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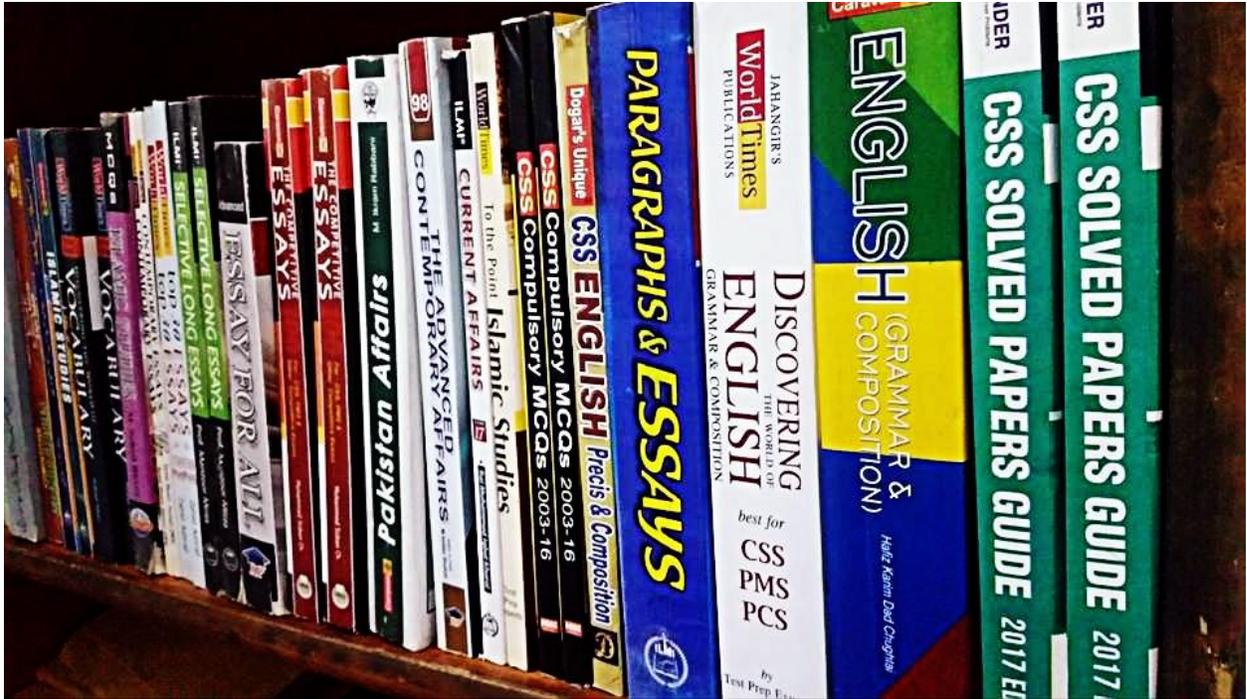
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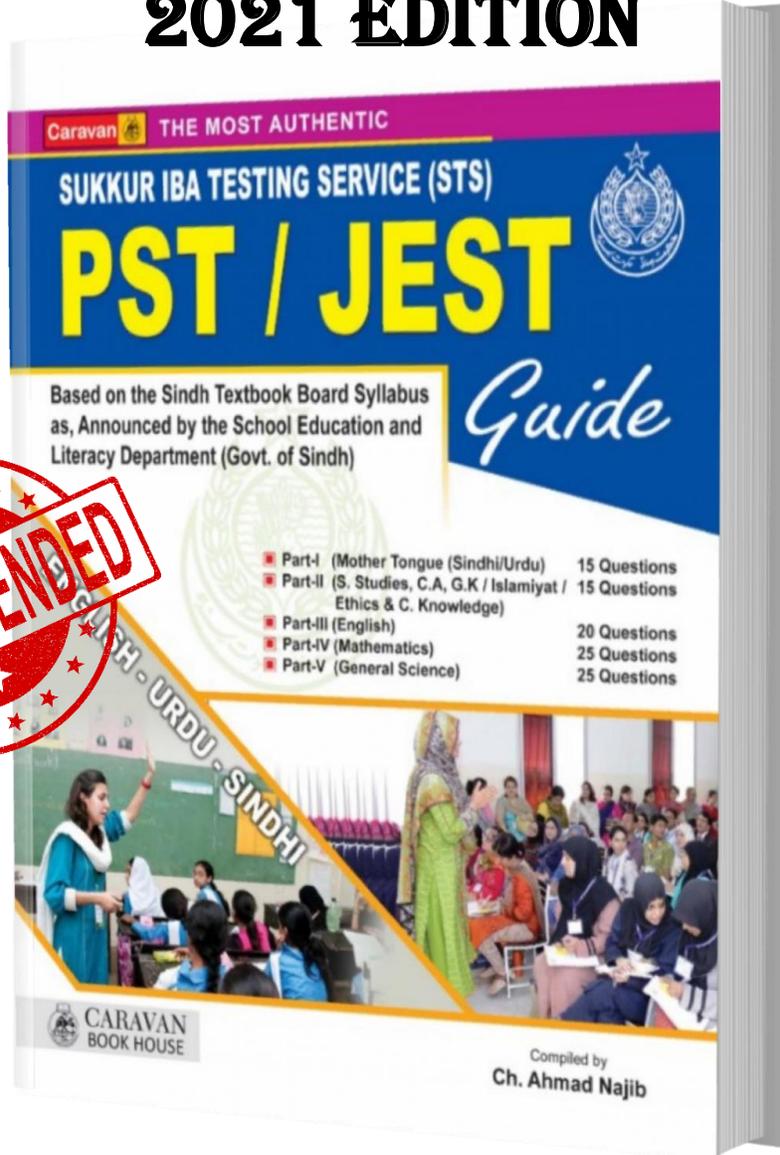
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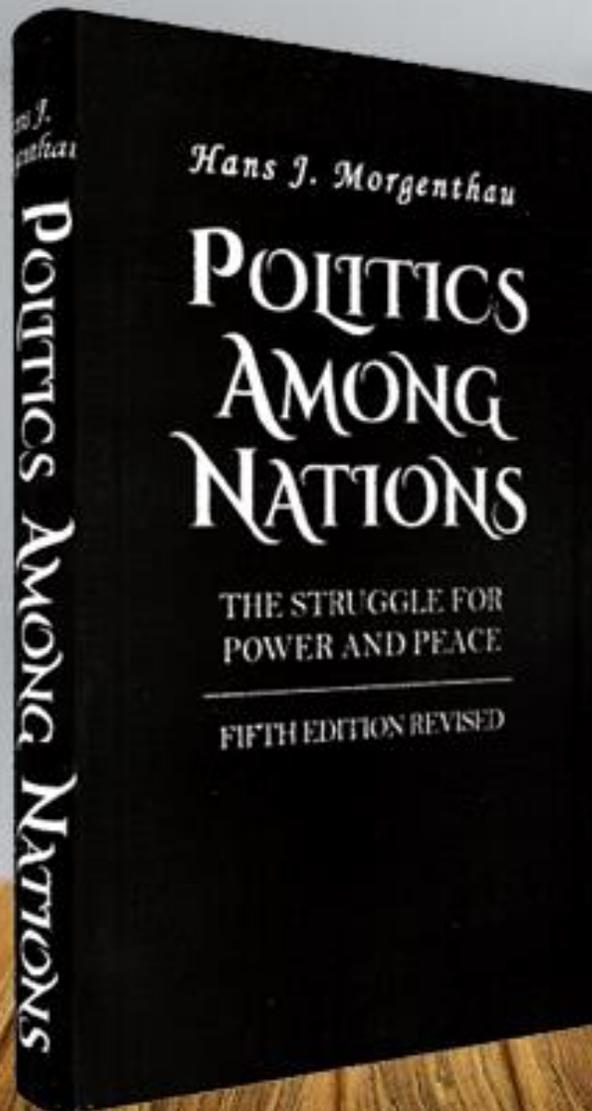
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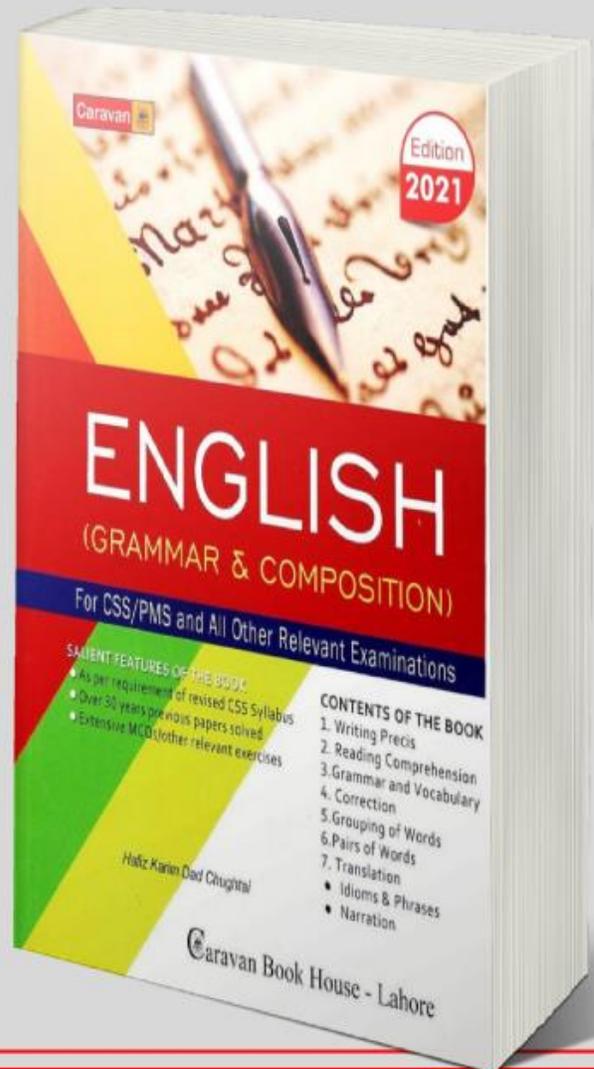
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PAKISTAN

Pak-Turkey Relationship: Prospects and Challenges By Prof Abdul Shakoor Shah

AFTER 1947, Pak-Turkey relations were limited to religion and culture. The 1950s security policies proved vital for bilateral relations. Both aligned with the West against Russian threat. The Baghdad Pact brought them closer and both pursued western security policy in the early 1960s. After the mid-1960s, both developed independent bilateral relations within the framework of the RCD. Pakistan semi-aligned with China after 1965. Turkey also stepped back from the US after Cyprus policies. In the 70s, both were involved in military operations. Pakistan lost its eastern wing while Turkey intervened militarily in Cyprus. Pakistan fully supported the Turkish stance on Cyprus which proved highly positive in developing national security ties.

During the 80s both realigned with the West. Russian invasion of Afghanistan and Iranian revolution greatly affected it and endangered the western interests in the region. Both were passing through and facing almost the same circumstances of coups, threat of communism and Iranian ideology. The military high ups of Pak-Turkey were aspirants of western alliance. 1990s stagnated due to the Cold War, Balkans and the Central Asian Republics for Turkey while Pakistan focused on Afghanistan. After 9/11 Pak-Turkey worked together in Afghanistan. Pak-Turkey contributed to Afghan peace process. Until Erdogan govt. Pak-Turkey relationship had been largely ceremonial.

Pak-Turkey have multifarious strategic locations in an intricate security region. Both have undergone the havoc of the Cold War and Post Cold War chaos. Pak-Turkey had centuries' long relationship mostly limited to speechifying. In the past, little practical was done to benefit from this relationship. Bilateral trade falls below \$1 billion, but optimistically, in recent years, it soared up to 40%. The Turkish imposition of safeguard duties on Pakistani textiles has declined Pakistani exports. On the other hand, India-Turkey trade mounts to over \$5 billion. The political stability in Turkey in the last decade has boomed its economy. Public to

public relations are weaker due to Western channels of information which project less positive aspects that is a challenge for Pak-Turkey ties. There is no academic, cultural and research institution in either country to strengthen bilateral relationship. Pak-Turkey must step ahead to eradicate the existing hurdles in every field of mutual cooperation. Turkey, with its booming economy and being a G-20 member can consider relocating Pakistani exports.

Pakistan can easily lure Turkish construction industry in the country for low-cost housing units. Pak-Turkey may get ahead smoothly in agro-based industries. Pakistan, being the 4th largest milk producer, still imports cheese from the EU. We can re-align our agro-based industry with Turkey to enable our agro-based products for export. Both the countries are already cooperating in the educational sector, though mostly relying on scholarships; they must jump up to research work and educational infrastructure. Pak-Turkey have greater prospects of cooperation in every field for their mutual benefits from education to media and defence to construction and the list goes on. Pak-Turkey can improve their defence by exchanging their expertise in the field of space technology. Turkey has been pitching the ATAK T129 helicopter on all occasions both the countries can join in manufacturing and redesigning their air jets. Turkey can benefit from Pakistani innovation of JF-17.

Turkey's high wires are following the policy of balance between the East and the West focusing Europe and the US on one hand and Russia and China on the other. Turkey is minutely observing the changing economic and strategic circumstances in the East and in the west. USSR' military and economic goals and China's Belt and Road/CPEC are very important for Turkey. Turkey has supported Pakistan on the Kashmir issue which is proof that Turkey seriously considers Pakistan as Asian giant instead of India. Turkey has also backed Pakistan in the Nuclear Suppliers Group.

Turkey considers that Pak-Turkey strategic and military ties will usher a new era of influence for Turkey in Asia. Ankara seems to be realizing that EU's dealing with Brexit and an aggressive Russia and ignoring Turkish claims. Pakistan considers itself a major player in Afghan peace process, mediator with Iran and a strategic partner supporting Turkey for balancing the East and the West. The West has concerns of refugee flows from Turkish borders. Pak-Turkey relations are prioritized in the field of security, defence, terrorism and trade. Pak-Turkey relations can prove very vital for the West in solving certain issues. The US is

looking into two dimensions. The US is looking at Turkey from the Syrian and Russian lens and Pakistan from India, Afghanistan and Chinese lens. Turkish Sunni inclination has pushed Turkey further away from Saudi Arabia and Iran.

During the 2016 Turkish coup Pakistan supported Erdogan which strengthened bilateral relations further. Pak-Turkey bilateral trade is mounting up slowly but steadily and it is expected to cross \$900 million to \$10 billion in 2022. Pak-Turkey are also collaborating in the aviation sector. There is a recent tourism agreement between the two countries which will strengthen their economy. Mustafa Kamal was called ideal by General Musharraf and the later developments show that Pakistan may follow the Turkish model. On international front both the countries have been supporting each other in regards with Azerbaijan and Armenia in return Turkey supported the Kashmir cause. Mr. Khan and Erdogan share the decision making tables.

—The writer is Prof in English, based in Lahore.

Source: <https://pakobserver.net/pak-turkey-relationship-prospects-and-challenges/>

Vaccines Procured | Editorial

Finally, the first shipment of six million doses, out of the larger order of 17 million, is set to arrive in Pakistan as early as March. With actual delivery starting from February, the Pakistani population can breathe a sigh of relief as the process of national immunisation looks to be on. However, authorities must be wary of the fact that the extraordinary task of procuring 200 million more doses still remains. As such, the diplomatic push needs to be as strong as it has been if we are to see such success again.

According to Asad Umar's announcement on Saturday, the AstraZeneca vaccine is one of the three antidotes available globally for battling Covid-19. For Pakistan to have obtained six million doses means that a significant portion of the population can start undergoing the vaccination process. Consequently, there is bound to be some relief experienced in the nation as well as the economy. Once the promise of greater supply materialises, we might be able to move closer to normalcy and become one of the few countries in the world to have escaped the grips of the pandemic.

It is imperative that the government does not forget that there is an overwhelming global demand for the vaccine, whether provided by the labs from Oxford, China or Russia. We must remain consistent with our efforts to secure a portion of the supply for millions that are living vulnerably in the country. Otherwise, we risk the likelihood of living within constrictive environments for an indefinite period of time.

Source: <https://nation.com.pk/01-Feb-2021/vaccines-procured>

Kashmir Challenge | Editorial

IT is hard to disagree with UN Secretary General António Guterres's assertion that Pakistan and India must discuss the Kashmir issue and that any military confrontation between the two South Asian states will result in "a disaster of unmitigated proportions".

Replying to a question during a press conference in New York, the UN chief added that "our good offices are always available" in case the parties wanted to avail the option to discuss the problem. However, the issue here is that Mr Guterres's offer can only bring results when both parties are interested in a negotiated settlement to the dispute. When one side — India — keeps harping on the same tune, insisting Kashmir is an 'internal' matter, there is little that third parties can do.

Without doubt the lack of progress on the Kashmir dispute has poisoned the atmosphere in South Asia since independence. Tensions in the disputed region have resulted in several wars and numerous skirmishes. Pakistan, for its part, has always offered to negotiate a solution that is acceptable to the Kashmiris, but has mostly been rebuffed. The present federal government has also offered to take steps towards peace if India reciprocates, while Islamabad has tried to improve relations through people-to-people contacts.

