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# Analysis of the 2024 U.S. Presidential Election Results and Outlook for U.S. Foreign Policy

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## 1. The Reality of U.S. Politics as Reflected in the 2024 U.S. Presidential Election

The 2024 U.S. Presidential Election holds a symbolic significance as the culmination of American politics since the emergence of Trump. From the moment he entered the Republican primary race in 2015 to last year's presidential election, President-elect Trump has been at the center stage of American politics for nearly a decade. Trump's prominence over the previous decade is closely tied to the changes that followed the failure of the Iraq War and the financial crisis. The United States failed to devise effective strategies to manage the unipolar order that emerged after the Cold War, as it was preoccupied with ideological battles rooted in anti-communism during the Cold War following World War II. In other words, the United States failed to devise a comprehensive "grand strategy" other than expressing confidence by shifting its policy from engagement to enlargement. After the 9/11 attacks in 2001, the Bush administration's attempt to link the traditional military approach to the value issue of democratization of the Middle East failed. Compounded by the subsequent large-scale financial crisis, public opinion in the United States suffered a second "Vietnam syndrome". At a time when there was widespread aversion to intervening in other countries' affairs and heightened anxiety over the stagnation of domestic manufacturing industries, Trump emerged out of nowhere as an outsider. The failure of the Iraq war spawned America First policies or non-interventionism while the financial crisis led to a new mobilization of the white working class.

## 2. The State of U.S. Foreign Policy Surrounding the 2024 U.S. Presidential Election

The 2024 U.S. Presidential election was a pivotal moment to decide whether Trump's spectacular return or Trump's complete political exit. However, it is difficult to frame this election as one that marked a significant realignment in foreign policy. According to studies such as Aldrich et al. (2014), two key conditions should be met for a presidential election to bring out a major shift in foreign policy: (1) there must be clear differences in the stances of the candidates on pressing foreign issues; (2) international issues must be perceived as critical by American voters.

In this election, these conditions were not satisfied. Conflicts such as Russia's war in Ukraine and the Israel-Hamas war are complex and difficult for the average American voter to fully grasp in terms of significance and impact. Additionally, since these international disputes do not involve the deployment of U.S. ground troops, they do not evoke strong preferences or stakes among the American public. Regarding U.S.-China strategic competition, both candidates demonstrated a firm stance, to the point where neither even mentioned "engagement" policies with China. The familiar accusations of being "soft on China," often seen in previous elections, were nearly absent. What remained was a competition over who could appear tougher on China, making it challenging for voters to discern meaningful differences between the candidates. Had President Biden run for re-election, he would have positioned his alliance-focused foreign policy in direct contrast to Trump's critical rhetoric about U.S. allies. However, with Vice President Harris, who lacks significant foreign policy experience, stepping forward as a candidate emphasizing alliances, her position appeared somewhat unconvincing. Biden's sudden withdrawal from the race also eliminated the opportunity to assess the credibility of his alliance-centered foreign policy approach.

The more significant characteristic of the last U.S. presidential election is the notable absence of discussions on the direction or content of U.S. foreign policy. Trump relentlessly targeted inflation as the central issue. This was also the year that the highest number of voters since 1984 who felt their financial situation had worsened compared to four years ago. In addition, issues such as poor border security and a surge in illegal immigration, often linked to failures in national crisis management, fueled public anxiety and eroded the public trust in Biden's replacement Harris. In response, Harris largely disregarded international issues that had largely fallen out of voters' focus and centered exclusively on defending abortion rights and highlighting Trump's unsuitability as president.

### **3. How did President-elect Trump Achieve a Landslide Victory?**

The U.S. November Presidential election resulted in a decisive victory for Trump. He swept each of the seven battleground states and all seven swing states, and beat the total votes against the Democrats since 2004. He also became the first Republican candidate since the 2004 election to win the popular vote. What explains this landslide victory for Trump?

