspects of his policies are likely to have a more significant impact on South Asia. In particular, Trump's approach to the issues of terrorism, economic collaboration, and military assistance to South Asian countries is likely to be the focus. Since coming to power, South Asian governments have been assessing Trump's policies and adjusting their interests as the priorities of the U.S. change. How are the countries of South Asia reacting to this situation? Using these questions as a focus, an attempt is made to map the impact of Trump's policies on South Asia.

Public sentiment regarding the U.S. under Trump's leadership has been assessed based on studies and surveys. One significant finding, relevant beyond just South Asia, is that skepticism towards the U.S. has intensified despite the complexities of globalization, national sovereignty, and the nation-state's role in ensuring stability at that level. The U.S. under Trump has been seen more as a risk than an opportunity at a time when great power rivalries are reviving. In this context, a mixed legacy of Trump's presidency is portrayed, with a focus on South Asia, where geopolitical complexities abound. In a way, the impacts are both direct and indirect, as South Asia plays a key role in the power game between China and the U.S., particularly evident in the Indo-Pacific strategy. South Asia's strategic importance is also underscored in India's quest to be recognized among the great powers, as well as the potential implications of the U.S. elections for the geopolitics of South Asia.

5. Economic Relations between the U.S. and South Asia

In many ways, the economic relations between the United States and the South Asian countries of casual interest are a surprising combination of continuity and change. While the United States has long been economically engaged with South Asia, primarily with India and Pakistan, trade patterns have historically changed gradually and often coincidentally (Kronstadt, 2006, pp. 1–20). Since the catastrophic events of September 11, 2001, the focus of American attention has shifted from economic partnership to environmental partnership or, in times of economic prosperity, to economic assistance, ostensibly due to American foreign investment and its numerous benefits to the local economy and job market. Since the Trump administration took office in January 2017, there have been significant changes in American economic policy and concerns. Most notable are the withdrawal from the Trans-Pacific Partnership and efforts to renegotiate the North American Free Trade Agreement, both driven by criticism of the jobs lost or economies devastated by free trade.

Trump's critics have pointed to various blunders regarding tariffs imposed on products such as solar panels, steel, and washing machines, partly because these were intended to bolster the faltering American economy by protecting American industries. The prediction is that these protectionist policies and other sanctions will only exacerbate the already

low growth rates in South Asia. The significant economic partnerships the United States has formed with nations such as India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh are of particular concern. Questions naturally arise about how these partnerships will influence domestic economies, industrial growth, and job markets in South Asia. Generally, America's foreign investment in the casual interest region is a two-edged sword tinged with opportunity and peril (Noland, 2018). On the one hand, foreign investment is crucial for an economy to improve, industrialize, and create job markets, as most South Asian nations still have limited economic and job market opportunities outside of their capital cities. On the other hand, foreign investment could prove devastating if an economy that is reliant on external dictates cannot strengthen its independent industrial base. Global economic trends suggest that achieving independence is nearly impossible when a significant portion of a nation's budget relies on foreign borrowings. While global economic trends often shape economic relations, how local economies respond to American economic initiatives is paramount. A nation, on the whole, knows what is best for its economy; hence, it is essential to critically assess the limits of challenges to that knowledge when economies are interdependent. After all, healthy economic ties between economies, particularly transparent trade relations, are strategically too important to neglect. Economic relations continue along the same course despite Trump's ascent to power.

