



Advice to the Next President on India and South Asia

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Abstract: A change in U.S. administrations can often result in significant policy shifts. However, in the case of South Asia, with marked exceptions, U.S. policy has been mostly consistent. That said, the new administration will confront important challenges at global, regional, and bilateral levels that involve South Asia. To that end, the administration will have to deal with questions of climate change, global trade, and transnational terror. It will also have to confront the nettlesome question of the future of Afghanistan as well as the growing religious intolerance and conflict in the overall region. Finally, given India's significance to the region and beyond, it will need to devise policies designed to place the bilateral relationship on a more secure footing.



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After long periods of engagement and disengagement with India, the United States has managed to reach a mostly bipartisan and rare consensus on the substance of Indo-U.S. relations. Gone are the days when New Delhi believed that either the Democrats or the Republicans were more sympathetic to Indian concerns.

Given this unusual consensus between the two parties, it becomes relatively easy to proffer some advice to the next president on what next to do about India. At the outset, it may be useful to highlight that the relationship, for the most part, is on sound ground and is quite multi-faceted. The two sides have forged a strategic partnership, developed robust trade and economic relations, and have extensive face-to-face contacts. Furthermore, the Indian diaspora in the United States is mostly prosperous and increasingly integrated into the fabric of American society.

How, then, might the existing relationship be improved further and what pitfalls might be avoided? In tendering advice to the new president, it is best to cluster the issues around global, regional, and bilateral concerns.

Global Concerns

At a global level, India and the United States have some important differences, but can also make common cause on a host of issues. Few global issues are more important than climate change. The new U.S. president must continue to confront this challenge. Fortunately, after adopting a difficult, if not intransigent stance on climate change negotiations, India now seems more amenable to working with the United States on reducing carbon emissions. Despite this recent willingness to cooperate, it is nevertheless planning to build numerous coal-fired plants over the next several years. This policy seems to contradict the country's professed commitment to mitigate and contain the effects of climate change.

Considering India's seemingly contradictory posture, it behooves the next president to gently nudge Indian counterparts to adopt possible strategies of carbon sequestration, to enhance the efficiency of the coal-fired plants, and, above all, to take on the onerous task of further reforming its power sector. Such a task, of course, could be facilitated if the United States shared its advanced technologies with India even on a commercial basis. The next president could also encourage Indian interlocutors to provide a suitable, legal regime that would make it possible for American companies to invest in India's expanding nuclear power infrastructure.

Another global issue that has proven contentious involves the international trade regime. India's acquiescence is vital if significant progress is to be made in global trade liberalization. Yet, India, somewhat understandably, has taken a tough stance on the issue of agricultural subsidies. If the industrialized world and the United States, in particular, could make suitable, reciprocal concessions, a long-standing logjam could be broken.

A third global issue concerns India's commitment to the nonproliferation regime. Since the two countries' momentous civilian nuclear agreement of 2008 under President George W. Bush, India has been accepted as a *de facto* nuclear-armed state despite its unwillingness to acquiesce to the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT). The George W. Bush Administration, at least in part, was willing to

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