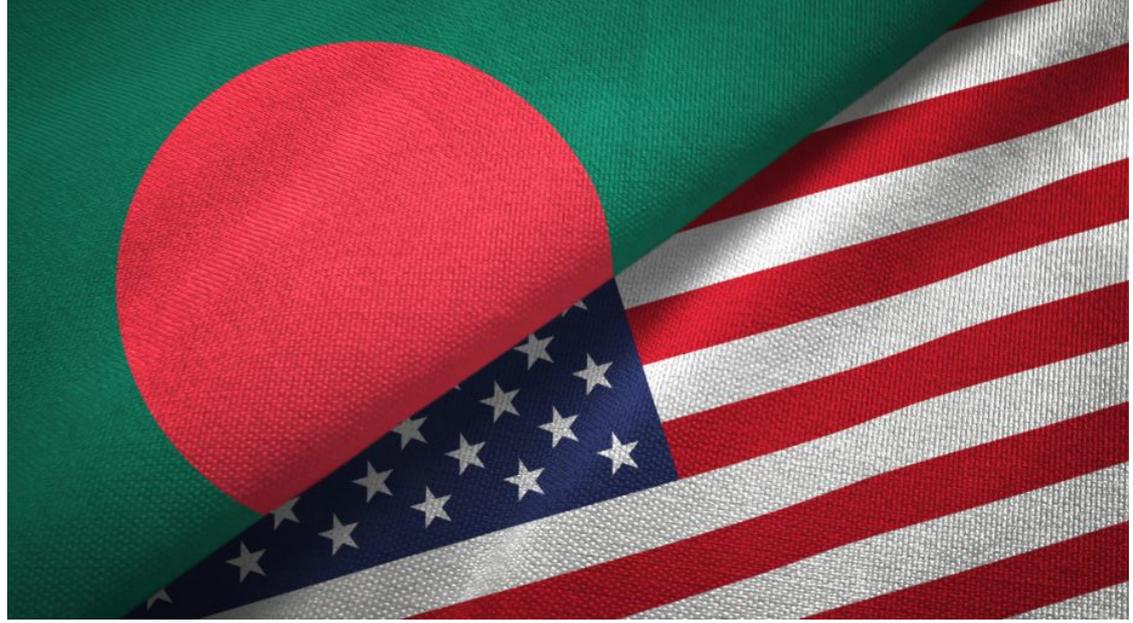


Assessing the Potential Impacts of the Second Trump Administration on Bangladesh

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Post-Hasina Bangladesh is confronting a transformative period marked by significant policy reforms. A good argument can be raised that the current scenario of Bangladesh is exemplified from the perspective of changes that the current Professor Yunus-led interim government has been trying to do since 5th August 2024 after the fall of the Hasina regime. One of the highest priorities of the Nobel laureate, Professor Yunus and his government is focusing on reformation, addressing areas such as bureaucracy, law enforcement, judiciary, the constitution, the electoral system, and legislative process.

Additionally, making reports, and having recommendations for policy reformation is one thing, but implementing those recommendations is another which needs time, consensus and substantial effort. The Yunus government is facing these dual challenges. In one way, they need to have support from all political parties, on the other many of the political parties are pushing

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** Image source: Rahman, Md. H. (2024, November 14). What a Second Trump Presidency Means for Bangladesh. The Diplomat. <https://thediplomat.com/2024/11/what-a-second-trump-presidency-means-for-bangladesh/>

for immediate national election rather than long-term reforms. And the tension between the structural changes and political demands for electoral processes is one of the main crises of the interim government.

Examining Bangladesh-USA relations reveals a notable shift in the USA's role in Bangladesh since 2021. Especially, after the huge sanction by the USA administration on officials of the Hasina regime law enforcement agencies due to all allegations of human rights violations, democratic backsliding and elections rigging. For Bangladesh, the USA is a very important partner in political, defense, trade and infrastructural development. Conversely, for the USA, Bangladesh holds immense geopolitical and geo-strategical significance. Beyond trade and politics, the USA can play its role in three different important regions such as South Asia, Southeast Asia and East Asia. Bangladesh is the connective area offers to influence and engage with these regions effectively.

However, the new Trump administration is likely to make a new crumble in Bangladesh-USA relations, presenting unpredictable and challenging to address. This is not because Bangladesh has had political changes recently but rather it will be because of the Trump's unpredictable policy decisions. Putting everything aside, observing Bangladesh-USA during the Trump administration can be explored through five key dimensions such as the USA's Indo-Pacific strategic outlook, the evolving USA-India relations, the China factor, regional checks and balances, and the leadership approach of Professor Yunus which will play an important role in shaping the bilateral relationship between both countries in the new political context.