6. Security and Defense Dynamics in South Asia

Under Trump, Indo-Pacific policy shifted its focus to bilateral partnerships, with an emphasis on military cooperation in South Asia. India and Pakistan, as strategic partners, exemplify the defense dynamics that affect regional stability—Trump prioritized arms sales to India, promoting joint production to achieve self-sufficiency. The U.S.-India Agreement on Geo-Spatial Cooperation enhances intelligence sharing and cooperation. Conversely, Pakistan's alliance with China has prompted increased arms deals, thereby exacerbating regional challenges. Trump's anti-terrorism stance complicated U.S.-Pakistan ties; the 2018 National Defense Strategy criticized Pakistan's support for insurgents, jeopardizing financial aid. Taliban talks were stalled over Islamabad's perceived support for the group's resurgence. South Asia's complex landscape features terrorism, insurgency, and state-sponsored cross-border terror (Tan, 2017, pp. 4–14). India and Pakistan's nuclear capabilities and diverging American allegiances complicate stability. Afghanistan's geostrategic location has fostered Russian, Iranian, and Indian involvement alongside U.S. interests. Trump's increasing military presence raises regional tensions. U.S. priorities shifted after 2011, with a focus on negotiating an exit from Afghanistan. Anti-Taliban efforts waned; Pakistan rebuffed U.S. control over Taliban actions. China's growing Afghan role and U.S. isolation drove Pakistan closer to Beijing. Trump's withdrawal from peace talks heightened Indo-Pak tensions, challenging the U.S.'s mediating role. The AFG-INC stalemate stalled Pakistan's role in Afghanistan.

Following 2016, alliances shifted their focus to mutual defense, and Indian defense spending surged from 1.62% to 2.26% of GDP, rivaling global standings. Internal insurgencies in India, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka shape defense budgets, influencing external military needs. U.S. priority adjustments in Iraq and Afghanistan altered bilateral relations, emphasizing military restraint over arms provision.

7. Religious and Cultural Factors in South Asian Politics

Religious and cultural factors are paramount in shaping the politics of South Asia, a region where faith continues to play a crucial role in the societal fabric. Similarly, faith in religion is also in resurgence on the global stage. The intersection of religion and politics explains the phenomena of nationalism and identity politics, which in turn influence the policies of the governments. The relevance of faith to politics often manifests in religious sentiments that can be quickly mobilized to provoke passions for electoral support or to inform hard-line policy decisions. Cultural narratives are similarly wielded to evoke instincts that can facilitate political gain. For example, the resurgent Trump shrewdly put to use the age-old cultural narrative of America as the promised land, which safeguards liberty in order to demonize his political rival.

South Asia comprises eight sovereign states: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka, all of which are members of the regional grouping SAARC. The uniqueness of this region lies in its intricate ties between religion, culture, and politics. A general overview of how religious and cultural factors shape politics is essential to understanding the implications of the resurgent Trump in the South Asian context. Religious organizations often manage to influence the policies of the governments in South Asia. Politics can quickly turn sectarian in Nepal, Bangladesh, India, and Pakistan, where identities are organized along religious lines. Similarly, outside the Indian subcontinent, in Afghanistan, Islamic militancy stoutly challenges the authority of a US-backed secular government (Mohammad-Arif, 2013, pp. 1–23). On the other hand, the cultural exchanges and diasporic communities significantly shape the bilateral relations between the states in this region. In this context, the recent spate of unfortunate hate crimes against Muslims and the rise of Trump has raised cogent questions about the cultural and religious implications of US policy in the region.

8. Media Influence and Public Perception

The influence of traditional and digital media on public perception of Trump's policies and actions in South Asia is explored in this section. The role of each region's media in shaping narratives around the U.S.-South Asia relationship is discussed. What stories are emphasized or omitted in U.S. media coverage of South Asia? How does South Asian media portray its region about the U.S. and its foreign policies? Misinformation, framing, and sensationalism are key elements

in shaping public opinion through the media (Hayat et al., 2020). The effects of respective media narratives on public perception of the U.S. in South Asia are examined.

Amid the increasing global connectivity, the dynamics of media consumption and its interaction with political engagement are critical to consider. For a region like South Asia, where countries continue to struggle with economic disparities, limited access to education, and political instability, the rise of alternative and digital media is crucial in shaping political discourse. South Asia is home to the most significant number of impoverished, undereducated, and low-skilled populations worldwide, yet it also boasts the highest number of internet users. By 2025, South Asia is expected to have the highest number of internet users and social media consumers globally, surpassing any other region. As the public in South Asia grappled to make sense of Trump's unexpected 2016 election victory, media coverage in and about South Asia was varied – from critical analyses of Trump's foreign policy outlook to op-eds reflecting how necessary it was for the U.S. to remain a key player in the region. Echoing concerns shared by many countries in response to Trump's victory, U.S. media highlighted the potential implications of his approach to foreign policy and global security, in particular.