The opening of the Kartarpur Corridor is a case in point. However, the Indian response, particularly under the BJP's watch, to these overtures has been less than enthusiastic. There have been consistent attacks along the LoC, leading to a high number of civilian casualties, while the Indian misadventure of 2019 in which New Delhi's jets (one of which was shot down) violated Pakistani airspace, is a prime example of the brinkmanship this country's eastern neighbour has indulged in ever since the BJP took the reins of power. And of course, matters in India-held Kashmir have been further complicated after India annulled the occupied region's special constitutional status in August 2019, in effect to crush the Kashmiris' aspirations for freedom and dignity. In such a situation, India has clearly shown that it is not ready for peace.

However, Pakistan should continue its efforts to resolve the issue peacefully because a military confrontation in this region would be devastating, as the UN

chief has observed. But for peace to succeed, the UN as well as global powers must realise that India needs to change its belligerent posture.

It is not only Pakistan that has been having trouble along its border with India; the recent clashes on the India-Chinese frontier show that New Delhi is in an aggressive mood and keeps provoking its neighbours. There is still a chance to bring peace to South Asia if India responds positively to Pakistan's desire for dialogue. However, if the politicians and generals in India keep making warlike noises and threatening this country, they should understand that Pakistan can and will defend itself.

Published in Dawn, February 1st, 2021

Source: <https://www.dawn.com/news/1604825/kashmir-challenge>

Pakistan's Latest Talks Offer on Kashmir By Kamran Yousaf

Pakistan observed the Kashmir Solidarity Day on February 5. The day is observed annually since 1990 when late chief of Jamaat-e-Islami Qazi Hussain Ahmed first floated this idea to express support to the Kashmiris. Occupied Kashmir has remained a thorn in the relationship between Pakistan and India since 1947. The two nuclear-armed neighbours have fought wars, and intermittent rounds of talks have failed to break the deadlock.

What changed of late was that India made Kashmir a “non-negotiable” issue after it unilaterally revoked the special status of the disputed territory. The August 5, 2019 move was also in violation of the 1972 Shimla Accord that prohibits both countries from changing the status quo till the final settlement. The unilateral step coupled with Modi government's approach diminished any chances of a dialogue between the two countries on the Kashmir dispute. Prime Minister Imran Khan, though, before the re-election bid of Modi thought that the hardline Indian leader might be good for taking unpopular decisions. But contrary to his expectations, PM Modi, emboldened by the heavy mandate second time around, did exactly the opposite. What happened post-August 5, 2019 saw the bilateral relationship dip further. PM Imran, who earlier was willing to go the extra mile to resolve all festering issues with India, took the attack to Modi, branding him as Hitler.

But on Kashmir Solidarity Day, Imran again offered what appears to be an ‘olive branch’ to India. “If India demonstrates sincerity in seeking a just solution to the Kashmir issue, in accordance with UNSC resolutions, we are ready to take two steps forward for peace,” he tweeted.

Two days before the PM's tweet, Army Chief General Qamar Javed Bajwa had to say this: “It is time to extend hand of peace in all directions. Pakistan and India must also resolve the longstanding issue of Jammu and Kashmir in a dignified and peaceful manner as per the aspirations of people of Jammu and Kashmir and bring this human tragedy to its logical end.”

Both statements may be consistent with Pakistan's policy of seeking a solution of Kashmir through dialogue but given the current hostilities between the two neighbours, its significance cannot be understated.

If diplomatic sources are to be believed, both PM Imran and the Army Chief made these statements in view of the change of government in the US. Pakistan, through these gestures, wants to signal the Biden administration that it is not the hurdle in regional peace. President Joe Biden in his maiden foreign policy speech suggested the US emphasis would be on "diplomacy, democracy and human rights". Pakistani officials think that unlike Donald Trump, Biden would seek a multilateral approach on global issues. Trump did offer mediation on Kashmir but never pressed the Modi government when it resisted the offer. Biden, although would still seek deepening strategic partnership with India due to China factor and is likely to return to old style US diplomacy. It is expected that the Biden administration would push India behind the scenes to lower tensions with Pakistan and improve the situation in Occupied Kashmir. It was because of this that the Indian government recently restored 4G internet services in the disputed territory. The move is aimed at pre-empting a possible US criticism of India's gross human rights abuses in the occupied territory.

Meanwhile, it is highly unlikely that India would respond positively to Pakistan's latest offer. What Pakistan needs to do is to have internal consensus. On the face of it, everyone is on the same page on the Kashmir issue. But when opposition and government leaders hold separate rallies in Muzaffarabad on Kashmir Day, it certainly does not send the right message!

Published in The Express Tribune, February 8th, 2021.

Source: <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2283034/pakistans-latest-talks-offer-on-kashmir>

Improving Ties With Iran | Editorial

Ambassador Seyed Mohammad Ali Hosseini's statement announced Iran's intention of working towards better ties with Pakistan and its government. This fits perfectly in Pakistan's larger focus on establishing closer ties in the region, as the cooperation will be based on issues of mutual importance, like trade and border control. If all continues to go according to plan, the potential of such a relationship with an old partner is bound to be fruitful given our interest aligns completely.

The statement, on the 42nd anniversary of the Islamic Revolution, stated that Iran is looking to corroborate with countries like Pakistan which can help usher in national progress and transform the region into a more successful and productive one. It is good to see such an initiative come from their government, especially considering the efforts that Pakistan has been making to incorporate Iran in its foreign policy priorities. Now, with mutual interests assured, issues of border control, trade and diplomatic support can improve substantially. Such a degree of collaboration within the region signals towards a unified community that is striving to promote peace and prosperity with the region.

Furthermore, the fact that New Delhi's persistent attempts in securing the support and friendship of Iran is proving to be futile when taking into account the closeness with which the country functions with China. Wanting to bring about harmony in the region, Iran has clearly chosen the route it wants to take and fortunately, Pakistan is looks to be a key component going forward. This mutually beneficial partnership looks to be starting with the first major initiative, the Turkey-Iran-Pakistan rail link. Greater connectivity only sets the stage for more collaboration.

Source: <https://nation.com.pk/11-Feb-2021/improving-ties-with-iran>

Chinese New Year gift to Pakistan & The World By Sultan M Hali

CHINESE New Year, also known as Lunar New Year or Spring Festival, is China's most important festival. It is time for families to be together and celebrate the event. Last year, the outbreak of the global pandemic COVID-19 had forced the Chinese government to impose lockdown to protect the people from the ravages of the deadly disease and the Chinese had to miss out on mass celebrations. It goes to China's credit and resilience that it managed to sanitize its teeming millions, provide relief, food and much needed medicines and even set up hospitals in record time to provide relief to the beleaguered people. Chinese leadership led from the front, visiting COVID hotspots, supervising relief and encouraging its scientists and researchers to find a vaccine to provide immunity.

It is heartening that despite some of its detractors unfairly accusing China of hiding facts and exposing the world to the deadly virus, Beijing reached out to the hardest hit countries of the world, sending medical teams, much needed equipment and sharing its experience of formulating effective strategies to contain the pandemic. The jury is still out to determine the origin of COVID-19 but undeterred by the plethora of accusations, Chinese scientists developed the Sinopharm among others along with Russia's Sputnik V, and the west's Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna's COVID-19 vaccines. Unlike the western vaccine, the Chinese injections can be transported in normal temperatures and do not have to be kept at -80°C.

It was not Pakistan's serious participation in the clinical tests of the Chinese vaccines that qualified it to become the first country in the world to receive vaccines donated by the Chinese government but its sincerity in extending a helping hand in its moment of crisis. Despite lockdowns and travel restrictions when the pandemic was at its peak, Pakistan's President Dr. Arif Alvi flew into Beijing along with medical teams and equipment to express solidarity with the people of China.

President Xi Jinping, a master statesman and one who believes in sharing the pain of others, knew that while the opulent nations of the world will grab the first

available vaccines to provide immunity to themselves; the developing countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America will be left behind till the World Health Organization (WHO) and humanitarian agencies will extend much needed help, which may be too little and too late. US President Trump, in 2020, soon after the outbreak of the pandemic, instead of lending much needed support to WHO and the world, had withdrawn US membership of the International Health Organization and stopped its funding. This rash decision hurt not only the world but USA itself, which suffered the highest number of casualties owing to COVID-19. Mercifully, as one of his first executive decisions taken on assuming the mantle of US President, Joe Biden reversed numerous decisions adopted by Trump including restoring membership of WHO and support for Climate Change policies.

Contrarily, despite the fact that China is leading the world with several vaccines in advanced stages of R&D and with ample production capacity, it signed an agreement with the Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunization (GAVI) on 8 October 2020, officially joining the COVID-19 Vaccines Global Access (COVAX), an initiative that aims to accelerate the development and manufacturing of vaccines for the COVID-19 and ensure that every country enjoys equitable access to the vaccines. The initiative intends to provide two billion doses of COVID-19 vaccines for higher-income self-financing countries and lower-income funded nations by the end of 2021.

At the request of the WHO, China has decided to offer 10 million doses of vaccines to COVAX, mainly to meet the urgent need of the developing world. The containment situation faced by all countries is still very serious, and China is also facing a huge domestic demand for vaccines. But still, it is doing whatever is possible to promote the equitable distribution of vaccines. Coming back to Sino-Pakistan strategic and deep rooted ties, the Solar New Year, celebrated by the world on January 1st and the Chinese Lunar New Year, which falls on Friday, February 12, 2021, beginning a year of the Ox, brought glad tidings for Pakistan.

On 31 January, China provided 500,000 doses of Covid-19 vaccine to Pakistan. The precious gift, which will save countless lives, was brought by special PAF air transport aircraft from Beijing, although the Chinese side had proposed to send them by their own aircraft. At a solemn ceremony held at Nur Khan Base in Islamabad, 0.5 million doses of the eagerly awaited vaccines were handed over

to Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi, who thanked Chinese President Xi Jinping for giving us the Sinopharm coronavirus vaccine.

On the eve of the Chinese Lunar Year, China's military took another unprecedented step by delivering a batch of Covid-19 vaccines to the Pakistan Army. However, keeping with the Pakistan Armed Forces' traditional spirit of 'nation comes first, always and every time' it decided to contribute complete vaccine donation, by PLA to Pakistan military, in the national vaccine drive to be administered to front line healthcare workers across Pakistan who are the real heroes fighting against pandemic and saving precious lives. It is befitting that our Chinese brothers are celebrating this New Year—the year of the Ox — since this animal is gifted with great patience and a desire to make progress, uninfluenced by others or the environment, but persist in doing things according to their ideals and capabilities. Happy Chinese Lunar New Year!

—The writer is retired PAF Group Captain and a TV talk show host.

Source: <https://pakobserver.net/chinese-new-year-gift-to-pakistan-the-world/>

Peaceful Initiative | Editorial

In light of the recent statements made by Pakistan's Chief of Army Staff (COAS) and Foreign Office (FO) Spokesman, after making yet another overture to the Indian government, Pakistan has asked it to reciprocate for conflict resolution. Our stance has always remained the same; if New Delhi is willing to resolve core areas of contention between India and Pakistan, like the occupation of IIOJK, then our authorities are willing to extend a friendly hand to India. After decades of struggle, surely the region deserves some relief from a permanent contentious environment.

Both officials, FO Zahid Hafeez Chaudhri and COAS General Qamar Javed Bajwa, echoed sentiments in line with the country's stance of cooperation. They highlighted the fact that no progress can be made until and unless the Indian government accepts its illegal and brutal actions in IIOJK and pulls out from the region. This is only rational considering the degree of unconstitutional harm and oppression being carried out in Kashmir. The least that can be demanded is the restoration of the Kashmiri populations' rights and adherence to the resolutions passed by the UN Security Council.

For too long, the tussle between India and Pakistan has disrupted the entire region's potential. In recognition of this, Pakistan has opened up the line for peaceful resolution for all conflicts on multiple occasions but they have not been taken up by the Indian government. The hope is that now, in the face of increasing international scrutiny as well, India will choose the route that takes them towards redemption.

Source: <https://nation.com.pk/06-Feb-2021/peaceful-initiative>

Reforming the Bureaucracy | Editorial

Bureaucrats in Punjab better grit their teeth for due diligence. Dissatisfied with the performance of local governments, the Prime Minister Office has issued seven show-cause notices and 263 warning letters to derelict officials over lacklustre response to public complaints. The PMO should be appreciated for showing no special treatment to deputy commissioners and assistant commissioners whilst directing them to be more vigilant.

Ever since PM Khan had waged a call for better governance in December, his administration is busy coming up with changes that would make the bureaucratic structure more responsive to public needs. The premier had valiantly noted, “We will not transfer a corrupt bureaucrat, but will sack him.” In his crusade against under-performing and corrupt officials, PM Khan has repeatedly pointed to public complaints as an instrument to bring change as well as hold concerned officials accountable.

A dysfunctional and inefficient bureaucracy can only imperil any country’s economic and social goals (as opposed to its Weberian correlation with growth). This is exactly what is at play in Pakistan. A visit to any district or divisional office will lay bare the masses’ distrust in the state’s willingness to solve their problems. Sadly, the British model of governance that we adopted over seven decades ago remains more or less unchanged. Little has been done to date to make the public servants more responsive to public needs. Considering the steel frame of the bureaucratic elite that is resistant to any change whatsoever, the government is at least trying to come up with a new form of local government. Ergo, something worthy of celebration!

Still, whether layers-upon-layers of bureaucracy—clothed in new procedures and jargons—would actually bring positive changes in the lives of citizens is not known yet.

Further, if the government actually aspires to deliver its electoral promise of change, why hasn’t it taken to task the inefficient officers sitting at the helm of various fast-decaying institutes? Once considered the pride of the nation, our flag carrier is now widely notorious for making dreams come true for headline writers. Only fast-track reforms based on training and infrastructural support can enthuse

a new life in the airline gasping for oxygen on its death-bed. It goes without saying that these changes can be brought forward by restructuring the institution sans any politicking.

Given the millions who travel on railways, looking after railways is an enormous undertaking. Unfortunately, with over 100 accidents in 2019 alone, nobody seems serious about the incompetence synonymous with the enterprise. Employees that are neglecting their duties are the real culprits of its downfall.

Same is the case with institutional rot plaguing the loss-making Pakistan Steel Mills. Decades of neglect have made our police force incapable of protecting us against crime; something that can only be improved under the guidance of a capable hand. Why are all these institutions still waiting for a swish of the miracle wand?

The ruling party's good intention behind reforming bureaucracy cannot be doubted but isn't the road to hell paved with those, anyway! Where are the 200 top professionals that were supposed to lead institutions in Naya Pakistan? Never mind enjoying the expertise of expats fascinated by an opportunity to rebuild their country, the state has not even found their appropriate substitutes at home. There is an increasing reliance on Pakistan's military in various administrative and executive institutions. Let's talk about an effective top-to-bottom overhaul instead of cosmetic reforms! *

Source: <https://dailytimes.com.pk/724265/reforming-the-bureaucracy/>

Pakistan in Diplomatic Push to Exit FATF Grey List By Kamran Yousaf

ISLAMABAD:Pakistan has reached out to member countries of the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) in an effort to garner their support for exiting from the grey list, just days ahead of a meeting of the global watchdog on terror financing.

The FATF plenary is set to begin on February 22. This year the session would be held virtually. The four-day meeting would decide whether to keep Pakistan in the grey list or not.

Although Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi sounded optimistic about the outcome of the upcoming FATF meeting, officials admitted that Pakistan would remain in the grey list at least until June.

Ahead of the FATF plenary, Pakistan has been seeking the support of member countries for an on-site visit, a crucial step — if agrees — will brighten Islamabad's chances of formally exiting the grey list by June.

"If agrees, the FATF on-site visit will help Pakistan come out of the grey list by June this year," said a senior Pakistani official dealing with the matter.

"Over the past few days, the Foreign Office has been inviting ambassadors and diplomats of FATF-member countries to brief them about the 'substantive progress' made by Pakistan to implement the 27-point action plan," officials familiar with the development told The Express Tribune.

The Foreign Office authorities have been telling the FATF-member countries to look at Pakistan's case 'objectively' and not to allow the process to be politicised by certain countries.

Pakistan has requested the countries to support its case and allow the on-site inspection by the FATF, a crucial step that leads to the removal of the country from the grey list.

Pakistan has been on the 'grey list' since June 2018 for failing to take adequate steps to counter terror financing, money laundering and ensure successful prosecution of terrorists.

Pakistan had been given a 27-point action plan to get out of the grey list. Islamabad was given multiple deadlines to implement the plan. In October last year, the FATF acknowledged Pakistan's progress but called for the full implementation of the plan by February this year.

Ahead of the plenary meeting, Pakistan reiterated its commitment to implement the FATF action plan.

"FATF had assessed Pakistan to have completed 21 of the 27 Action Items under the current Action Plan. In the remaining six partially addressed items, significant progress has been made by Pakistan, which is duly acknowledged by the wider FATF Membership. Pakistan remains committed to completing its FATF Action Plan," said Foreign Office spokesperson Zahid Hafiz Chaudhri.

Pakistan feels that India is using the FATF forum to target the country. Special Assistant to the Prime Minister on National Security Dr Moeed Yusuf has said the FATF's grey listing of Pakistan was more of a 'political' decision than 'technical'.

