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## **US midterm elections: If Democrats flip the House, what does it mean for US foreign policy and India? 'Very bullish' is dominant theme**

Nikhila Natarajan

November 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2018

Long time US foreign policy watcher and president of the International Republican Institute Daniel Twining remains “very bullish” on the US India relationship (despite the current misalignment on trade) even if the Senate and the House pull away in two different directions after the US midterm elections on 6 November. As for whether things will change, Twining predicts there’ll be more of the same process that US Congress has come to embody. “Congress is a very traditional place no matter whether it’s led by Republicans or Democrats”.

“On trade we are not aligned...that’s partly our fault and partly India’s fault. It is a complication, India is having its own set of economic problems at the moment and the rupee has plummeted. But overall, we are very aligned with India and this relationship has taken very big steps in the last few years, with a set of defense agreements and other engagements. This is a relationship that successful administrations in New Delhi starting to build in 1998 and successive administrations in the US have embraced and driven forward. This is one of the bilateral relationships I’m personally most optimistic about in this (current) scheme of things”, Twining said in remarks at a Stimson Center panel on the post-midterm impact of US foreign policy in the Indo-Pacific.

Seen through the American lens, Twining believes India is constantly measuring its relationship with China based on where the US-China relationship is. “The Indians still feel, because of their tradition of non-alignment, that they can’t count on anybody in a crisis. Going forward, the US - India relationship, the India - China relationship and the India-Japan relationship will determine broadly the nature of the Indo Pacific order in the 21st century”, he said.

If Democrats flip the US House on 6 November, Donald Trump may likely be struck once again, like he was at the start of his presidency, about the peculiar constraints of his office. His pet plans for new asylum policies, more money for his “big beautiful wall”, a militarized southern border and a new tax bill - would likely go up in smoke. Most political pundits agree that instead, we’ll be seeing non stop investigations into Trump’s businesses, his tax returns, his family and his administration would follow. Derek Mitchell, President of the National Democratic Institute, predicts America will turn inwards and focus on very “domestic” issues the day after the election - “foreign policy won’t be central”.

But as 6 November nears, policy mavens are keeping an eye on historical patterns that have informed US foreign policy in times of political change. For most part, what we hear is that Congress is “quite traditional” when it comes to foreign policy. “The Trump administration

proposed cutting State Department Funding Development Accounts. Congress led Republicans pushed back against that over the last two years. The Trump administration sent two budgets to the Congress with as deep as 40% cuts to the civilian side of American influence in the world and Congress denied that, and in some cases plussed up", explains Twining.

Twining points to US Congress led legislation that has been "very bipartisan" over the last two years: "Russia sanctions, North Korea sanctions, Russia-Iran-North Korea sanctions that passed the Senate by 98 votes to 2 and passed the House by 419 votes to 3!" Even the reaction to the Khashoggi murder, Twining says, proves the same tendency of Congress to play down the middle.

So, what would this continuum mean for the fate of the HR 392 bill that addresses India's ( and other countries') human capital in the US? H.R. 392, sponsored by Rep. Kevin Yoder (R-Kansas) aims to eliminate per-country caps on employment-based visas which leads to lengthy wait times (spanning decades) for permanent residency applicants. "Its inclusion in a Department of Homeland Security funding bill means it could become part of an overall spending package that Congress is expected to pass", writes Laura Francis for Bloomberg Law.

Despite high hopes from the legal immigrant community and the record number of sponsors that the bill has (329 in all), the political reality remains grim. "I have doubts that serious progress can be made on immigration in this environment where both sides have such a strong incentive to blame the other side for inaction. Neither Democrats nor Trump will want to give the other side a 'win' on this issue", David Bier of Cato Institute told Firstpost.

Despite the wide ranging support for the HR 392, Bier says the "right wing is furious about it, and they are bringing out every trick to stop it." That too, would be largely in step with Congress' overall tack on immigration. The most dramatic changes in immigration rules have come into effect via government memos, not Congress action.