

Trump 2.0 and Its Implications for Uzbekistan: Opportunities and Challenges  
Part 3 of the RHI-series “Trump is back – what it means for the world”



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What effect might Trump's presidency have on Uzbekistan and Central Asia?

The United States' strategic preference remains primarily focused on the Middle East, and this is unlikely to change under Trump's administration. However, Central Asia has the potential, albeit small, to become a region of strategic importance in the foreseeable future.

Afghanistan's significance in the region and in the counterterrorism policies of the U.S. is likely to remain substantial under Trump's administration. Simultaneously, there might be an interest in discouraging Uzbekistan from aligning too closely with superpowers such as China, Russia, and the European Union. As the geographical heart of Central Asia, Uzbekistan borders five countries—Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Afghanistan, and Tajikistan—making it geopolitically significant. U.S. involvement in the region could increase pressure on Uzbekistan from Russia and China, both of which are strategic rivals of the United States, putting the country in an uneasy position of choosing sides, or even more.

President Shavkat Mirziyoyev has already demonstrated effective leadership in addressing such challenges, as seen in 2023. His strategy has enabled Uzbekistan to maintain a neutral position in the international arena while prioritizing national interests, creating a secure “island” in an otherwise anarchic geopolitical environment. Additionally, during the meeting between the U.S. and Uzbekistan held in Tashkent on November 7, 2023, both nations reaffirmed their commitment to deepening diplomatic relations across various sectors, including political, economic, and security fields. President Mirziyoyev's actions underscore his dedication to prioritizing Uzbekistan's national interests while balancing complex international relationships with foreign partners. By fostering mutually beneficial partnerships, Uzbekistan has maintained its sovereignty and promoted regional stability, exemplifying an effective strategy of neutrality in a world of unbalanced power dynamics.

Moreover, Uzbekistan's natural resources, such as uranium, natural gas, oil, and gold, are significant assets in the geopolitical arena. These resources underscore the country's importance and make it a valuable partner in international relations.

While cooperation with the United States under Trump's administration could bring economic and technological benefits to Central Asia, some aspects of Trump's policies could pose challenges for Uzbekistan and the region as a whole. His administration's anti-immigration and anti-Islamic rhetoric, coupled with U.S. interventions in unstable regions like Ukraine and the Middle East, may have negative consequences for Uzbekistan and Central Asia in terms of safety and could lead to unwanted involvement in proxy wars. This is particularly concerning given

that the majority of the Central Asian population identifies as Muslim, adhering to a peaceful and cohesive national mindset.

Strong cultural values, such as religion, traditions, and sovereignty, could result in resistance to Western values and agendas promoted by the United States. Attempts to impose such values on Central Asia could create instability in the region. To ensure productive cooperation, the United States must respect the region's sovereignty and avoid overstepping cultural and political boundaries by refraining from interfering in domestic policies and internal affairs.

The idea of a union among Turkic states is another factor to consider. Shared cultural and historical ties within these states could give rise to a significant geopolitical force, potentially challenging existing superpowers. This development would likely conflict with U.S. interests, and Trump's administration might take steps to prevent it, raising numerous questions and challenges to address before pursuing cooperation.

Lastly, migrants from Central Asia living in the United States or planning to migrate there could face difficulties under Trump's strict immigration policies and initiatives supporting mass deportation. Such measures could negatively affect Uzbekistan's diaspora and the welfare of Uzbek migrants.

In summary, while Uzbekistan seeks economic and technological benefits from cooperation with the United States under Trump's administration, challenges related to cultural differences, geopolitical pressures, and U.S. domestic policies must be carefully navigated. Mutual respect, balanced diplomacy, and sovereignty are essential to maintaining safety and stability. Despite Uzbekistan's potential as a region of interest to the U.S., Trump's presidency is unlikely to significantly impact the conditions in Uzbekistan and Central Asia, as the focus of his administration will remain primarily on the Russia-Ukraine war, conflicts in the Middle East, North Korea, and domestic concerns under the "America First" policy.