In order to counter the Indian lobby, Pakistan is in contact with the FATF-member countries to ensure they view Pakistan's progress objectively.

A foreign diplomat, who was briefed by Pakistani authorities on the FATF progress, told The Express Tribune that he had 'sympathy' with Pakistan but added that his country would take a position based on the expert opinion.

"If technical experts and other countries are happy with the progress of Pakistan, we will not hesitate in supporting you," said the diplomat, whose country is considered close to the US and India. The diplomat insisted that despite being close to the US and India, his country's decision would be based on an independent assessment.

Sources said Pakistan was asking the FATF member countries to acknowledge the progress and support its case at a time when the country was making sincere efforts at addressing deficiencies and other shortcomings in its system.

Source: <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2284600/pakistan-in-diplomatic-push-to-exit-fatf-grey-list>

CSS Reforms | Editorial

The federal government promises to cleanse the civil service of an arbitrary promotion process along with corrupt officers through the new reforms proposed by the Pakistan Administrative Service (PAS). While the authorities may be on the right track, there are still certain concerns being expressed about the new reforms that must be heard and responded to. Such small, but necessary, actions let the people know that such initiatives are as consultative as is being claimed.

According to Dr Ishrat Hussain, the Adviser to the PM on Institutional Reforms, the CSS reforms were only passed after the expertise of more than 1900 officers was sought, in addition to over 60 sessions of intense discussions. As was needed, all the stakeholders came to the logical conclusion of there being a need to weed out all the causes of inefficiency with the CSS.

As such, to force all the fraudulent officers into retirement and creating a trackable promotion process was the right move forward and any controversy in this regard needs to be clarified immediately.

Otherwise, vital progress bears the risk of being derailed by those who claim that not only are the reforms outdated or repetitive but that the PAS has been in charge of the reins for a significant period of time since they were initially called the District Management Group—those in charge of creating such structures within the CSS. These internal bureaucratic squabbles should not tarnish a process that could bring positive restructuring.

It is imperative that the government, before taking any further steps to modify the CSS, takes a step back to assure the public, officials and relevant institutions that cooperation is its primary goal when embarking upon such tasks. Furthermore, it can clarify the credentials of the PAS to ensure that such misunderstandings are clarified immediately.

Source: <https://nation.com.pk/18-Feb-2021/css-reforms>

Afghanistan Peace? | Editorial

THOUGH the situation on the ground in Afghanistan is far from ideal, should the parallel peace processes collapse — between the Afghan Taliban and the US/Nato alliance and between the Taliban and the government in Kabul — the situation will degenerate further. After the Biden administration's arrival in Washington many questions hang in the air about the fate of the Trump-era US-Taliban peace deal. After all, the White House has said it will “review” the deal while Nato officials have recently said they have deferred a decision on troop withdrawal from Afghanistan. Foreign troops are due to exit the country by May 1, as per the US-Taliban deal. It is in this atmosphere of uncertainty that Prime Minister Imran Khan's plea for all Afghan actors to seize the opportunity for peace makes sense. He reiterated this point during a meeting with an Afghan delegation in Islamabad on Thursday.

The fact is that the air of confusion is having an impact on the peace process. For example, talks between Kabul and the Taliban in Doha are frozen, while the Taliban have issued a dire warning to Nato vis-à-vis troop pullout deferment. The fact is that all sides — foreign forces, the Taliban as well as the Afghan government — need to do more to revive the faltering peace process. The Taliban shoulder a fair share of the blame, as they have continued to stick to the battlefield while talking peace. This hardly creates a conducive atmosphere for dialogue. In fact, a recent US report has said the Taliban are not honouring their part of the deal. However, the dilemma here is that foreign forces cannot stay in Afghanistan indefinitely. In reality, it is the meddling of foreigners — the Soviets and later the Americans — that played a major factor in destabilising Afghanistan over the last few decades, along with the endless lust for power of Afghan strongmen and warlords.

As we have written in these columns before, the very brief window for a negotiated settlement in Afghanistan is closing fast. Should the Taliban abandon the peace process, it will be back to square one. The Taliban themselves need to show more commitment to the peace process by reducing violence. The US, on the other hand, needs to send a clear message that it intends to stick to dialogue. Ultimately, it is down to the two major Afghan players in this geopolitical game — the government in Kabul and the Taliban — to decide on the future of their country. If they are unable to reach a modus vivendi, then outsiders will continue

to interfere in Afghanistan. Several generations in Afghanistan have seen nothing but war; it is time those that wield power in that country took bold decisions and put an end to this long nightmare of the Afghan people.

Published in Dawn, February 20th, 2021

Source: <https://www.dawn.com/news/1608365/afghanistan-peace>

Pakistan Backs Russian Bid for Afghan Peace By Kamran Yousaf

Pakistan will attend a crucial meeting later this month in Moscow, which is being convened by Russia with an aim to restart the stalled Afghan peace process, officials and diplomatic sources confirmed here on Sunday.

Russia has launched a diplomatic initiative to arrange a meeting of Pakistan, the US, China and Iran in order to develop a “collective mechanism” for the Afghan peace efforts.

Moscow is also pushing for hosting the stalled intra-Afghan dialogue. The talks that began in Doha in September made slow progress because of differences between the two sides. The situation became further uncertain after the new US administration decided to review the February 29, 2020 deal.

Against this backdrop, Russia is making efforts to seek resumption of intra-Afghan talks and also broader regional consensus.

For this purpose, Special Representative of the Russian President for Afghanistan, Ambassador Zamir Kabulov recently visited Islamabad and sought Pakistan’s support for Moscow’s initiative.

Although there is no official confirmation, diplomatic sources told The Express Tribune that Pakistan backed the initiative and will attend the meeting.

“Pakistan supports any effort that contributes to peace in Afghanistan,” a source familiar with the development said.

Moscow hosted a similar meeting in 2018 where Afghan Taliban were for the first time given an international stage. The US attended the meeting as an observer. It is not clear if the US will formally join Moscow’s initiative but Iran and China are certain to attend the meeting.

The development comes at a time when the peace process hangs in the balance after the US and NATO indicated that they may not withdraw their troops by May 1 as agreed in the US-Taliban deal.

The US and Afghan government have accused the Taliban of not fully implementing the Doha accord. The US and NATO insist the troops withdrawal is condition-based. Taliban, however, rejected the allegations that they were not implementing the Doha agreement.

In a statement, the Taliban listed a number of steps to implement the agreement. The statement noted that not a single American soldier was killed since the deal was signed a year ago.

Russia backed the Taliban's claim as Ambassador Kabulov said the insurgent group "flawlessly" implemented the deal. He instead accused the US of not adhering to the accord.

Moscow is not only seeking resumption of intra-Afghan talks but also proposing an interim government by including all factions, including the Taliban. The Ashraf Ghani administration related sharply to the Russian proposal and insisted that the current administration had been given a five-year mandate.

With these divergences, Moscow's meeting will be seen with a lot of skepticism both by the Afghan government and the US. But Pakistan feels that Russia is an important player and hence has a role in the Afghan peace process.

Key regional countries, including Pakistan, China, Russia and Iran, have broader consensus on the Afghan peace process. They want a political settlement of the Afghan war and also recognise the Taliban as a political entity. The Taliban representatives have in recent years frequently travelled to these countries.

The convergence among these key regional players is aimed at preventing Afghanistan slipping into a civil war, something that will pose threat to these countries.

Source: <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2285478/pakistan-backs-russian-bid-for-afghan-peace>

Kashmir on The International Radar By

Sajjad Shaukat

Once, Abraham Lincoln said, “You can fool all the people some of the time, and some of the people all the time, but you cannot fool all the people all the time.” This applies aptly to the Indian fanatic Prime Minister Narendra Modi –the leader of the extremist ruling party BJP.

In this regard, the Modi-led government unilaterally abrogated the special status of the disputed territory of Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IIOJK) on August 5, 2019, when their parliament revoked articles 35A and 370 of the Constitution. The act split IIOJK into two territories that were to be ruled directly by New Delhi. The purpose was to turn a Muslim majority into a minority. Other moves such as amendment of the law, allowing Indian citizens to buy land in the IIOJK and the issuance of domicile certificates to more than 600,000 non-Kashmiris were part of the same scheme.

Now, more than 18 months have passed but India has continued the lockdown in the IIOJK. New Delhi has deployed more than 900,000 military troops who have martyred thousands of innocent Kashmiris through brutal tactics like the use of pellet guns and phosphorus bombs. They have even continued shelling inside the Pakistani side of Kashmir by violating the ceasefire agreement. In support of this, other Indian rulers are also escalating tensions with Pakistan to divert attention from the drastic situation of IIOJK and its other internal issues

The Kashmiri tragedy started after 1947 when they were denied their right to self-determination which was recognised by the UN resolutions. On February 5, 1964, India backed out of its promise of holding a plebiscite in accordance with the UN Security Council’s resolution of April 21, 1948. Instead, in March 1965, the Indian Parliament passed a bill which declared Kashmir as an integral part of the Indian union.

Since 1989, the Kashmiris have already been enduring various forms of state terrorism; no Indian soldier has ever been taken to task. Hence, since the military clampdown started, the Indian armed forces accelerated the employment of cruel tactics. Almost, 100,000 Kashmiris have died in the past 30 years.

Despite the ban on journalists' entry in the IIOJK, some reports and images are appearing in the world and on social media that show extrajudicial killings of the innocent people by the ruthless Indian forces. This dreadful practice could be judged from the martyrdom of a 65 year old individual, Bashir Ahmed Khan, on July 1, last year. He was dragged out of his car and shot dead by paramilitary troopers in Sopore, Srinagar. His three-year-old toddler grandson, who was travelling with him, was later pictured sitting on his chest.

Amnesty International said, "It is a breach of the best interests of the child principle as required to be the basis of any action by authorities under the Convention on the Rights of the Child, to which India is a state party." The UNO stated, "Whosoever responsible for the killing in Sopore, has to be made to account for it." Clearly, this merciless event displays that New Delhi does not have any qualms about murdering any Kashmiri civilian.

Taking cognizance of the Kashmiris' plight, UN human rights experts called on India and the international community to take urgent action to address the alarming human rights situation in Jammu and Kashmir on August 4, 2020. They asked to investigate all cases of human rights violations, including extrajudicial killings, enforced disappearances, torture and arbitrary detentions.

Last year, Amnesty International said that it was, "stopping its work in India because the government has frozen its bank accounts for highlighting rights violations in Jammu and Kashmir...the government had sought to punish it for that". In the recent past, the UN Security Council, in its meetings, has reiterated that the Kashmir issue requires to be settled according to the related Security Council resolutions thrice. Furthermore, several British parliamentarians strongly agreed with Pakistan's positions on the Modi government's brutal treatment of the residents of the Indian occupied territory and gross human rights violations. Even the European Parliament has repeatedly indicated that the people of IIOJK had been subjected to intolerable suppression of their freedom and fundamental rights.

In the latest statement, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, who urged the resolution of the Kashmir dispute in accordance with the UN resolutions, warned that any military confrontation between two nuclear powers—Pakistan and

India—would be a disaster for both countries and the whole world. He added, “His good offices are always available for mediation.”

As part of Islamabad’s diplomatic efforts, the New York State Assembly had passed a resolution on February 3, this year to observe February 5, 2021 as the Kashmir-American Day. The day was observed to express wholehearted support for the Pakistani nation in the just struggle for the Kashmiri people and in securing their inalienable right to self-determination under the UN resolutions.

Moreover, Indian fake news, websites and accounts on social media against Pakistan and IIOJK have come to the limelight of the global media. In recent revelations, the EU DisinfoLab disclosed the leaked WhatsApp chats of the Indian Channel Republic TV, Arnab Goswami, who exposed the sinister designs of the Modi’s government to blame Pakistan for the false Pulwama attack and a failed air strike on Balakot in 2019. Now, Indian perennial state terrorism and lockdown in the IIOJK is not internal issue of New Delhi, as it is an international one.

Source: <https://nation.com.pk/22-Feb-2021/kashmir-on-the-international-radar>

Diplomatic Gains Made | Editorial

Ever since Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) has come into power, the government has been working hard on improving its relations with other states. An earlier visit of Foreign Minister (FM) Shah Mehmood Qureshi to Egypt and the recently concluded visit of Prime Minister (PM) Imran Khan to Sri Lanka demonstrate Pakistan's shift from geo-strategic to geo-economic tendencies in its foreign policy.

PM Khan's visit to Sri Lanka must be seen as a foreign policy win. The PM and his Sri Lankan counterpart Mahinda Rajapaksa reaffirmed their resolve to work together, which indicates that the leaders understand the importance of cooperation for growth.

Historically, the two sides have always enjoyed warm relations. In Sri Lanka's offensive against the rebels in particular, Islamabad and Colombo became much closer due to the support we provided. Building on that, PM Khan's announcement of a military credit line worth \$50 million will take the military cooperation between the two nations to new heights. The line will expand security sector relations between Pakistan and Sri Lanka.

Ever since Sri Lanka has managed to clamp down on insurgency, Pakistan has made even greater strides in developing armaments and defence equipment. Perhaps Colombo can be sold the indigenous JF-17s and other technology we are now producing independently.

Likewise, the signing of memorandums of understanding (MoUs) in many sectors, including higher education, IT and commerce and an informal commitment to take up the bilateral trade to \$1 billion will bring the two sides closer than ever.

PM Khan's decision to pitch the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) to Sri Lanka reflects our desire to play an integral part in regional development and peace. It suffices to conclude that Khan's tour was a very fruitful trip to a country that we have had productive and meaningful relations with in a broad sphere of issues. Khan's efforts to reach out to countries within the region are praiseworthy.

These endeavours show Pakistan's commitment to regional peace and prosperity. It is clear that this visit was closely watched by experts and policymakers alike in Delhi. Our overtures of peace might find more traction than any war-mongering efforts by spoilers in South Asia.

Source: <https://nation.com.pk/26-Feb-2021/diplomatic-gains-made>

Khan's State Visit to Sri Lanka | Editorial

The fanfare and pomp that welcomed PM Khan as he touched down on Sri Lankan soil on Tuesday was a pleasant surprise. A special documentary recalling his cricketing days has, especially, warmed many hearts, his, and would be remembered for long as a great gesture from a longtime friend.

Pakistan and Sri Lanka have traditionally enjoyed cordial relations, notably after Pak Army lent the latter military support in the closing stages of its civil war. Building on this connection, PM Khan inked an agreement to increase intelligence sharing between the two countries and even offered an olive branch of a \$50m line of credit for defence purchases. Now, some might criticise his move (along with his Rs 52 million sport development fund and 100 medical scholarship) as a squandering of precious resources amid particularly pressing financial times. However, Khan's strategic landing should be compared to Chinese and Indian vigorous efforts to woo this crucial player on the Indian Ocean. Pitching the CPEC as a means to enhance bilateral trade was a much-needed move since the two-way trade is relatively limited (\$359 million last year) when the potential stands at \$2.7 billion. Pakistani sugar and cement, for instance, can go like hot cakes in the island nation if the government is willing to focus on these exports. Since Lankan investors are finally warming up to South Asian markets, now is our chance to sweep in and minimise the serious COVID hit taken by our economy.

Warm welcomes aside, the Sri Lanka visit has not offered the prime minister any opportunity to raise any foreign policy issues. Having gained an international reputation for taking up the issue of Islamophobia with great passion, Khan was expected to discuss both the Kashmir issue and the forced cremation controversy that has lately embroiled the Rajapaksa brothers. However, last week, his scheduled address to the Sri Lankan parliament was cancelled citing the pandemic. Given Colombo's refusal of 15 Muslim parliamentarians request to meet PM Khan, it would be worthwhile to consider speculations regarding Sri Lanka's attempt to avoid confrontation with India. Had the premier raised the growing antipathy towards Lankan Muslims (Buddhist protests on animal sacrifices, forced cremation of COVID patients) or New Delhi's expansionist agenda in Kashmir valley, he was bound to ruffle some feathers in India.

Khan's visit—the first since the pandemic struck the world—calls for celebration over the sole fact that things are returning to normal. Therefore, he cannot, and should not, be blamed for prioritising his country's relations over the problems brewing within another nation. Respecting your allies' sensitivities is what a shrewd statesman should prudently pursue, especially if he wants the relationship to stay the course. Yet, if he could have slid in just enough time to answer a 13-year-old's call for help (even using a low tone), he would have gained both humanitarian and domestic wins. *

Source: <https://dailytimes.com.pk/728073/khans-state-visit-to-sri-lanka/>

Hoping For Best: Future Of US-Pakistan Relations Under Biden Administration – Analysis By Khawaja Dawood Tariq*

As Mr. Biden was sworn in, policymakers in Islamabad took a sigh of hope. After the contentious Trump presidency, Islamabad was hoping for a reset of its relation with the US. President Biden was awarded Pakistan's second-highest civilian award back in 2008 in recognition of his continued support.