First, the impact of high inflation cannot be overlooked. Inflation had not been a major factor in a U.S. presidential election since the 1980 Carter vs. Reagan race. Unlike the issue of unemployment, inflation is a challenge for which the incumbent president or ruling party lacks effective policy tools. Aside from raising interest rates, which is an unpopular solution for the many voters burdened with credit card debt, there were few viable options available.

Second, Voters seemed to strongly desire a return to "common sense" both in economic and cultural terms. For instance, in the later stages of the campaign, Trump and the Republican Party heavily aired TV campaign ads that focused on trans-athletes in these swing states. While Trump did not formally declare a full-fledged cultural war or make it the centerpiece of his

campaign strategy, the emphasis on sports and transgender issues appeared to resonate with voters. Many voters recalled the strong economy during Trump's first term while others sent a warning to the Democratic Party for becoming overly aligned with radical gender issues and increasingly perceived as an elite-centric party.

#### **4. Outlook on U.S. Foreign Policy Under Trump and South Korea's Response**

Before forecasting U.S. foreign policy post-election, it is essential to understand how presidential powers are exercised. Key points include:

1. **Executive Orders:** President-elect Trump's campaign proposal for a universal 10% tariff on all imported goods has sparked debate due to the uncertainty surrounding its legal basis in U.S. statutory law. While Congress could intervene by introducing legislation requiring approval for presidential tariff orders, such oversight is unlikely to succeed. Federal courts, however, may impose some checks on the president's authority. High tariffs on China are anticipated, and it remains to be seen how China, currently experiencing significant economic stagnation, will respond to these measures. Under the second Trump administration, executive orders are expected to play a significant role, particularly in the fields of trade and technology.
2. **Legislation:** In terms of legislation, the issue of Senate filibuster applicability will also be a critical factor in shaping policy. For instance, the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act of 2017, set to expire in 2025, is a high-priority issue for Trump and the Republican Party. Extending this legislation is politically crucial, as it could boost disposable income for individuals and lower corporate taxes, compensating for the administration's limited tools to address inflation directly. This legislation is likely to bypass the filibuster, as it did during its initial passage. Similarly, the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) is also expected to be an exception to the filibuster rule. If Trump and the Republican Party propose a scaled-down "skinny repeal" version of the legislation—focusing on the elimination of increased IRS funding and electric vehicle benefits—it could theoretically pass both the House and Senate with a simple majority, bypassing the need for a filibuster. However, given the substantial benefits already promised to Republican districts under the IRA, it remains uncertain whether its repeal would materialize.
3. **Foreign Policy:** A significant shift could emerge under President-elect Trump regarding the Ukraine war. Unlike President Biden, Trump might not seek congressional approval for Ukraine support bills. Historically, U.S. military and security policies have rarely been initiated and pursued by Congress without presidential leadership. Therefore, if Trump refrains from requesting or endorsing such support, U.S. aid to Ukraine is likely to cease entirely.

In conclusion, South Korea needs to respond to the second Trump administration as follows: First, South Korea must adopt flexibility as a countermeasure to Trump's own unpredictability. Trump embodies uncertainty itself, so there is no reason or need for South Korea to cling to or prioritize certainty. In other words, it may be more effective to respond to Trump's actions as they arise rather than attempting to prepare for every possibility in advance. A confident and flexible diplomacy—sometimes giving Trump credit and at other times holding him accountable—is essential.

Second, South Korea must avoid premature missteps. While Trump undoubtedly represents a shift in American diplomacy, all diplomacy requires time and involves the other party. Fear of Trump should not lead South Korea to prematurely expose its negotiation strategies or publicize hypothetical concessions before Trump even makes demands or raises issues.

Third, South Korea should keep a close eye on Trump, whose presidency is limited to a single four-year term under the 22nd Amendment, making him ineligible for the 2028 election. With only four years in office, Trump's prioritization of certain policies will inevitably push others to the back burner. Additionally, the 2026 U.S. midterm elections—typically disadvantageous for incumbent presidents—will further influence his decisions.

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(‘2024 년 미국 대선 결과 분석과 미국 외교 전망’, <https://www.asaninst.org/?p=96788>)