By highlighting case studies from South Asia, this analysis examines the role of social media as a tool for public mobilization and the construction of counter-narratives in response to Trump's foreign policies. Effectively addressing the need to understand better the impact of social media on political mobilization and communication in the Global South, this argument suggests that while social media enables the construction of counter-narratives, state power continues to shape the success of those counter-narratives in gaining traction. In South Asia, media campaigns emerged in support of and in opposition to the U.S.'s positions in the region. In the contestation over narratives that emerged within the South Asian media landscape, public rallies in response to specific policies or actions taken by the Trump administration add dimensions to consider. Thus, it begins with discussing the significance of media literacy among the public in navigating these complex narratives. Ultimately, agreement with McChesney's assertion that "in contemporary society, media and communication systems are the central and most important institutions shaping public consciousness and social, political, and economic life" can be found. This is not to suggest that media alone shapes public perception or opinion in response to media coverage. However, it must be acknowledged that the substantial power media plays in shaping narratives.

9. Challenges and Opportunities for South Asian Countries

As the world grapples with the implications of Donald Trump's resurgence, the focus is often on the United States and its immediate allies in Europe and Asia. However, the repercussions extend far beyond. The issues are far more complex for nations in South Asia, where China's growing

influence is worrisome for the U.S. It is not merely a question of foreign influences but of national interests and the unfolding of local politics. The challenges confronting Sri Lanka and Pakistan are not dissimilar to those faced by India, Bangladesh, and Nepal, each of which has to navigate the fine line between opportunity and challenge (Tan, 2017, pp. 4–14).

Trump's re-election poses a conundrum, presenting both challenges and opportunities. Each country must assess issues on their merits, but the broader context of Trump's foreign policy is difficult to ignore. South Asian nations are likely to be courted for strategic partnerships and are to be found on the periphery of significant power contestations. In return, incentives such as heightened concern for local economic ills could bring countries together or drive wedges between them, depending on how they choose to act. A region plagued by poverty, economic inequality, political instability, and social unrest is a quagmire of competition among major powers.

A prior arrangement could mediate a struggle that seeks to pit countries against one another. Then again, an arc of cooperation could emerge, united by a common anxiety regarding an overreaching Beijing. There are no fixed choices. South Asian countries, currently confined to a specific geopolitical space, have previously demonstrated the ability to play the great powers against one another. At a time when countries are urged to build economic ties and security agreements with the U.S. to counterbalance China, the concern uppermost in the minds of South Asian leaders is maintaining sovereignty in the face of external pressures. Still, the U.S. is not China either. Through multilateral organizations, countries can collaborate to manage the complex causes of regional security, even as the U.S. and China shape the character of that security. This could involve various issues, such as natural disasters, piracy, people's movement in the aftermath of the pandemic, and terrorism.

Terrorism, for all its vexatious character, could be one point of departure, and regional organizations like the SAARC could resurface and assert a more expanded role. Although deliberations could retreat into a bygone era against the backdrop of the Sino-Indian faceoff and a more assertive China, they could be enlivened by a recognition that local militancy could no longer be viewed through the prism of an Indo-Pakistani rivalry exacerbated by external influences. The opportunity presented by a newly invigorated regional grouping must be viewed in the context of a broader geopolitical contest it is navigating. Asian powers could play a more active role in containing terrorism by attempting to shape the nature of local states and their engagement and aspire to be aligned with one grouping or another.