Though the U.S and Pakistan have long-standing strategic relations, it won't change the fact that their relations have always been transactional. It has always been about what Pakistan can contribute to help secure U.S interests and how Pakistan can extract concessions from the former to secure such interests. The long-standing U.S-Pakistan relations deteriorated under Obama and Trump administrations. The Trump administration not only stopped financial aid earmarked to Pakistan, but unceremoniously and unprecedentedly also blocked the Pakistani military's access to U.S military institutes. In order to reset U.S-Pakistan relations, both countries would have to reevaluate regional and strategic dynamics and come up with a new set of policy tools to engage. This could be achieved by restarting the U.S-Pakistan Strategic dialogue.

Afghanistan remains the most pressing area of concern for both the US and Pakistan. Being committed to promoting peace in the region, Pakistan has played an instrumental role in creating a conducive environment for the peaceful settlement of the Afghan issue. However, the recent increase in violence and the Biden administration's decision to review the withdrawal agreement would likely have an adverse effect on the success of the intra-Afghan dialogue. Both the countries would have to find concrete confidence-building measures on a rather urgent basis to ensure that the Afghan conflict can finally be resolved.

Pakistan's economy cannot withstand any economic blowback that comes with getting blacklisted by FATF. Pakistan has already complied with the demands placed by FATF. However, the US has used FATF as a tool to exert influence on Pakistan to manipulate its strategic direction. Now that the Afghan peace process is towards its conclusion, given that all sides can keep their end of the bargain.

The US would have to create an environment for Pakistan to exit out of the FATF grey list so that it may start to rebuild its economy. Unfortunately, keeping Pakistan occupied in FATF would only delight the Indian policymakers. This would ultimately let the region remain unstable. Given the significance of Pakistan for regional peace and stability, an economically strong Pakistan would be in a much better position to play its positive role in this regard.

Indo-U.S relations have come a long way since the days of the cold war. The two have developed a very robust strategic partnership over the last decade. India is being considered a regional bulwark against the rise of China. India features heavily in U.S designs to contain China. Policymakers in Pakistan believe that the U.S is empowering India at Islamabad's expense to contain China. Such favoritism is very dangerous for the strategic stability of the region. Both sides need to find a comprehensive balance that could address Pakistan's concern vis-à-vis the US' Indo-Pacific policy in which India has been given a major role by the US. In this regard, a good start would be to exert pressure on the Indian government to allow international media and human rights observers' access to Illegally India Occupied Jammu & Kashmir (IIOJ&K).

President Biden in his maiden foreign policy speech asserted that "America is back. Diplomacy is back at the center of our foreign policy". He was referring to democratic values-based diplomacy that is cherished by the State Department. These values include human rights, rule of law, and democracy. Indian actions in Kashmir are a stringent rebuke to these values. Similarly, India's slide into extremist society and an authoritarian regime should be of grave concern to the US.

In the same vein, the Sino-Pakistan strategic partnership is of concern to the US. The latter has tried pressuring Pakistan to distance itself from China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). A reset process can allow Pakistan the opportunity to address concerns raised by Washington. A comprehensive dialogue would not only clear such concerns, but it might also end up in the development of a mechanism for the U.S to become part of CPEC. At the very least, the US' business firms should take advantage of the free trade agreement between China and Pakistan and use Pakistan as a regional base of operations for their trade with China.

The US and Pakistan had long enjoyed strong economic relations. The former used to be Pakistan's largest trading partner since overtaken by China. Even today, the U.S is one of the biggest markets for Pakistani exports. The new administration has to devise a strategy to once again develop strong economic ties between both countries. Strong economic relations with the U.S in turn would likely allow Pakistan to balance its relations with both the economic superpowers.

The change of guard in Washington is always considered an opportunity for a reset in U.S-Pakistan relations. Mr. Biden is believed to be an old foreign policy hack. Owing to its geostrategic location, Pakistan would continue to play an important part in regional and international politics; and no one knows this better than POTUS himself. The US has long used Pakistan to secure its interest and left Islamabad to dry when it was of no use. Given this approach of the US, policymakers in Islamabad are very rightly reluctant to trust the US again and again. The mutual distrust needs to be resolved and there might not be a more suitable administration than the Biden to carry out this task.

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Source: <https://www.eurasiareview.com/26022021-hoping-for-best-future-of-us-pakistan-relations-under-biden-administration-analysis/>

LoC Ceasefire | Editorial

THE Pakistan-India relationship is known for its complexity and bitterness, but there are times when surprises of a more positive kind are sprung. The recent decision by both militaries to honour the 2003 ceasefire along the LoC certainly qualifies as a pleasant surprise, considering the acrimony that has marked relations of recent.

In a joint statement released after hotline contact between the respective directors general military operations, “both sides agreed for strict observance of all agreements ... along the LoC and all other sectors”. Considering that two years ago on this date both nuclear-armed rivals were at the brink of war, this is a welcome development. Moreover, too many innocent lives have been lost in cross-border shelling and ceasefire violations last year.

The move has not gone unnoticed, with the US State Department spokesman welcoming the move and encouraging continued “efforts to improve communication between the two sides”. Washington has also urged Islamabad and New Delhi to hold direct parleys on Kashmir.

It is difficult to say in concrete terms whether this development is the result of bilateral backchannel contacts between Pakistan and India, or if the new US administration has ‘nudged’ both actors to try and resolve their differences. Regardless of the impetus, the fact that both sides are talking instead of facing off at the border heralds a welcome change in the region, especially if the bellicosity that was emerging from New Delhi not too long ago is remembered.

And while the statement covers purely military matters along the LoC, buried within it are the seeds of normalisation, should both sides — particularly India — wish to pursue deconfliction. The “DGMOs agreed to address each other’s core issues/concerns which have propensity to disturb peace and lead to violence”, the statement says. Of course, from Pakistan’s perspective Kashmir is the core issue, and it is hoped that this and other irritants to peace are eventually addressed in a frank and progressive manner by both sides.

However, no one should be under the illusion that the bitterness afflicting bilateral ties will magically disappear on the basis of one statement. Peace-building is a

long and arduous process, and when the relationship is as complex as that of Pakistan and India, things will take time to fall into place. As for external players, if the US is serious about peace in South Asia, it should clearly let New Delhi know that dialogue with Pakistan needs to be continued.

In the short term, the development bodes well for the people living along the LoC, who have paid with their lives due to Indian aggression. In the longer view, if New Delhi genuinely wants peace with Pakistan, it should make efforts towards restarting the dialogue process. Confidence-building measures will be more effective once political temperatures cool and India reviews its disastrous policy in held Kashmir.

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Source: <https://www.dawn.com/news/1609662/loc-ceasefire>

Emergence of Regionalism and Pak-China-Russia Axis By Abdul Shakoor Shah

THE multi and unipolar rink has turned Russia to the East. China and Russia, being important regional players, have the same stance about the unipolar world and U.S. supremacy.

The emergence of regionalism and the current regional structural design of Asia-Pacific have provided Moscow a platform to get into regional organizations along with other key players.

The emergence of regional organizations such as Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) and ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) spectacularly fortified bilateral relations of Russia with both China and India.

But India aligned itself with the US, dreaming regional hegemony and is out of regional players.

China and Russia established the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) which is constantly expanding. In 2014 Russia devised a new set of strategies in the aftermath of economic sanctions focusing the East wing.

The Russia-West tension forced the latter to integrate with nearby Asian economies. Earlier Moscow used to revolve around the former Soviet states and the West. Moscow's policy shift manifests it's striving to integrate itself into the Asia Pacific region.

On the international front it is an endeavour to balance against the US-led unipolar world and in regional perspective, Russia aspires to restrain the increasing US influence through actively participating in regional affairs and strengthening ties with the regional states. Pakistan, the only hurdle against India-US hegemonic designs in South Asia is inevitable for any regional alliance.

Russia's re-emergence on Asian stage will provide versatile possibilities for Pakistan in trade, energy, development and defence. Last year's Pak-Russia joint military drills are vivid proof of it.

Pakistan must focus on flexible foreign policy by engaging the USSR in regionalism.

One aspect of the Cold War was to get hold of South Asia and Moscow failed in gaining it for obvious reasons.

The changing geo-political and eco-strategic conditions of South Asia have attracted Russia to regain its lost rank.

Russia is actively engaging with Pakistan, China and other regional players excluding India on two main grounds firstly due to [India's] tense relations with Pakistan and China; secondly its alliance with the US.

South Asian strategic lines are being redrawn. The contradictory interests of the extra-regional actors in South Asia have muddled the region.

Russian involvement in South Asia is better to liaison with Mephistopheles than Lucifer.

Russia backing the future Russia has jumped to the scene as a challenge for the US after a long time.

The Russia-US transactional relations have been transitional as the US policies have been challenging to Russian clout and kudos.

The US influence in Russian neighbours is threatening the Russian security and its regional hold.

Russia is focusing to restrain the US influence by developing ties with China, Pakistan, Iran and the West.

Russia wishes to ward off the US from the Middle East and South Asia; that's why it has re-emerged on the Asian stage.

Moscow is not only hankering after countering Washington but it is also aiming at strengthening geo-political and eco-strategic ties with Asian states. Russian policy shift is not sudden but it was decided in the 90s to search for new allies.

Like the US, Russia is not unaware of the fact that 21st century is going to be Asian Century; that's why both the US and the USSR are inclined to Asia to great extent otherwise the US has no immediate danger from South Asia.

Moscow and Beijing are also enjoying a good relationship and cooperating in economic and political spheres.

Integration with Asian regionalism will provide an opportunity for a new image for Moscow as a Euro-Pacific country, not only as a Eurasian or European one. Since 1996, Russian foreign policy has been fairly sundry.

Many Asian players, including China, Japan, India, Pakistan and member states of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), have provided a favourable environment for achieving Russian objectives. Asian markets lured Russia to trail Asian tracks.

Russian bend to the East is to get rid of the West economic dependency. Since 2012 Moscow's policy is China-centric to counter the unipolar world.

However, Russia has developed ties with the rest of Asiatic zone to avoid Chinese dependency labels.

Pakistan's alliance with the West pushed Russia towards India's margin.

Now firstly we are less dependent on the West, secondly India has aligned itself with the US and thirdly from all angles Pakistan is much more advantageous for Russia than Hindu state.

Now both the states are on good terms in almost all spheres of mutual interests. In South Asia, Russia is left with no alternative except Pakistan and China. Afghanistan is a gateway to Central Asian States.

China, Russia and Pakistan have played their role in a peaceful and stabilized Afghanistan.

Along with it, Pak-China has made alternate gate way the CPEC, in case of uneven situation occurs in Afghanistan. Russia is the largest producer of oil and gas in the world. China and Pakistan's increasing demands can easily be achieved through Russia and Central Asia.

The Gwadar Port has great economic significance and holds a special position for Moscow.

Russia will also get long-sought access to sea transit routes for trade. Pakistan and Russia are getting ahead tremendously in all fields of cooperation especially in strategic and defence sectors.

The Beijing-Moscow strategic alliance is developing regional peace and stability. The fair-weather friendship of the US and its alliance with our eternal rival India has compelled Pakistan to look for new regional options.

China-Pakistan-Russia axis can help in bringing closer South, Central and East Asia, in the best interests of trilateral cooperation.

—The writer is Prof in English, based in Lahore, Pakistan

Source: <https://pakobserver.net/emergence-of-regionalism-and-pak-china-russia-axis/>

FATF's Appreciation | Editorial

The Financial Action Task Force (FATF), in its plenary meeting decided to retain Pakistan on the grey list. The case of Pakistan will be reassessed next at the extraordinary plenary session in June this year.

This was expected; sources from within the PM house claim that the reason for the lack of a diplomatic offensive in anticipation of the review stemmed from the knowledge that June would bring about our removal from the list.

The assessment report shows that Pakistan has made significant progress on the twenty-seven-point plan that was agreed to by Islamabad. If we look at Pakistan's journey, the country has made huge progress from January 2019 when it had to address 25 incomplete points to this day, when it only has three partially complete actionable items. The government deserves credit for showing such an improved level of compliance.

Islamabad's hard work has paid off, and now the country is nearing the finishing line. Authorities need to burn the midnight oil to satisfy FATF in the next session to get Pakistan out of the grey list permanently.

Remaining on the grey list for such a long period has not cost us politically only. The economic costs are also enormous. According to one report, our placement on the grey list may have resulted in cumulative GDP losses of around \$38 billion. This is a very huge amount.

However, it is also true that the plan that FATF handed over to Pakistan was the most rigorous that was ever given to any country. Therefore, our progress is nothing short of commendable. And Pakistan's significant improvement on 24 points shows that we are far away from the once lingering threat of being blacklisted.

It is now time to step up diplomatic efforts to make FATF appreciate Pakistan's remarkable journey. Furthermore, Islamabad must also persuade FATF to put India under increased monitoring because of its financial assistance to anti-state actors that are destabilising the region.

Source: <https://nation.com.pk/27-Feb-2021/fatf-s-appreciation>

ECONOMY

Digital Economy | Editorial

The annual report for 2020 released by Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA) shows positive growth trends about Pakistan's digital economy. According to the report, more than 90 million users, around 42.2 percent of the total population, are now benefiting from broadband services. The increase of more than 13 million internet users during the coronavirus pandemic is enormous. Undoubtedly, the single biggest reason behind this growth is the pandemic. Educational institutions and business shifted to online activities, and many individuals and organisations switched to the work-from-home policy.

There were around 20 million internet users in Pakistan only five years ago. The data compiled in the annual report of PTA show that the growth trends increased by 17 per cent during fiscal year (FY) 2020. This is undoubtedly a great achievement. The accelerated internet penetration indicates that the stage is now all set for us to truly go digital.

Pakistan's internet market is ideal for investment purposes. The government can earn giant fruits for itself and the population. With a mass influx of users, this is the opportunity that the government cannot waste. Authorities and policymakers must offer incentivised policies to attract businesses and corporations to invest in infrastructure so that access is no longer a problem for prospective internet users in Pakistan. Moreover, the government also needs to engage tech giants and companies in software and tech development by allowing them to take initiatives with Pakistani youth.

Pakistan has the fourth largest pool of freelancers in the world. Officials can lure tech companies to invest in Pakistan and allow for these freelancers to gain mainstream employment, or at the very least, a chance to increase their incomes. The government needs to direct the new generations' energies and creativities towards the digital economy. The possibility of gaining financial stability while earning from the internet is limitless with the size of our potential digital labour force and market.

Source: <https://nation.com.pk/03-Feb-2021/digital-economy>

Tax Reforms Challenge | Editorial

A leading think tank, Policy Research Institute of Market Economy, has recently reviewed tax reforms under the ruling Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) and the report does not look pretty. Out of the 10 electoral promises about reforming the tax system, ending tax machinery corruption and introducing more equitable taxation, the government is only said to have achieved one target fully over the last two-and-a-half years.

The report does, however, make note of the government's efforts to reform tax policy and even acknowledges the fact that half a tenure is not sufficient time to roll out effective changes in a country that faces a myriad of socio-economic challenges. Still, the abysmally low number of income tax filers—less than 10 per cent tax-to-GDP ratio—is a worrisome indicator of the gross failure in broadening the extremely narrow tax base. As per an FBR tax report in 2019, around three million people had filed income tax returns, albeit a majority of which had declared below-threshold income. This number was said to have reduced by nearly 23 per cent last year. With the tax collection said to have lagged around Rs 300 billion (according to IMF projections) in the year 2020, Pakistan is all set for an even more disappointing, cash-strapped budget this year. Then again, no progress has been made in the much-touted promise to shift towards direct taxation. “The share of direct taxes has remained fixed at 38 per cent,” lamented the report. The government, surely, can't rely on indirect taxation in the light of the dismal projected increase (up to 40 per cent) in Pakistanis living below the poverty line post-pandemic. Whether the government wishes to continue burdening its low and middle-income citizens at the expense of the wealthy, there just aren't enough proletariats to make go!

To bring taxpayers in Pakistan up to the level of other countries, the ruling powers need to convince them of what they would get in return. Increasing transparency as to where would their money be utilised for is a great stepping-stone to build credibility. Quashing concerns over fair distribution of the tax burden could help the government start with a clean slate. Another way to level the field would be for the government officials and political representatives to bring into open the taxes they have been paying, the assets they own and the sources they have used to acquire those assets. Mere tightening of the screws won't do the trick.

Nonetheless, the FBR should be appreciated for reducing the transaction cost of paying taxes and introducing the electronic payment facility. Its intense crackdown against illicit and smuggled goods led to the seizure of goods to the tune of Rs 29 billion. Under PM Khan, the FBR has also upped its ante against 20,000 wealthy non-filers and 42 corrupt tax collection officers. Still, no notable action has yet been taken against the non-filers and none of the suspended officials has been dismissed.

If renouncing tax evasion is to be pursued comprehensively, the government needs to bring powerful landowners under its net. The agriculture sector, which accounts for 21 per cent of GDP, pays less than one per cent of all taxes. The manufacturing sector, on the other hand, contributes 13 per cent of GDP but pays 52 per cent of all taxes. But politically-mighty agriculturalists would be a slippery catch.

Despite a strong commitment to uphaul the tax system in Pakistan, no effort can succeed unless tax compliance is increased, tax exemptions are reduced and the tax base is broadened—equitably and fairly.