The Trump administration's first priority will likely be advancing the national interests of the USA in the Indo-Pacific region. In his first term, Trump emphasized the strategic importance of this region, particularly in countering China's growing influence in the Asia and Indo-Pacific region. For doing so, so far, the USA is strongly engaged with the region through different connectivity and frameworks such as QUAD, AUKUS and IMMEC. Thus, the new Trump administration will eventually continue its earlier foreign policy approach in the Indo-Pacific region, reinforcing strategies to curb the rise of China, particularly in Bangladesh.

The second critical factor is whether the USA under the Trump administration will continue to view Bangladesh through the lens of India. During the Trump's first term, it was mostly clear that Trump was much approached to see the region through the eyes of India, largely due to the Trump's personal relations with Modi. Additionally, India is strategically important for the USA due to the successes of the Indo-Pacific strategy and more broadly to establish its national interest by countering China's growing influence. Of course, if Trump continues the same relations with Modi in his second term, then it could pose challenges for the Yunus-led interim government in Bangladesh. However, this does not mean that the previous dictatorial leader Hasina can come back to Bangladesh. By using the special relations with Trump, Modi can do an early election in Bangladesh where India can have their special relations with the elected governments and can make their negotiations with strategic interests. The current Yunus administration, however, may face significant obstacles in this scenario due to its perceived anti-India stance. This sentiment stems from India's open and consistent support of the Hasina government since 2009, which many in the interim administration view as a betrayal of democratic principles in Bangladesh.

The third crucial element in USA-Bangladesh relations under a new Trump administration will be the 'China factor'. Trump's foreign policy will likely continue to prioritize countering China's growing influence, particularly in the Indo-Pacific region. This focus will make it challenging for Bangladesh to maintain a balanced relationship with both the United States and China. Any effort by the Yunus-led interim government to pursue such equilibrium could face significant pushback from Washington. On the other hand, Trump's foreign policy is famously unpredictable. If his administration were to establish a new type of balanced relationship with Xi Jinping's administration, it could alter the dynamics of Bangladesh-China relations as well. However, given the prevailing geopolitical tensions, building strong ties with China during

Trump's tenure would be an uphill task for Bangladesh. The USA's Indo-Pacific strategy, coupled with its strategic partnerships such as QUAD, AUKUS or IMMEC, will likely keep pressure on nations like Bangladesh to align more closely with Western interests, further complicating any attempts to strengthen ties with Beijing.



Fourthly, the USA focus on maintaining check-and-balance relations in South Asia and the Indo-Pacific region will remain crucial under a Trump administration. Despite Trump's personal rapport with leaders like Modi and Putin, it is unlikely that the U.S. will compromise its broader national security interests for these relationships. For example, India's close economic ties with Russia during the ongoing Russia-Ukraine war, including its purchase of S-400 missile systems and its role as a key intermediary for Russian energy exports, highlight a potential conflict with U.S. strategic goals. While Trump and Modi may maintain specialties, the USA is likely to weigh what concessions India is willing to offer in exchange for American support for its interests in Bangladesh. The Trump administration may also explore balancing India's influence in the region by strengthening relations with other South Asian and Southeast Asian nations like Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Maldives, and Pakistan. Myanmar's Rakhine state, with its ongoing struggles for autonomy, is a key geopolitical concern for the USA. The USA could leverage this issue to counter China's significant influence over Myanmar's government and rebel groups. Whether Trump chooses to address these regional complexities through India's leadership or by engaging with a pro-Western and liberal-conservative Bangladeshi government will depend on the evolving dynamics of USA-India relations and the geopolitical calculations surrounding the Indo-Pacific strategy.

Finally, the leadership of Professor Yunus plays a pivotal role in shaping the dynamics of USA-Bangladesh relations under the Trump administration. Despite the significant challenges faced by the interim government, Professor Yunus's strong connections with both Democratic and Republican leaders in the USA add complexity to Trump's potential unilateral actions, particularly if these actions are driven by India's perspective or Yunus's previous critical views on Trump. The USA is likely to evaluate its approach to Bangladesh based on the benefits it can derive. This includes weighing the interests of the Yunus-led interim government, any future elected government, and the remnants of the former Hasina regime. While India's influence may

play a role, Trump’s ultimate focus will be on safeguarding U.S. national security interests in Bangladesh, prioritizing these over alliances or personal affiliations.

In this context, the Yunus-led government has the potential to position itself as a reliable partner by aligning its policies with USA strategic priorities while maintaining its sovereignty and balancing relations with regional powers. However, the unpredictability of Trump’s foreign policy will likely remain a significant challenge for Bangladesh’s leadership.