10. Case Studies: Nepal, India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka

Nepal, India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka are selected as case studies to illustrate the diverse impacts of the resurgence of Trump on the South Asian region, as well as how the uniqueness of each country's history, culture, and political context shapes the nature of their bilateral relations with the U.S. Since these five countries have stark differences

in how they view Trump's policies and initiatives, the discussion focuses on the local context in influencing how these nations react to the former president's actions. While collaboration can be reaffirmed in some local contexts, conflict can be deepened in others, as seen in the varying experiences of South Asian nations in engaging with U.S. foreign policy under Trump's presidency. Each country's domestic challenges are briefly sketched to examine the political strategies these countries have adopted in response to U.S. engagement when they are primarily preoccupied with their problems. The narratives also concern how civil society and public opinion have shaped national responses to Trump's actions in a region where this influence is often weak or restricted. These five narratives are, therefore, somewhat similar in structure, as they discuss each country's polity, economy, civil society, public opinion, relations with the United States, and relations with China. These individual accounts provide a comprehensive picture of the regional landscape, which is crucial to understanding South Asian politics (Tan, 2017, pp. 4–14).

11. Future Scenarios and Predictions

To forecast several potential scenarios regarding Trump's resurgence and its implications for South Asian politics, it is crucial to acknowledge the uncertainty in the geopolitics of South Asia based on a current assessment of political, economic, and security trends (Tan, 2017, pp. 4–14). Although a comprehensive forecast may include predictions extending ten, twenty, or even fifty years into the future, this analysis will focus on five key predictions for the next five years, from 2025 to 2030. These predictions will range from the most likely to the least likely, assessing their probabilities based on the interplay of domestic compulsions and foreign influences.

Most likely, A politically unstable and insecure South Asia, but further regional trade agreements were blocked under Trump's leadership. As it seems to be the case now and highly improbable without Trump's resurgence, any chances of regional trade and economic arrangements among South Asian countries are bleak. Despite posturing in public about enhancing free trade and defense collaboration with South Asian countries, the Trump Administration is likely to adopt a more protectionist and inward-looking approach.

Similarly, there are concerns that China might take advantage of South Asia's changing political and security dynamics under Trump and forge stronger economic, military, and political partnerships with India's immediate neighbors. However, based on history, India is likely to remain the most influential power in South Asia despite its increasing political and military assertiveness. Islamabad and Kathmandu are likely to be more cautious in their engagement with China. South Asian countries will likely focus on internal political, economic, and security issues. The region is likely to remain politically unstable, insecure, and impoverished for the next five years.

Second most likely: Growing radical Islamic movements in South Asia and increasing threats to engagement with the U.S.

There is no substantial evidence suggesting that the Taliban's resurgence in Afghanistan will directly encourage similar radical Islamic movements in Pakistan or elsewhere in South Asia. However, Pakistan may be obliged to pay a heavy price for engaging the Taliban in Afghanistan, as there are possibilities of further weakening Pashtun nationalism in pursuit of a hard-line Islamic agenda by the Taliban. The rising political and military assertiveness of the Taliban in Afghanistan may embolden the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and similar like-minded militant outfits to challenge the writ of the Pakistani state.

Considering the currently deteriorating political and security situation in Afghanistan, it is predicted that the United States will be engaged in counterterrorism endeavors in Afghanistan and neighboring countries. As a result, the CIA and NATO might have to rely on Pakistan's military and intelligence to some extent. In this scenario, there are worries that Islamabad might manipulate the security assistance and favor the TTP or similar groups to pursue Pashtun nationalism and undermine Pakistani state authority.

While currently overshadowed by the pandemic, there are indications of the resurgence of anti-incumbency popular radical Islamic movements in a few South Asian countries like Bangladesh, India, and Pakistan. Such movements may modestly reshape the political landscape of South Asian countries, and public engagement with the United States might decline unless U.S. policies are tailored to accommodate popular sentiments. Furthermore, a possible resurgence of radical politics may lead these countries to adopt more collective foreign policies, engaging in efforts against the West.

Less likely: A resurgence of Tamil nationalism in Sri Lanka and a politically assertive Tamil Nadu in India, which could thwart U.S. maneuvering in the Indian Ocean. Amidst the pandemic, a pro-United States and anti-China political coalition may emerge in Sri Lanka along with the current President's possible political marginalization. Nevertheless, a politically assertive Tamil Nadu in India may pose a challenge to U.S. maneuvering in the Indian Ocean, as U.S. naval presence in the Andaman Sea, South China Sea, and Diego Garcia is likely to be obstructed or retaliated through pro-LLTTE agitations by the Tamil Nadu state assembly and street politics.