Source: <https://dailytimes.com.pk/721177/tax-reforms-challenge/>

Asia — The New Centre of Gravity By

Rashid A Mughal

FOR more than two decades now with the rise of China, as major economic engine in the East and its rising political and economic role and clout, particularly in the neighbouring countries and generally in the entire world, the importance of America and European powers has been on the decline. In the recent past two major events, the economic meltdown in 2008 and the Trump's disastrous polyclinics during the last four years further dented the American image and the Brexit controversy which lingered on for years, leading to exit of the UK from the European Union, caused immense harm in terms of uncertainty and economic fall-out and political fragmentation. This situation not only helped China, which continued its spectacular rise and became the major economic power, replacing US and with its OBOR initiative, is connecting to the entire world.

Countries like China, India and Indonesia, thanks to enormous populations, have some of the world's biggest economies, and have become economic and political powers. According to the trends shown by economic indicators it seems that most of the growth in the world economy in the next decade will be seen in Asia. This will have far reaching implications not only in improving the lot of the poor and reduction of poverty globally but also in striking a balance between the rich and the poor. Unfortunately this narrowing of income gaps will do little or nothing for the world's poorest population miserably living in African countries whose only involvement in the global economy has been through the exploitation of the natural resources seem to be facing a bleak future but even for some of them there could be hope for two reasons. The first is growth in consumer spending in Asia and China in particular which may lead to a higher commodity price. The second is the possibility that Europe and Asia may finally agree to re-examine and rationalize their protective policies for food and agriculture sector. If this happens this would open up unprecedented possibilities for advancement of the poor in Africa, North America and the Caribbean. Health sector has not achieved much. While it is less increasingly become difficult for most of the people to afford quality medical treatment it is equally impossible to meet the quality educational cost for the children for large portion of population.

Much ink has been spilt in analyzing the rise of these Asian economies. The main factors were their export-orientation, good education, macroeconomic stability and strong government leadership. But geopolitics also played an important role in the context of the Cold War, as the US offered official assistance and opened its markets to friends in Asia. And all of these successful economies — the economic tigers of the East, were motivated to become strong and stable. China stunned the world with three decades of over 10% growth rates, following its opening up, which began in 1978 (more recently, Vietnam launched a similar opening to the world economy). Today, the future of the Chinese economy is bright, as the government seems to be tacking the social and political risks of undertaking reform, prudently. India is the other Asian giant, with an enormous population. It began its reform in the early 1990s and has since achieved good economic growth. While there is a lot of positive momentum in the Indian system, it also faces immense challenges — both social and political.

You only have to look back to the nature of some of the factors driving emerging Asia's high-growth period to glean insights. As populations are aging in the West, there will be less energetic, youthful populations to drive growth. This will help Asian countries which have a strong and formidable base of young population of working age. Now that many countries are already highly urbanized, there will be less new movements of people from the rural areas to the city. Overtime, the benefits of backwardness also fade as countries have copied the easy lessons from world leaders. The growth in China, the most important trading partner for virtually all other Asian economies, is driving the economic growth potential of everyone. However arrival of Donald Trump at the leadership of the US and his trade wars with China resulted in a deterioration of some of the key factors that have driven Asia's development—an open US market, a relatively benign security environment and a stable global economic system.

But digging behind the mechanical story of economic growth is a deeper story of institutions and politics. What is required for successful economic development are “inclusive economic institutions”, as argued by Daron Acemoglu and James A. Robinson, noted economists. Such institutions “allow and encourage participation by the great mass of people in economic activities that make best use of their talents and skills and that enable individuals to make the choices they wish”. They “require secure property rights and economic opportunities not just for the elite, but for a broad cross-section of society” And behind inclusive

economic institutions are inclusive political institutions. The enemy of economic development is “extractive political institutions” which “concentrate power in the hands of a narrow elite and place a few constraints on the exercise of this power”. This elite then usually structures economic institutions in order to extract resources from the rest of society.

Population — young population in fact — plays an important role in Asia’s economic development. Asia has enormous economic size, with 55% of the world’s population, Asia’s rapid economic growth has enabled it to grow its share of the world economy from 13% in 1960 to 31% in 2015 (the West, represented by the OECD member countries, accounts for only 18% of the world’s population, and has seen its share of world GDP decline commensurately). And there are a plethora of projections from organizations like the Asian Development Bank, the OECD and PWC which predict that in the coming decades, Asia will account for more than half of the world economy. It is true that their enormous economic size gives countries like China, India and Indonesia “market power” which attracts Western and other businessmen. China has large pools of investible funds that can be used for both economic and political purposes like establishing the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, and the Belt and Road Initiative. Large economic resources can also finance militaries which can project power and intimidate smaller neighbours, as reflected in the arms race presently underway in Asia. China, India, Japan and Korea all figure among the world’s top ten for military expenditure.

Perhaps the greatest limit on Asia’s power comes from the poor relations between Asian countries — for example, China-Japan, Japan-South Korea, Vietnam-China, India-Pakistan, India-China and North Korea. Asian countries may together account for half of the world economy in a few decades time, but they are unable to join forces in a way that they can become a dominant force. The very low trust among Asian countries means that they have difficulty cooperating with each other to make Asia a dominant force.

— The writer is former DG (Emigration) and consultant ILO, IOM.

Source: <https://pakobserver.net/asia-the-new-centre-of-gravity/>

CPEC 2.0 | Editorial

A project so huge it invites anxiety and awe alike, the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor is nothing like Pakistan has ever seen before. Promising concrete carpeted highways to the tune of \$60 billion, special industrial zones, energy projects said to generate around 9000 MW of electricity, the government was bound to be enthusiastic about the “game-changer” plan. The whole country is. But the very fact that Pakistan’s silver lining has not yet ushered in the prosperity it repeatedly promised is an undeniable cause for concern.

Despite Prime Minister Imran Khan regularly waging rallying cries of delivering on the ambitious project at “any cost,” his bureaucracy does not appear ready to live up to his expectations. Abject unproductivity echoed across Wednesday’s meeting of the CPEC cabinet committee that ended within minutes. Even after being sternly warned in a previous meeting that failure to remove irritants for fast-paced execution of the CPEC projects would be brought to the premier’s notice, the ministries returned with nothing but time requests. This momentum in carrying out the multi-million dollar project is being regularly questioned by both local opposition and international rivals’ campaigns.

CPEC’s star player, Gwadar Port and Free Zone, continues to suffer from official backlog despite being functional for one year. The federal revenue bureau has still not defined Gwadar Free Zone policy and Customs rules and regulations; chopping down all business

activities. Therefore, none of the 42 potential investors (given licenses) has broken ground in the economic zone. Additional constraints include delays in construction of the breakwater and capital dredging of berthing area on top of land under possession of the Pakistan Coast Guard and Pakistan Navy. Regarding the Mainline-1 project, the committee is still struggling as to what currency to use to secure Chinese loan and what insurance tariff to agree to.

There remain no qualms about the immense importance the cross-Pakistan project holds for its economy as well as its society. Still, to use this opportunity to its best advantage, Islamabad needs to regain its full-throttle drive on CPEC projects. First and foremost, the government needs to quell all corruption rumours. The official heading the CPEC commission is deemed highly

controversial in the light of the infamous Papa John's scandal. Then again, there remains the issue of the authority's blanket immunity from watchdog bodies' investigations. How can the Chinese authorities and provincial governments be expected to give unflinching support to a body that has been tainted in such an unprecedented manner? It is oft-argued that corruption scandals tarnishing CPEC projects are kept under wraps only because of fears over China's displeasure. Khan's team should rise to the occasion with transparency and credibility-building exercises.

Making use of synergistic coordination, the government's goals should revolve around developing its capacity to plan projects that best absorb concessionary loans and grants. Effective dissemination of information that the prosperity would come to entire Pakistan, not just cities in Punjab and Sindh, could well quash hostility in Balochistan. A united Pakistan would mean a secure platform that shapes CPEC projects as a whole.

China has repeatedly asserted that Pakistan stands to attract extensive Chinese investment if it provides a business-friendly environment. Therefore, cutting the bureaucratic tape so that potential investors can register and operate in SEZs sans wasting time should be prioritised by the government.

Extending CPEC to Afghanistan and distributing its low-hanging fruit to all provinces would help seize this never-before-seen opportunity in the best manner possible. The ball is surely in Islamabad's court. It remains to be seen how many wickets would it take.

Source: <https://dailytimes.com.pk/720526/cpec-2-0/>

US-China Reset Key To Brighter Global Economic Prospects – Analysis By Dan Steinbock

After four years of US-Sino tensions, the Biden administration could speed up US recovery, while restoring bilateral trust with China. That would foster global economic prospects. The reverse would undermine those prospects.

In the United States, the third wave of the COVID-19 peaked with 250,000 confirmed cases daily after the holiday period. Following the catastrophic mishandling of the pandemic by the Trump administration, total cases are approaching 27 million and the 440,000 deaths exceed US military fatalities in World War II.

After effective containment, confirmed cases in China remain below 90,000. With the Spring Festival holidays just days away, recent resurgences have renewed concerns about outbreaks and people have been urged to avoid travels during holidays. Despite some unease, public-health authorities believe a major outbreak is unlikely.

The key question is will China's recovery prevail amid the dire global landscape and will US recovery begin later in the year. Due to the great size of the two economies, the former is vital to many emerging and developing countries, while the latter is critical to major advanced economies.

Both require restoring US-Sino trust after years of devastation.

In the past year, US economy suffered a -3.5% contraction, despite ultra-low interest rates, low inflation, weak dollar and huge fiscal injections.

The CARES Act has kept economy humming between the lockdowns. However, exports have contracted. Industrial production has begun to recover, but even more slowly than consumption. Last November, US trade deficit in goods jumped to record high. Better days won't return before a critical mass of vaccinations, around the 3rd quarter of the year.

Here's the caveat: The consumption-led recovery is leveraged to the hilt, relying on costly stimuli and rapidly-rising debt. In the past four years, US national debt has soared to more than \$28 trillion, which puts US federal debt-to-GDP ratio at 128%.

How will the Democrats cope with the debt burden?

Instead of focusing on the size of US debt, says Jason Furman, President Obama's former lead economic adviser, "policymakers should assess fiscal capacity in terms of real interest payments, ensuring they remain comfortably below 2 percent of GDP." That would ensure adequate fiscal support and needed public investments, while maintaining a sustainable public debt.

As a share of GDP, the cost of servicing US debt has fallen since 2000, even as federal debt has increased. Low interest rates make it easier to pay off debts. However, deficits will more than double from 2010-19 to 10.9% percent of GDP in 2041-50, according to the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office. By 2050, debt as a percentage of GDP will amount close to 200% of the GDP, as net spending for interest as a share of GDP could quadruple over 2031-50.

That's a ticking time bomb.

China: key indexes signal broad recovery

In 2020, China's real GDP growth of 2.3 percent exceeded expectations. It was the only major economy to avoid negative economic growth. The performance relied on fiscal and monetary support, but as recovery is accelerating, monetary easing no longer seems warranted.

Although consumption is still constrained, investment is likely to be buoyed by government-financed infrastructure projects and solid performance in the property market. In November, the indexes for manufacturing, service, trade and consumption were encouraging, while growth in the 4th quarter of last year rose to 6.5 percent year-on-year as consumers returned to malls, restaurants and cinemas.

Thanks to across-the-board recovery, the yuan has surged in strength against the US dollar and other major currencies.

Despite US-Sino tensions, foreign companies continue to pour money into China, thanks to the new foreign investment law to further open up the economy. In real terms, inbound foreign direct investment hit a record high of \$144 billion in 2020.

In November, China signed the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) agreement with the 10 ASEAN member states, plus Japan, South Korea, Australia and New Zealand. That will boost regional trade and boost recovery.

The impressive increase in China's exports pushed the trade surplus to a record high in December, with soaring demand for medical equipment to fight the pandemic. Thanks to the effective containment of the epidemic in the 2nd quarter 2020, Chinese factories could respond to the global demand for such products, while other countries struggled with quarantines and lockdowns.

Importantly, the integration of the Chinese financial market with the global financial markets has accelerated, thanks to China's regulatory reforms have. Consequently, foreign ownership of onshore Chinese stocks and bonds is likely to increase in 2021.

From Cold War to partners and rivals

After decades of US-Sino progress, Trump let high-level dialogues crumble in economic, law enforcement, and cultural affairs as well as diplomatic and security relations. These multi-level dialogues should be restored to foster strategic trust that took four decades to build and four years to kill.

After the Phase-I deal, China was obliged to buy \$200 billion in additional US imports over two years on top of pre-trade war purchase levels. That was impossible amid Trump protectionism and global pandemic. What is needed is a reset to re-build a new appropriate path of dialogue in bilateral trade and advanced technology.

Before the trade wars, US investment to China averaged \$15 billion per year, whereas Chinese investment in the US soared to \$45 billion. US investment to China has persisted and most US companies plan to stay there. Yet, Chinese investment in the US has been forced to plunge. It is time to restart bilateral investment talks to facilitate a new rapprochement.

Despite political differences, US-China military exchanges used to feature high-level visits, exchanges between defense officials, and functional interactions. As these engagements fell by two-thirds in the Trump era, bilateral tensions have surged in South and East China Sea and a major conflict may be just a matter of time. What's needed is a restart in military dialogues, at all levels and in all arenas.

China fueling over a third of global growth prospects

This year China's economic growth is expected to rise further to 7 to 8 percent, followed by stabilization to 5.5% in 2022. Rapid recovery has brought Chinese economy closer to the US economic output, which it could surpass by the late 2020s.

Assuming the Biden administration can avoid new economic and pandemic pitfalls, US growth could rise to 5.0 percent, followed by stabilization to 2.2 percent in 2022.

In both cases, positive spillover effects would support global economic recovery.

The question is whether the Biden administration will opt for a cooperative scenario, which would result in some tariffs, moderated protectionism and efforts to avoid redundant conflicts, which would facilitate US recovery and global economic prospects. A reverse scenario would push those very same prospects back to the edge of global depression.

In December, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) forecast that global GDP will reach the pre-pandemic level by the end of 2021. In this view, China will account for over a third of world economic expansion.

That contribution is critical to global economy.

The article was released by China-US Focus on Feb. 8, 2021

Source: <https://www.eurasiareview.com/09022021-us-china-reset-key-to-brighter-global-economic-prospects-analysis/>

The Centrality of Geo-Economics By Talat Masood

As always, but more so in recent times, geo-economics has acquired great significance due to its vital role in national development and its impact on foreign and security policy. Generally, those national leaders that focused on traditional security and combined it with economic security taking advantage of their country's geographic location were able to give their people a better quality of life and exercise greater level of freedom.

Sustained economic growth merged with economic integration within the country and with its friendly neighbours is the surest path that will uplift Pakistan, contribute toward the well-being of its people, and enhance its defence capabilities. Presently, Pakistan's anaemic economy, dependent on foreign assistance — the IMF, the World Bank and friendly countries — has little space of manoeuvrability in foreign and economic policies and has to operate under a strict financial regime.

In fact, the centrality of Pakistan's relations with China, apart from the strategic dimension and strengthening defence, aims at lifting its economy by placing it on more durable lines. The China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is largely based on this concept and if faithfully implemented along with other major national pursuits should place the country on an upward trajectory. And give strength, sustenance and durability to the China-Pakistan relationship.

This shows how invaluable is Pakistan's geographic location. But more importantly, are we as a nation truly exploiting the centrality of our geography for economic well-being or are we merely content with what our Chinese allies or others are doing for us or for themselves?

Looking back, history reminds us that we exploited our geography more for global powers than for ourselves. The backlash of policies pursued by the United States during the Afghan jihad on Pakistan was far too severe and hardly compensated by the military and economic assistance that we received from them. With the US, apart from seeking normalisation of relations and cooperation in areas of common interest such as working toward peace in Afghanistan,

Pakistan would like to expand and give depth to its economic relationship. Our heavy reliance on leveraging the country's geo-strategic location for others has its limits and overplaying this card becomes counterproductive as history reminds us.

At present the civil war in Afghanistan is a major impediment for Pakistan to fully benefit from intra-regional trade with Central Asian countries. Unfortunately, as the situation stands there are remote chances of any likelihood that the security situation would improve in the near term. The Chinese are, however, expecting to maximise the use of CPEC by using the Gwadar port for shipment of goods and services from western China.

The most striking feature of Washington's policy that affects Pakistan is building India's economic, military and strategic potential against China that could be directed against us. The US is injecting investments and boosting India's economic growth by supporting its industrial and agricultural production, easing transfer of defense and space technology and providing modern weaponry.

Our political leadership's focus on economic and financial issues is mostly peripheral. It should engage more critically and give economy the importance it deserves if Pakistan is to overcome its perennial dependence. Major thrust of national policy debates should be preferably economy related subjects. In parliament, important economic matters fall prey to political squabbles and only a few parliamentarians have the interest and understanding to engage in these subjects.

While most of the world moves at a fast pace, we take decades to decide the fate of our sick enterprises whether it be the Pakistan Steel Mills (PSM) or other state entities. The PSM has remained a victim of state neglect and political gamesmanship costing billions of rupees to the exchequer. And those responsible for placing hurdles in the sale of the Steel Mills with ulterior motives have gone scot free. Hopefully, the great burden of these state industries would end soon with their privatisation.

We have to upgrade our education system and devote greater resources to the health sector for strengthening the economy and increasing national productivity. These measures would also contribute in coping with growing demands of the global economy. Successive governments have failed to give a high priority to

these two vital sectors resulting in retarding economic growth and fall in exports. There were hopes attached to the PTI government that they would focus on these areas as PM Imran Khan had repeatedly emphasised their importance before coming to power. Moreover, by adopting a Single National Curriculum (SNC) which appears to be a favourite plan of the government we may be regressing and playing with the destiny of the country rather than moving forward.

The impact of the pandemic on the economy has been severe at the global and national level. This required greater professional expertise in dealing with which we fortunately had to an extent in the person of the Finance Minister and State Bank Governor and a few others. What we need is more officials to be well-versed in financial matters. Inefficient management of national resources and political pressures over extended periods has resulted in the continuous rise of national debt. As of August 2020, the total debt and liabilities of Pakistan was estimated to be Rs44.2 trillion (\$270 billion) which is 106.8% of GDP, much higher than the safe limit of 77% which is the internationally accepted criteria.

The rising Chinese economic power is being thwarted by the US by trying to place several hurdles in its way. But despite that China's economy is moving ahead and was the only major power whose GDP was growing at an appreciable pace. According to experts, government-led investment and demand for Chinese goods globally were the major factors that helped China to boost its exports and revive its economy at a faster rate. This augurs well for Pakistan as it is a major beneficiary of Chinese loans and its aided projects.

A weak economy limits options in foreign and economic policies. Global politics centers largely on the economy and influences relations between countries. It is in Pakistan's vital interest to make the economy the centerpiece of its foreign and national policy.

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Source: <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2284484/1>

CPEC: Wider Regional Integration By Brig (R) Muhammad Khan

THE most significant and decisive factor in the interstate relationship of the states is the bilateral trust and mutual respect of each other's sovereignty.

In international relations these aspects are driven by national interests of the states. In the relationship of Pakistan and China bilateral trust and mutual respect of each other's sovereignty have been the defining factors.

Generally, there has been convergence of national interests of both states in many areas. The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is the latest manifestation of trust, mutual respect and shared national interests with common developmental goals of both countries.

CPEC is aimed to drive practical cooperation between the two countries for the development of port facilities at Gwadar and other projects like energy resources, infrastructure development and industrial cooperation.

The ultimate objective of these projects is economic opportunities for the masses of the two countries and other regions of Asian Continent.

Siegfried O. Wolf authored a book entitled, "The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor of the Belt and Road Initiative: Concept, Context and Assessment". The essence of this book is that CPEC is a project of immense significance for Pakistan and China.

The book provides an in-depth analysis of Belt and Road Initiative (BRI); the gigantic Chinese project, which encompasses a set of corridors and Maritime Silk route spreading over three continents: Asia, Africa and Europe.

The author highlighted the philosophy behind Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and more about the strategy of Economic Corridors (ECs). The primary objectives of having these economic corridors are to connect China with its neighbours and then other regions and countries beyond Asia.

Contextualizing from history, the ancient Silk Road started during the westward expansion of Chinese Han Dynasty from; 206 BCE to 220 CE.

It forged trade networks passing through the contemporary Central Asian Region, Afghanistan, India and today's Pakistan to further south, reaching over to European and African continents.

The BRI is therefore, revival of the old Silk Road and Maritime Route by modern Chinese leadership. The enormous size of Chinese economy and heavy industrialization warrants new communication corridors and routes in this highly interconnected and globalized world.

Besides, China needs energy resources and raw material in order to maintain its sustained growth and economic development.

The huge industrial base of China lacked the needed energy resources on a long-term basis.

China is currently importing over 50% of its energy resources from Middle East region and African countries.

Besides, it imports over 30 oil and gas from Central Asian region and Russia. Chinese imports and energy resources from the Middle East and Africa have to pass through Indian Ocean region, before entering the South China Sea.

Since Indian Navy is dominating the Indian Ocean Region (IOR), therefore in a future scenario there may be constraints for Chinese trade at the Strait of Malacca; a key point in the Indian Ocean.

Strait of Malacca is a narrow passage of water between the Indonesian island of Sumatra and the Malay Peninsula. In 2003, Chinese Government highlighted its vulnerability at Malacca; 'Chinese Malacca Dilemma'.

There have been many studies under Chinese Government and at the level of its think-tanks and universities to find out alternative routes for Chinese trade and energy imports.

Well deliberated findings of all such studies concluded that, in case there is a blockade of Malacca Strait, there are a few alternative routes available to China for its trade and oil imports.

Other available alternatives are either incompatible to take on the weight of modern ships and heavy traffic or else causing heavy expenditures owing to longer routes.

CPEC is the only secure and guaranteed alternative which can guarantee an uninterrupted flow of Chinese trade and energy resources.

It is shortest route, less expensive and more secure for the sustenance of Chinese energy and trade needs. Chinese leadership had selected CPEC after years of deliberations while weighing its pros and cons.

President Xi Jinping is the architect of this project, who has been embarked upon the position of life-time President and Secretary General of Communist Party of China (CPC).

From the Chinese perspective CPEC is the most significant part of BRI. Its (CPEC) timely completion will provide a boost for the completion of other projects and corridors of the BRI.

The Chinese dream for global governance through its soft approach depends a lot on the implementation of BRI and completion of CPEC will be a booster for the BRI. In a rapidly evolving regional and global security situation, Pakistan holds the key for the continuance of Chinese economic development by providing a secure energy corridor.

Sequel to the development and operationalization of Gwadar Port, completion of CPEC as per scheduled is the real challenge, facing China and Pakistan.

Despite its financial constraints, Pakistan has dedicated two security divisions under Pakistan Army for ensuring security of the CPEC from Khunjerab Pass to Gwadar.

In 21st century, economy (trade and commerce) drives the world politics. The strategic competition and the trade war between Washington and Beijing should

not hamper the CPEC, since it is a project of economic benefits for all regional states including India, Iran, Central Asian and GCC states.

Whereas, CPEC effectively addresses the Chinese Malacca Dilemma, it provides a golden opportunity for the wider integration between various regions and states of Asian Continent. Now, it is up to the leadership of the Asian states to secure the future of their posterity through a visionary approach and prudence.

Source: <https://pakobserver.net/cpec-wider-regional-integration/>

How the WTO Changed China By Yeling Tan

When China joined the World Trade Organization in 2001, the event was hailed as a pivotal development for the global economic system and a bold marker of the country's commitment to reform. It took 15 long years of negotiation to reach the deal, a reflection of the challenge of reconciling China's communist command economy with global trading rules and of the international community's insistence that China sign on to ambitious commitments and conditions. U.S. officials had high hopes that those terms of entry would fix China on the path of market liberalization and integrate the country into the global economic order. U.S. President Bill Clinton called Beijing's accession to the WTO "the most significant opportunity that we have had to create positive change in China since the 1970s" and argued that it would "commit China to play by the rules of the international trading system."

Chinese President Jiang Zemin and Chinese Premier Zhu Rongji evinced similar resolve in securing WTO membership. In their view, joining the organization was not only appropriate for a country of China's size and economic potential; it would also force China to move forward on necessary domestic reforms. Chinese state media noted at the time that entry into the WTO would "expedite the process of China's reform and opening up"; spur the "cleaning up of laws, regulations, and policies"; facilitate the establishment of an "impartial, efficient judicial system"; and bring much-needed external competition to the country's inefficient state-owned enterprises (SOEs). China accepted far more stringent terms than any other new member before or since. These commitments included not just large cuts to tariffs on imports into China but also a sweeping overhaul of domestic institutions and policies to allow market forces freer rein within the economy. Beijing pledged to improve the rule of law by strengthening courts and increasing protections of intellectual property rights, to allow firms greater autonomy and limit the government's interference in their affairs, and to revamp regulation to make governance more transparent.

Such commitments generated widespread anticipation that China's accession to the WTO would bring about major change and tie a rising China more tightly to global economic networks and institutions. But these hopes now seem like

wishful thinking. In 2018, the office of Robert Lighthizer, the U.S. trade representative, proclaimed that the United States had “erred in supporting China’s entry into the WTO,” arguing that China’s “state-led, mercantilist trade regime” was “incompatible with the market-based approach expressly envisioned by WTO members.” Kurt Campbell and Ely Ratner, two former Obama administration officials, claimed in these pages in 2018 that “the liberal international order has failed to lure or bind China as powerfully as expected.” By most accounts, in Washington and more broadly, China’s economic model has not turned toward market liberalism since 2001 but instead consolidated into a form of state capitalism that Beijing hopes to export globally. WTO membership, the new consensus goes, has allowed China access to the American and other global economies without forcing it to truly change its behavior, with disastrous consequences for workers and wages around the world. China seems to pay lip service to international norms and still play by its own rules, taking advantage of loopholes and naive policymakers abroad.

But if the hopes for China’s WTO accession were overblown, so is this new consensus, which oversimplifies a complex story that holds different lessons about the path of, and prospects for, China’s reform and about the future of trade liberalization globally. China has surely not followed the course envisioned by Clinton—or, for that matter, that anticipated by Jiang and Zhu. But rather than judge China’s WTO entry in the categorical terms of success or failure, a more productive way forward would be to understand the ways in which WTO membership did lead to positive change within China—and when and why that positive change started to slow and then reverse. Joining the WTO had a stronger liberalizing effect in some parts of the Chinese state than in others, and that liberalization was more forceful at some points in time than at others. At least for a few years, China’s accession to the trade body bolstered Chinese reformists and helped authorities push through necessary changes, in the process showing that multilateral institutions can boost domestic reform in China. But the impetus for reform wavered, and other actors within China pushed in opposite directions, steering the economy toward greater state control. It’s not impossible to foster positive change in China, but it will be uneven, contested, and require ongoing pressure and engagement from the outside.

THE SUM OF ITS PARTS

China first embarked on the path of reform under Deng Xiaoping in 1978, when the Chinese leader began to gradually open the economy by decollectivizing

agriculture. Beijing accelerated these market-oriented reforms in the ensuing years, granting more leeway to private enterprises, opening the door to foreign firms, and steadily privatizing large SOEs. An economy that had become moribund in the 1970s was growing at a breakneck clip of nearly ten percent per year by the late 1990s. But that story of rapid growth and incipient liberalization concealed a much more complicated picture: China's economy consisted of a welter of different actors pursuing different, sometimes contradictory interests. Accession to the WTO in 2001 was a fillip for the country's pro-market liberalizers, but many others evaded or remained hostile to liberalizing reform.

The Chinese state is vast, sprawling, and highly decentralized, especially when it comes to economic policy. The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) comprises about 90 million members, which would make the organization larger than the 16th most populous country in the world (the Democratic Republic of the Congo, which has a population of around 89 million). Its members have a wide range of backgrounds and views, from executives with international business experience to dyed-in-the-wool apparatchiks who eagerly study the ideals articulated by President Xi Jinping. The central government oversees over 30 provinces, hundreds of cities, and thousands of counties. As a result, Beijing has long struggled to coordinate, implement, and enforce policies across the country. Subnational governments enjoy broad discretion over how to run their local economies. Governors and mayors compete with their neighbors to produce ever-higher and more spectacular growth rates, and they enjoy enough autonomy to selectively enact, creatively interpret, and even subvert guidelines from Beijing.

When China was preparing to join the WTO, its system of economic governance was decidedly mixed. Some actors within China's massive party-state advocated liberalization based on free-market principles. Others supported a strategy akin to those adopted decades prior by Japan and South Korea, which involved offering financial incentives and instituting administrative measures to support firms in industries deemed strategic. And still others counseled adhering to China's command economy.

Liberal reform in China ran up against deep-seated bureaucratic resistance.

The various actors within China's large and complex economy had to reckon with the seismic shift of entry into the WTO. Accession triggered many significant changes and strengthened the hand of the country's reformists, who in the first

few years following WTO entry implemented large cuts to import tariffs, loosened rules around trading licenses to introduce domestic private and foreign competition, shrank the state-owned sector, and enhanced the functioning of market forces in the economy. Beijing strengthened the rule of law and the protection of intellectual property rights to greatly improve the ease and predictability of doing business in China and limit government interference.

The central government drove much of the resulting change, because it felt the pressure of adhering to WTO rules more keenly than did provinces and cities lower down in the administrative hierarchy. WTO membership spurred Beijing to undertake a formidable legislative and regulatory overhaul in order to bring domestic laws and policies into compliance with the international trading system. For example, it amended its law regulating the quality of products, with the aim of improving standards and strengthening the state's ability to guard against counterfeit and subpar goods. It reformed a commodity inspection law to create a common certification process for foreign and domestic goods and put in place similar reforms for customs laws; rules governing pharmaceutical products; and copyright, patent, and trademarks laws. It also overhauled national economic institutions to strengthen the state's regulatory capacity, merging a number of agencies to eliminate overlap. The new General Administration of Quality Supervision, Inspection, and Quarantine (AQSIQ) took the lead in assessing over 21,000 domestic technical standards, abolishing about 1,400 of them, and revising over 9,000 others to bring the country's standards regime into conformity with WTO rules.

The central government's liberalizing efforts did not stop with legal and institutional reforms. Beijing established research and advisory centers in various parts of the country to provide guidance on matters pertaining to WTO rules and procedures. Authorities launched a national campaign through state media to raise awareness about the consequences of the country's joining the WTO and held training sessions for government officials to help them navigate the complex process of implementing the trade body's rules.

This effort to set in motion greater market liberalization ran up against deep-seated bureaucratic and industry resistance. Those in the state-owned sector feared that foreign competition would crush their businesses. The automotive industry had even petitioned Jiang for greater protection when he was negotiating the entry deal. Powerful industrial ministries within Beijing bristled at

the idea that international rules would now curb their autonomy to make policy. The agricultural sector protested the opening up of China's markets to highly subsidized goods from developed countries.

Foreign businesses immediately benefited from the measures that followed China's accession. By 2003, roughly 70 percent of U.S. firms surveyed in China reported that Chinese domestic reforms had improved their business climate "to a great extent" or "to a very great extent." Those measures would not have occurred without the external impetus of entry into the WTO. And they reflected the degree to which China's leaders had succeeded in using multilateral trade commitments to drive forward difficult domestic changes.

But the actions of the central government tell only part of the story. Subnational authorities, which escaped direct WTO scrutiny, did not match Beijing's commitment. China's entry into the WTO reframed local economies, inviting foreign competition while creating opportunities for commerce abroad. Regional governments had to keep their economies growing while dealing with potential import threats and pursuing potential export gains. Some local leaders responded by liberalizing their markets and facilitating more business-friendly regulations, but many found ways to resist opening up and to promote their own interests in other ways.

Anhui Province, for instance, issued an industrial policy in 2001 that drew from South Korea's success in automobile exports, targeting state support to favored firms. Authorities in Shandong Province noted that the territory should "seize the opportunity" created by WTO entry to expand and develop its shipbuilding industry—which meant not liberalization but increased preferential credits and subsidies in order to expand exports out of the province. Other, smaller jurisdictions responded to the threat of intensified competition with even more forceful interventions aimed at suppressing market forces, using administrative directives to reshape local businesses. The autonomous prefecture of Yanbian, in northeastern China, for example, launched a restructuring drive in 2003 to consolidate its cement industry. Rather than let the market dictate which firms would thrive and which would die, the local government picked winners and losers, taking away business licenses, cutting off the electricity supply, and dismantling the machinery and equipment of factories that were deemed to be too small or inefficient.

Accordingly, China's entry into the WTO produced a wide range of shifts, often in contradictory directions. It initially spurred sweeping efforts to liberalize the economy, reshape policies to accord with international rules, strengthen institutions to support the free market, and reduce the role of direct state intervention—transforming China's economic landscape and vastly expanding the scope for private and foreign enterprises to do business in China. But the country did not move in lockstep toward liberalization. Subnational governments adopted a plethora of strategies to pursue economic growth, many of them in clear contrast to Beijing's liberalizing agenda. A stark internal divergence in China's economic policies emerged, with some parts of the state strengthening their commitment to market liberalization and others following more statist paths.

China did fulfill the majority of the terms of its WTO accession within a few years. Tariff rates on foreign imports were slashed, and a multitude of nontariff barriers were eliminated. The authority to engage in foreign trade, previously restricted to SOEs and foreign firms located in special economic zones, was broadened to all firms, including private Chinese enterprises. Beijing substantially improved legal protections for and reduced administrative burdens on businesses. Foreign investment surged once more into China, after having plateaued during the Asian financial crisis in the late 1990s.

THE STATE ADVANCES

Market-friendly reforms, however, would soon lose their luster for the central government. Observers in China use the term *guojin mintui*, or “the state advances, while the private sector retreats,” to describe the central government's slide starting around the middle of the first decade of this century toward greater state intervention in the economy. Several domestic and external factors pushed China's powerful central government to embrace state capitalism. In the first few years after the accession, pro-reform ministries in Beijing drove the agenda for market liberalization, empowered by the mandate of China's pledges to the WTO. The Ministry of Commerce, China's trade agency, led efforts to harmonize China's trading regime with international rules. AQSIQ, the new quality-control agency, encouraged the adoption of international standards and established a direct link with the WTO to manage potential conflicts. These agencies further benefited from the leadership of Jiang and Zhu, who were not just ideologically well disposed to reform but also able to wrangle the country's sprawling central bureaucracy to keep the reforms on course. Under the two leaders, the government instituted important macroeconomic reforms to recalibrate revenue-

sharing arrangements between the center and localities, better control inflation, and improve central oversight of the banking sector. And in a major administrative restructuring in 1998, Zhu had slashed the central bureaucracy in half, from eight million to four million people, and cut the number of central ministries from 40 to 29.