A politically assertive Tamil Nadu may emerge only if the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) coalition wins the upcoming Lok Sabha elections in India in May 2024 and considering the importance of Sri Lanka in Indian foreign and security policy and the U.S. effort to contain China in the Indian Ocean region, such coalitional politics may be largely ineffective. Alternative forecasts of tensions between New Delhi and Colombo, despite the current pro-India Rajapaksa administration, are improbable, as geopolitical rivalries between India and China will likely preclude Sri Lanka from sidestepping India for China's closer engagement.

Less likely: A collective effort of the smaller South Asian countries to thwart Indian hegemony. With the gradual rise of

nationalistic politics in South Asia, the collective efforts of the smaller South Asian countries to counter Indian hegemony are expected to be ineffective. A regional political alignment countering the larger nation's influence is most likely to occur only in the event of significant upheaval in domestic politics. With their political leaderships preoccupied with numerous pressing internal issues, the smaller South Asian countries are unlikely to pursue collective regional efforts against India.

12. Comparative Analysis with Other Global Regions

Political dynamics in South Asia, particularly those involving the nation-states of India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Afghanistan, Bhutan, and the Maldives, are viewed in the context of the resurgence of Donald Trump as a global leader. Questions are raised about the implications for political trends in South Asian countries as Trump reclaims the Republican nomination and resumes the presidency in 2025. The political turbulence brought about by Trump's rise and the associated challenges for national policy choices in countries such as India, Pakistan, and Afghanistan are first outlined. Further exploration is undertaken of the broader questions surrounding emerging political trends that shape policy choices in South Asian countries, including their opportunities, vulnerabilities, and challenges, in an environment marked by similar trends in other regions. As a comparative inquiry, political trends in South Asian countries are analyzed in Europe, Latin America, the Middle East, and the Indo-Pacific region. Focal attention is placed on insights into populism, nationalism, and authoritarianism as they emerge from a bouquet of country case studies. Likewise, deliberation is given to how similar or different these trends are to trends that influence national policies in South Asian countries, even as the presence of the United States, the architect of the post-World War II international order, shapes global and regional dynamics. Empirically oriented, this investigation draws on secondary sources to examine and compare the political trajectories of Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka with those of other countries (Gill, 2019, pp. 1–18). Selection is guided by regions and countries with implications for Trump's foreign policy and impact, focusing on populism and national policy choices. Europe is examined through France and Hungary, Latin America through Brazil and Venezuela, the Middle East through Turkey and Israel, and the Indo-Pacific through Australia and the Philippines.

13. Conclusion and Recommendations

This chapter presents the significant findings of the research and considers their implications for assessing the impact of Trump's resurgence on South Asian politics. Findings concerning these implications have been presented in a nuanced fashion, highlighting the complexity of these dynamics. In doing so, it is emphasized that understanding how local, regional, and international factors intersect to influence political environments is crucial for strengthening democracies. South Asian leaders are advised to pursue strategic diplomatic engagement that encompasses a diverse

range of global players. In this respect, the importance of public opinion and civil society in shaping countries' responses to U.S. foreign policy is emphasized. Furthermore, it is suggested that practical dimensions, such as economic collaboration between smaller states and great powers and regional security arrangements, can assist in managing the potential risks and rewards of relations with the U.S. As recent history has highlighted, cooperation with a powerful nation can have unintended consequences, especially when that nation's leadership is unpredictable. Nevertheless, all nations face shared challenges, including pandemics, climate change, terrorism, and economic depression. Thus, a balance must be sought between fostering mutual understanding and proactively addressing these challenges. Finally, this analysis recommends that South Asian nations pursue regional strategies that are balanced, carefully thought through, and protect and advance regional interests within a broader global framework. Overall, South Asia must navigate an era of "inverted" great power politics, characterized by both risks and rewards.

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