But as China fulfilled its WTO commitments on schedule, pro-liberalization forces lost momentum; swiftly meeting the terms of China's accession had the effect of sapping the urgency of reform. Without the outside pressure that WTO entry first provided in 2001, it was difficult for reformists in Beijing to keep up the push for greater liberalization. Instead, rival agencies that oversaw industrial policy gained the latitude to expand their influence.

This shift in bureaucratic power dovetailed with a change in leadership in 2003 from Jiang and Zhu to President Hu Jintao and Premier Wen Jiabao. The leaders differed less in their essential views on reform than in their abilities to control the state bureaucracy. Hu and Wen did not have their predecessors' political strength to discipline the state. Wen, in particular, had spent the majority of his career within the central government. He rose to the top with support from networks deeply embedded in the Beijing bureaucracy. Although this milieu might have given him some advantage in understanding the inner workings of the central state, it also left him beholden to that bureaucracy. Unlike Zhu, who was able to halve the size of the central government in 1998, Wen's attempt at administrative restructuring in 2003 was relatively unsuccessful. Reports at the time indicated that Wen planned to whittle down the number of ministries by as many as seven, but he eventually axed only one central agency. Instead, agencies dedicated to industrial policy, such as the National Development and Reform Commission, gained greater influence: the NDRC became informally known as the "mini State Council." In 2008, the newly created Ministry of Industry and Information Technology added to the central government's increasingly activist role in enacting statist industrial policies.

Dysfunction in the WTO dealt a blow to the cause of pro-market reform.

The cause of pro-market reform was dealt a further blow by the failure of WTO members to agree to another comprehensive package for trade liberalization as part of the Doha Round of negotiations in Geneva in 2006. The disagreement over farm subsidies and import taxes underlined tensions within the trade body, and the ensuing impasse strengthened the hand of agencies in Beijing that

oversaw industrial policy and did not subscribe to the market-friendly imperatives of the WTO. Dysfunction in the trade body meant that Chinese reformists could not repeat the success of 2001, lacking renewed external impetus for domestic liberalization.

The central government's new policy trajectory started to become clear in the 2006 iteration of the Five-Year Plan, China's periodic policy blueprint. It emphasized domestic innovation and reducing China's reliance on foreign technology, reaffirming the dominant role of the state in the economy—and inevitably dispiriting foreign firms doing business in China. According to the American Chamber of Commerce in the People's Republic of China's annual surveys of its members, positive sentiment among U.S. firms operating in China fell to an all-time low in 2006.

The 2008 global economic crisis and its aftermath reinforced the regime's statist turn by setting the stage for greater government intervention and laying bare the weaknesses of free-market capitalism. China responded to the downturn with a \$580 billion fiscal stimulus and channeled the funds largely through SOEs and local governments. This spending strengthened the central state's hand and boosted the ideological justification for statism. While many wealthy countries that had also enacted large fiscal stimulus programs soon shifted back to economic austerity (and a diminished role for the state), China continued on the path that it had embarked on before the crisis, toward greater state control of the economy. The state-owned sector had steadily shrunk in the years following China's accession to the WTO. In 2001, 40 percent of all jobs in China were in the state sector. That figure had fallen to 20 percent by 2008, but this decline came to a halt in the years after 2008 and showed little change up to the end of the Hu-Wen administration, in 2012. Between 2008 and 2012, assets managed by state firms rose from over 12 trillion yuan to more than 25 trillion yuan.

Since Xi's ascent to power in 2012, the state's role in the economy has only become stronger and more pronounced. Private investment had for many years expanded at a faster pace than investment by state entities, but this dynamic began to weaken after 2012, and it even reversed from 2015 to 2016. China has continued to pursue free trade in its foreign relations, inking numerous deals with countries far and near, but the political energy for domestic market reform has all but disappeared. Recent years have seen the country's SOEs become stronger and larger than before, boosted by national policies that reaffirm the dominant

role of the state and the overarching supremacy of the CCP over the economy. China's overseas economic footprint has also expanded significantly, most notably through Xi's vast infrastructure and investment program known as the Belt and Road Initiative, sparking fears that China is seeking to export its brand of state capitalism globally. Such fears, however, are overblown.

CONTAINING MULTITUDES

China may have dashed the hope that it would become a liberal free-market economy, well integrated into the international economic system. But even now, its model of state capitalism is not the juggernaut that many make it out to be. In many respects, China still lives under the shadow of its entry into the WTO. Ultimately, the Chinese system is not likely to prove strong enough to completely resist the liberalizing effects of globalization or coordinated enough to effectively pursue its ambitions on the global stage through its SOEs.

In some ways, WTO membership reinforced the central government's inability to prevent local governments from interpreting higher-level directives to serve their own interests. WTO entry brought a new surge of foreign capital into China, reducing the reliance of subnational governments on funding from Beijing and providing them with alternative resources to pursue their own goals—and the flexibility to disregard dictates from the capital. For example, despite Beijing's desire to orient economic growth around increasing productivity, boosting technological development, and training a more skilled workforce, subnational governments have fixated on a quantitative approach to growth that relies on capital investment and high-profile development projects, undermining the overarching national effort. Instead of making long-term investments to raise the productivity of firms and their capacity for innovation, local officials seek out foreign direct investment to expand output for short-term gains, leading to projects that duplicate the work of others and generate problems of excess capacity.

China's policy on so-called new-energy vehicles (electric and hybrid cars) illustrates this divide. In 2012, the central government's State Council issued an industrial policy on such vehicles that stressed the importance of promoting innovation and explicitly warned local governments against “blindly making low-quality investments and duplicating construction.” But that same year, Hubei Province issued its own policy, which ignored the central government's focus on technological innovation and high-quality production and instead stressed the

need for “investment promotion” and “large-scale production” to scale up the manufacturing of the vehicles. Nor was Hubei alone in pushing for rapid expansion and disregarding the longer-term imperative of improving technological capacity. By 2017, the central government had to issue a new directive to curb the overinvestment of local governments in the production of new-energy vehicles.

Similar conflicts plague China’s overseas economic ambitions. Although some SOEs (particularly those in strategic sectors, such as automobiles and shipping) have retained a more statist orientation to trade, not all are faithful agents or reliable exemplars of state capitalism. China’s entry into the WTO granted more foreign trading rights to domestic private enterprises, lowered import barriers, and allowed private companies greater freedom to operate. Once exposed to foreign competition and global rules, many SOEs—especially those participating in highly competitive sectors not protected by state industrial policy—came to resemble more traditional commercial actors, responding to price signals in the same way as private firms. It is not a given that China’s SOEs will act as agents of China’s overseas economic statecraft. The extent to which an SOE might directly serve Beijing’s interests is instead determined by a bevy of factors, including the competitiveness or strategic importance of a particular sector, the degree to which the central government can monitor the firm’s overseas behavior, and the specific political context of the country in which the firm is operating.

WHAT NOT TO DO

Some Chinese state and nonstate actors see their interests as aligned with international economic rules; others seek to exploit gaps in global governance. Some dependably behave as operatives of Beijing, whereas others actively subvert national policy in pursuit of their own narrow interests. These dynamics have persisted even as Xi has sought to consolidate CCP rule over many aspects of Chinese political, economic, and social life. Despite Xi’s efforts, China’s global economic posture remains mostly the product of the country’s messy internal politics and not the result of a coordinated master plan.

This reality complicates matters for Washington and other governments. Given the multitude of actors and interests involved in Chinese economic affairs, traditional state-to-state diplomacy, centered on communications between national capitals, is necessary but insufficient. Substate actors, such as

provinces and cities, wield substantial authority over economic affairs. The actions of Chinese firms do not necessarily represent the will of Beijing. Countries must therefore take a multipronged approach to engage with China at different levels. A policy of overt hostility that overlooks the diversity of interests driving China's massive economy will end up being counterproductive.

Recent U.S. policy has demonstrated how not to encourage greater market liberalization in China. The U.S.-Chinese trade war launched by the administration of former President Donald Trump has created conditions opposite to the ones that spurred market reform back in 2001. Washington levied unilateral tariffs, launched trade-dispute cases, instituted export bans, and placed restrictions on foreign investment in the United States. The Trump administration framed relations with China in terms of a zero-sum competition and even went so far as to threaten the decoupling of the two countries' giant (and thoroughly enmeshed) economies.

Recent U.S. policy has demonstrated how not to encourage liberalization in China.

Chinese leaders view these actions as part of a hostile U.S. strategy to contain or undermine China's rise. The confrontation has empowered the nationalists and conservatives opposed to market liberalization, who point to U.S. coercion as a reason to further protect China's high-tech manufacturing and secure the country's supply chains. The trade war has marginalized pro-reform officials who have called for many of the changes to Chinese policy that the United States has requested, such as the liberalization of the financial sector and the loosening of rules around foreign investment. China's reformists no doubt have less clout than their more statist counterparts. But their relative weakness has led them in the past to seek external leverage—as reform-minded officials did during China's WTO accession. This dynamic is by no means restricted to trade. China's banking regulators, for instance, have drawn on frameworks put forward by the Basel Committee on Banking Supervision (an international committee of central bankers) to overcome the resistance of state banks, SOEs, and local governments to greater oversight of the banking system.

U.S. policymakers should not abet the nationalists in China by focusing on threats and punishments. A broader strategy of engagement that offers significant benefits in return for Chinese commitments to further liberalization would provide domestic reformists with just the sort of leverage they enjoyed in

2001. Initiatives backed by multilateral institutions would have more legitimacy than would Washington's unilateral demands. Today, segments of the Chinese political elite remain open to adopting the high product standards and market-oriented rules of multilateral trade arrangements. A number of current and former Chinese officials have even spoken positively about the prospect of China's joining the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership, a free-trade deal, a step that would benefit the United States (although it is not a party to the deal) by bringing greater external oversight of problematic issues, such as the governance of Chinese SOEs and foreign investment in China, into the bilateral relationship.

The sweeping liberalization that China's central government embarked on at the beginning of this century showed the positive effects of the country's joining the WTO. But it was naive then to expect China to fully open up its economy and integrate it into the international trading system, just as it is simplistic now to think that China has abandoned liberal reform for the more familiar comforts of state capitalism. The Chinese economy is neither entirely marketized nor completely state-controlled, and any sensible China policy cannot treat the system as a monolith.

Source: <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/2021-02-16/how-wto-changed-china>

EDUCATION

Education Emergency | Editorial

RECENTLY, on the International Day of Education, UN Secretary General António Guterres commended students and teachers for their resilience during the Covid-19 pandemic, which has disrupted education and learning for countless students around the world. However, an estimated 44pc of all Pakistani children between the ages of five and 16 were not even going to school in the first place, and the figure is noticeably higher for girls than boys. On Wednesday, the Aga Khan University's Institute for Educational Development conducted an online discussion on out-of-school children in Pakistan, looking into some of the reasons why such a large percentage of the population has never stepped foot inside a classroom, or has dropped out before completing their studies. Even though Article 25-A of the Constitution directs that the state provide free and compulsory education to all children between the ages of five and 16, an estimated 22.8m children are not in school — the second highest figure in the world for that age bracket, according to Unicef. Furthermore, as noted in the IED discussion, Pakistan's population rate is rising at an alarming rate, and the number of out-of-school children will only grow in the near future, as the distance between demand and supply increases.

The reasons behind low attendance and high dropout rates is manifold, but primarily connected to poverty and accessibility issues. There are simply not enough schools in the country — particularly for secondary and higher studies, and especially in rural areas — and transport expenses remain a major concern for parents, along with all the other expenses. Children have to walk long distances, often with heavy schoolbags, and if there is no one to accompany them, parents may opt to take them out and put them to work — inside the home or outside. Additionally, if there is a gap in their studies, as there will be with the pandemic, children or their families are often reluctant to return to class. The state must wake up to this aspect of the challenge.

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COVID-19 Impact on Education in Pakistan

By Dr Nosharwan A Abbasi

COVID-19 has disrupted education worldwide in an unprecedented way. Millions of students have not been able to continue learning in schools, universities, vocational training institutions, and adult learning programs. Most governments around the world temporarily closed educational institutions in an attempt to contain the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic. The closure of educational institutions started back in February when China completely closed schools due to pandemic. Until March more than 190 countries either partially or fully closed their educational institutions. These nationwide closures impacted hundreds of millions of students.

Students, teachers and parents were not prepared for this situation and faced a wide range of challenges particularly dealing with the online mode of teaching or e-learning. Both school-going children and higher-level students such as college or university students experienced remote learning which affected their emotional side of learning. This phenomenon of remote learning is changing relationships between students, teachers and parents as well as highlights the importance of ensuring students' and teachers' well-being in times of crisis. COVID-19 appeared as an add-on challenge for the education system in Pakistan when the government decided to close all educational institutions back in March.

A prominent challenge that affected a large number of students was inadequate facilities and infrastructure of the internet to support online learning. Particularly, university students faced problems with online lectures due to poor internet connection and living in remote areas. Students were staying at their home and teachers were asked to deliver lectures online using different software such as zoom, Microsoft teams etc. It was not only a challenge for students but also for teachers as they were also in their hometowns and they were also facing internet issues.

In the wake of online classes challenge, students who had internet access started raising voice on Twitter and they managed to create trending topics such as #SuspendOnlineClasses, #BoycottOnlineClasses etc. This lash back clearly shows the lack of infrastructure to deliver online lectures. We adopted an online

class system following the trends from China and other western countries, but we ignored the realities of poor infrastructure and management.

At the school level, the concept of online education was conceived merely as teaching using WhatsApp groups and sending recorded voice notes. It was a challenge for teachers to record lectures and teach students using WhatsApp and a major responsibility was sifted on to parents' shoulders. WhatsApp mode of learning became a nightmare for parents and created a huge mess for them. School management so far was blackmailing the government, but they started building pressure on parents and students. Merely to collect monthly fee, owners of private institutions forced parents and teachers to adopt WhatsApp based learning. Primary level students who never used WhatsApp and particularly mobile phones for educational purposes were forced to attend lectures on WhatsApp. Moreover, due to the pandemic students were promoted to the next level without exams based on their previous results. This scenario also created a mess for many students and the results surprised many students. Even at the end of 2020 and the beginning of the New Year, students are still struggling with online education issues. They are still asking their teachers how they will conduct final exams, which will be the state of classes in 2021, and many similar questions.

Crisis situation raised questions on the value offered by educational institutes globally. And parents around the world have realized the importance of online education and home-schooling. Various discourses have started arguing that home-schooling can be the best solution for many students and parents. It can be convenient, innovative and socio-economic friendly to bring the home-schooling concept. However, the literacy rate at large in societies like Pakistan can be a major challenge in home-schooling. Educational institutes need to reinvent or innovate the learning environment in order to remain relevant. Online education has become a new normal globally at all levels of education and this new shift in education has raised the concerns of digital media literacy. Where students, teachers, and parents need to be more knowledgeable and literate when it comes to the use of technology for educational purposes.

In Pakistan, lack of digital media literacy appears as a huge gap and a major challenge particularly for parents who want their children to use digital devices for education, but they know nothing about the use, impact and challenges of digital devices. In a society where girls are discouraged to keep or use smartphones or

computers with or without the internet, they need to prepare and understand the importance of the use of digital devices for educational purposes. So far we discussed the challenges of women education in Pakistan but over time, many new challenges such as the use of digital devices for education purposes have emerged as major threats for female students. A few imminent questions must be answered such as: Will their parents allow them to use a mobile phone or computer? Will their parents allow them to use internet-enabled devices and particularly WhatsApp? Will parents allow their girl child to opt online mode of education?

—The writer holds a PhD from Communication University, China.

Source: <https://pakobserver.net/covid-19-impact-on-education-in-pakistan/>

Rethinking Education | Editorial

It is a sad state of affairs when one of the oldest and most iconic universities in Pakistan is struggling to stay afloat, but it is hardly surprising. The University of Peshawar is currently undergoing one of the worst financial crises it or another comparable institute in the country has gone through. The situation appears so extreme that its body of students is compelled to launch a charity drive simply so it can pay the salaries of its staff.

While there may be numerous factors responsible for UoP's current predicament, one cannot help but think about our general attitude towards education. This applies to both at the official and the individual level. In terms of the former, ensuring quality education has long been the least of our various leaders' priorities. Where other nations view both education and research as strategic sectors crucial to driving development, our approach towards it has been lacklustre at best.

Take neighbouring India for a moment, forgetting the current upheaval. The Indian government recently announced it would bulk purchase access to major reservoirs of international research papers for all its citizens to enable a much more conducive environment for research. In our case, we cannot seem to sustain an existing prestigious research university. Our teachers, from primary to higher education, are woefully paid, and the profession is regarded with some derision by most. Instead of seeing the career as a calling and investing in teachers' capabilities accordingly, most Pakistanis view it as no more than a 'pastime for bored wives'. That line of thought is problematic in itself and has led to crisis of education that no amount of school and university buildings will fix.

Speaking of individual attitudes, most Pakistanis remain fixated on education purely as a means to secure a well-paying job. That mindset is taken to such an extreme that it leads to a sense of entitlement, regardless of ability and aptitude. It also means that our business schools tend to be oversaturated and research, which could hold the key to reversing Pakistan's fortunes, is severely overlooked. While the government definitely needs to invest more in the education sector, we as a nation also need to change our cultural outlook towards it.

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Covid-19 and The National Education Policy

By Muhammad Jehangir Khan/Junaid

Ahmed

The formulation of the National Education Policy 2021 is a challenging but important task for the current government. When the unprecedented school closure due to the pandemic challenged the conventional education system globally, governments looked to researchers to present ideas to improve learning access. In this regard, the consultative process for developing a new policy is undeniably important in bringing a positive change to Pakistan's education system. Given this, we propose reformative actions that can change the current system's landscape.

First: how to get greater convergence in educational outcomes nationwide?
Second: what innovative topics would be useful during the consultative process to develop a final action?

Concerning the convergence in educational outcomes, the focus should be on improving learning and nurturing critical thinking instead of attendance. The policy should reform the overall assessment system to judge core competencies instead of rote learning. For instance, Pakistan has 22 million out-of-school children, yet those attending feel the effects of a low-quality education system. Children in Pakistan can expect to complete 9.4 years of pre-primary, primary, and secondary school by age 18. However, the quality-adjusted learning is only 5.1 years: a learning gap of 4.3 years.

Meanwhile, inequality in opportunity remains endemic due to access, quality provision, funds allocation, and infrastructure in the education system. Hence, the current policy should be based on "access, equity, quality, affordability and accountability" for greater convergence in areas left behind.

Regular teacher training is important for discipline, lesson planning, classroom management, and content knowledge. Therefore to advance skills and knowledge, teacher development modules, workshops and free online courses from Coursera and edX, etc. should be compulsory. Besides, there should be

training for education sector administrators to improve their skills/supervisory standards for efficiently undertaking duties. E.g., governance protocols should be framed such that school principals or area directors are accountable for improvement in the performance of pupils, staff and school's financial outlays.

Regarding absorption capacity, unemployment among graduates is higher due to the mismatch between the education imparted and labour market requirement. Still, enrolment in Pakistan's technical and vocational sector is low despite high demand for skilled workforce. Therefore, the policy should promote flexible, professional options between formal and technical schools. Technical education would not only decrease pressure on the labour market, but increase employability in the domestic and international markets. Lastly, it is time to bring uniformity in the curriculum and the education system. There are public schools, madrassahs, low-cost private schools, and schools for the elite. We should end this strict dichotomy.

Concerning innovative ideas, we should examine the digitalisation of education and scaling up successful educational innovations to improve education access and quality. There is no disagreement on the importance of digital services and online technology platforms to keep children learning. However, technical solutions exacerbate existing inequalities in educational outcomes. The policy should rely on existing evidence about what type of structures would improve distance learning in Pakistan. Besides, we need to plan forward as technological platforms for online teaching are still in their infancy. We need to be flexible as there are specifics not yet realised about online teaching experiments.

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Quality Education By Khurram Mateen

The federal government is finally going ahead with its ambitious plan to align the parallel education systems in the country with its much-vaunted Single National Curriculum (SNC) in August this year.

The initiative, which promises to do away with imbalances in the learning system and is characterised as a panacea by the prime minister to cure the classism in Pakistani society, has been the centre of much debate.

The arguments mainly square on the SNC's emphasis on religion and whether it can reform the education models in seminaries, besides the medium of instruction in schools. It remains to be seen how far this move will be able to reverse the rot that has hollowed out the education system over the decades.

If the objective is to truly reform the education system in its entirety – and not just another half-hearted attempt to mainstream seminaries to check extremism and increase tolerance in conformity with new security and political dimensions – this move alone is unlikely to offer the desired results that the architects boast of. To achieve this, an overarching reforms programme would have to be actively implemented alongside the SNC, with state schools in sight.

Boosting resources and efficiency to improve the quality of education and to facilitate students in public-sector institutions should be the areas of focus. Such challenges have already been noted in the National Education Policy Framework put forward a couple of years ago. Scaling up literacy rate and bridging the gender gap is another major challenge.

Education has no doubt become a class issue, with the affluent sending their children to expensive private schools and then abroad. These children return to the country to better opportunities than those who went to public schools, seminaries, or cheap 'private' schools – the in-betweeners – with questionable credentials that dot the educational landscape to fill the perceived gaps in the country's public education system. So why do people opt for the latter?

State schools at the moment are considered the least favourable option by many parents. Talk to any parent, and they will tell you the same thing: public schools

are in shambles. Parents prefer to send their children to private educational institutions because state schools are cash-strapped and neglected. The country spends just little over two percent of its GDP on education. This miniscule amount translates to a lack of quality of education and basic facilities.

While some non-profit organisations are playing an important role towards educating the less privileged, those NGOs are just crutches for the limping public-sector education system. So where do the (relatively) low-cost private schools come in? Parents opt for these not just due to a shortage of public schools. While quality of education is a factor, social pressures also likely contribute to the thriving 'industry' of such schools.

Private education is not always a choice for many inflation-ridden lower- and lower-middle class households. They are forced to compromise on other necessities of life to educate their children. So, what can the government do besides the SNC to change the fate of the country's underprivileged?

For real change, efforts need to be made by provinces to uplift the standard of education at government-run educational institutions, besides ensuring basic facilities. As education has become a provincial subject after the 18th Amendment, provincial governments are now mainly responsible for leading on this front. The PTI has governments in Punjab, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Gilgit-Baltistan, so it makes it easier for the ruling party to implement educational reforms.

When no quick fix seems in sight to overcome perennial resource constraints in the education sector, public schools can at least channel their energies towards quality teaching and discipline through efficient utilisation of the available human and material resources. All they need is effective teacher training and a robust monitoring system. An exclusive online application on the pattern of the Pakistan Citizen's Portal can help track the progress of educational institutions. Lack of merit in the hiring process and political interference in operational matters has been one of the major root causes for low efficiency in institutions, and the education sector is no exception.

So, the success of the latest initiative hinges on how well the government deals with the massive task of teacher training and efficiency, and how it manages political and administrative challenges to improve conditions at public schools. A

sophisticated mechanism would have to be put in place to sift out 'unfixable' and 'ghost' human resource.

Moreover, private schools should no more be a compulsion but a personal choice for parents to educate their children. However, minimum quality standards will have to be ensured in private schools through regulations, while managing the adverse impact of such an intervention which commonly results in more corruption. Turning a blind eye to a substandard school is akin to letting a quack play with the lives of unsuspecting patients – here the future of the next generation is at stake.

After all, the success of any initiative depends on how it moves from rhetoric to action. Political will is a prerequisite for defeating ignorance and restoring trust in education in the public sector.

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Covid-19 and The National Education Policy

By Muhammad Jehangir Khan/Junaid

Ahmed

The formulation of the National Education Policy 2021 is a challenging but important task for the current government. When the unprecedented school closure due to the pandemic challenged the conventional education system globally, governments looked to researchers to present ideas to improve learning access. In this regard, the consultative process for developing a new policy is undeniably important in bringing a positive change to Pakistan's education system. Given this, we propose reformative actions that can change the current system's landscape.

First: how to get greater convergence in educational outcomes nationwide?
Second: what innovative topics would be useful during the consultative process to develop a final action?

Concerning the convergence in educational outcomes, the focus should be on improving learning and nurturing critical thinking instead of attendance. The policy should reform the overall assessment system to judge core competencies instead of rote learning. For instance, Pakistan has 22 million out-of-school children, yet those attending feel the effects of a low-quality education system. Children in Pakistan can expect to complete 9.4 years of pre-primary, primary, and secondary school by age 18. However, the quality-adjusted learning is only 5.1 years: a learning gap of 4.3 years.

Meanwhile, inequality in opportunity remains endemic due to access, quality provision, funds allocation, and infrastructure in the education system. Hence, the current policy should be based on "access, equity, quality, affordability and accountability" for greater convergence in areas left behind.

Regular teacher training is important for discipline, lesson planning, classroom management, and content knowledge. Therefore to advance skills and knowledge, teacher development modules, workshops and free online courses from Coursera and edX, etc. should be compulsory. Besides, there should be

training for education sector administrators to improve their skills/supervisory standards for efficiently undertaking duties. E.g., governance protocols should be framed such that school principals or area directors are accountable for improvement in the performance of pupils, staff and school's financial outlays.

Regarding absorption capacity, unemployment among graduates is higher due to the mismatch between the education imparted and labour market requirement. Still, enrolment in Pakistan's technical and vocational sector is low despite high demand for skilled workforce. Therefore, the policy should promote flexible, professional options between formal and technical schools. Technical education would not only decrease pressure on the labour market, but increase employability in the domestic and international markets. Lastly, it is time to bring uniformity in the curriculum and the education system. There are public schools, madrassahs, low-cost private schools, and schools for the elite. We should end this strict dichotomy.

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WORLD

The Chessboard of US-Iran Relations: Obama, Trump, Biden By Dr Huma Baqai

EARLIER this year, President Biden said the international system is coming apart. He promised to salvage America's reputation, and said he is in a hurry. "There will be no time to lose", he wrote in the Foreign Affairs Magazine. One issue on which he really has to move fast, is US-Iran relations. Donald Trump's "maximum pressure" campaign was responded by "maximum resistance" by Iran.

The country has already withstood sanctions for three years without giving in to the demand of Trump Administration. Trump withdrew from the deal in May 2018 and has done everything to completely demolish it, including slapping very depleting last-minute sanctions on Iran in December 2020.

The setback has been for the Americans. America got isolated on the issue in the western world and as predicted Iran went into a strategic convergence with China and Russia. Moreover, Iran is closer to acquiring the technology needed for a nuclear weapon than it was before the deal. It has resumed enriching uranium to nearly 20 percent purity. It has also begun construction activity at both the Natanz and Fordow nuclear plants, where they appear to be building additional underground facilities, and installing centrifuges. Outgoing US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo alleged that Iran has become Al Qaeda new "home base, and was time for America and all free nations to crush the Iran-Al Qaeda axis. These allegations were made without providing any hard evidence. The comments were rejected by Iran as war mongering lies".

US-Iran relations are at a crucial point of inflection. President Obama's greatest achievement was the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) in July 2015. According to the deal, Iran agreed to limit enriching and accept stronger monitoring in exchange for relief from sanctions. In 2018, US under President Trump withdrew from the JCPOA. The withdrawal was largely triggered by both Saudi Arabia and Israel growing weary of Iran's interjection in Syria, Iraq and

Yamen. Shortly after President Trump's withdrawal from the deal, supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Hosseini Khamenei pledged Iran would not tolerate "the simultaneous restrictions of its economy and its nuclear program."

Iran since has been emboldened, however, continues to exercise strategic restraint, while responding to American provocations, but at the same time sending poignant messages to America in general and the region in particular. The missile attack on Saudi Arabia's Abqaiq oil refinery in September 2019, being a case in point, which shut down nearly five percent of global oil production.

In January 2020, Qassim Solemani, the powerful leader of Quds Force of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps, was assassinated by the US. The Iranian response of strike on the Ayn al Asad military base was a measured restrained response. In November 2020 Iran top nuclear scientist Mohsen Fakhrizadeh was killed in a brazen attack in Tehran. Iran blamed Israel for it, but chose not to respond immediately. Most analysts and commentators believe US withdrawal from JCPOA has only made the conflict matrix of the region more volatile. It has if anything resulted in a more aggressive Iran and a US that comes across as a country relying more on rhetoric than action on the ground.

Moreover, it has made restoration of trust in US as a guarantor of deal and negotiation a huge challenge. Biden has made it clear that he would rejoin the agreement and use a renewed commitment to diplomacy to work with allies to strengthen and extend it, while pressuring Iran against its regional activities. This is easier said than done. The optimism on the American side to negotiate a better agreement are at least for now unrealistic. The distrust for US in Iran runs high. Both tightening and lengthening Iran's nuclear constraints will not be easy. Iran may want to return to JCPOA to ease its economic sanctions, it is in a state of double jeopardy because of the pandemic. However, Iran is a resilient state. It takes great pride in its ability to resist western pressure autarkic "resistance economy to Hassan Rouhani's policy it is a resilient state. It takes great pride in its ability to resist western pressure. To the Iranian hardliner, the country's economic health is of lesser significance than its security, ideological purity and national aspirations. Many of them actually prefer an autarkic "resistance economy" to Rouhani's policy of nuclear cooperation with the West.

Elections in Iran are due in June 2021. No one in Iran can afford to look soft on the US. The window of opportunity is narrow; however, it must be used by both US and Iran to return to JCPOA.

Israel's reaction is not of any help. Its top generals have responded to Biden's plans by taking their gloves off. The top generals warned attack plans against Iran were being revised and said any US return to the 2015 nuclear accord with Tehran would be wrong. Such remarks in public domain by Israel's military top brass on American policy are rare and never without a pre-approval by the Israeli government. One of Netanyahu's Minister said publicly, if the US rejoins the nuclear deal, which is something Biden believes lies in the US national interest – Israel will go to war. The situation becomes more confusing with a newly appointed Secretary of State Antony Blinken, saying on record that US was “a long way” from deciding whether to join nuclear deal with Iran and It would need to see what Tehran actually did to resume complying with the historic pact.

As a footnote, a less ambiguous US policy for the region and Iran is the need of the day, it has been lacking for decades now. US has tried the hard track of sanctions and it has not worked. It is time to explore the options of engagement, support, aid, and soft power.

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Source: <https://pakobserver.net/the-chessboard-of-us-iran-relations-obama-trump-biden/>

Back to the Future By Maleeha Lodhi

THE Afghan peace process is now on hold as the negotiating parties — as well as the region — await the outcome of the new US administration's review of its Afghanistan policy. Top officials of the Biden administration have announced that they would review the February 2020 agreement forged between the US and Taliban in Doha a year ago.

Earlier this month, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken told Congress during his confirmation hearing that the administration would “have to look carefully at what has been negotiated to understand fully what commitments were made by the Taliban and to see where they get with their negotiations with the government of Afghanistan”. He also made it plain that Washington wanted to “end this so-called forever war” and “bring forces home”. And he added that the US may want to “retain some capacity to deal with any resurgence of terrorism”.

US National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan reiterated the same message during a call to his Afghan counterpart Hamdullah Mohib. He was cited as saying he “made clear the United States’ intention to review” the (Doha) deal and check whether the Taliban are “living up to [their] commitments to cut ties with terrorist groups, reduce violence in Afghanistan, and engage in meaningful negotiations with the Afghan government and other stakeholders”. In quick response, a Taliban spokesman declared they would “honour the agreement” and expect “the other side to remain committed to their agreement too”.

None of this is a surprise. Any incoming administration can be expected to examine afresh agreements made by its predecessor. But what will this mean for efforts to find a negotiated end to Afghanistan's long war? And for withdrawal of the remaining 2,500 US forces, pledged for May 2021 under the Doha deal, in exchange for Taliban guarantees to prevent Al Qaeda and other terrorist groups from operating in Afghanistan. Firm answers to these questions will only emerge once the review is concluded.

The US may shift the May timeline of its withdrawal to ensure the Taliban's compliance with commitments.

There are however pointers to the direction the review might take. President Joe Biden has long been averse to prolonged US military engagement in Afghanistan. As vice president he opposed the military surge president Obama ordered in 2009 and urged a narrow definition of US interests focused on counterterrorism. He advocated an end to “forever wars” often invoking the Vietnam experience to support his stance.

These views and the fact that the US troop pullout is now so far down the road suggests that the Biden administration is unlikely to reverse or significantly change course from what has been agreed under the Doha accord, which is in its interest to affirm. The political context too is significant given public fatigue with a long, unwinnable war. During the year since the agreement was signed there has been no American casualty in Afghanistan with the Taliban adhering to their commitment not to attack US/Nato forces. Any policy change that risks the loss of US lives is not a likely option, the political cost of which will be high. Another indication of policy continuity is the decision announced by Blinken in his first press conference to retain special representative Zalmay Khalilzad, apparently till May.

Some policy clarity may emerge from Washington before a Nato defence ministers meeting scheduled for Feb 18 in Brussels with Afghanistan on the agenda, even though the review would take longer. Europeans have been sceptical about a total troop withdrawal in May given intensifying violence in Afghanistan. That may influence the review. Biden has in the past argued for retaining a small counterterrorism force in Afghanistan, a view Blinken echoed in his congressional testimony. But it is questionable whether this can be negotiated with the Taliban, who are unlikely to agree to any kind of residual force in Afghanistan. This could be a deal breaker and may lead to the collapse of the Doha accord — an outcome that will make the presence of international forces unsustainable and put the peace process at risk.

While the Afghan policy review may not add new US conditions (as some in the Afghan government hope) indications are that the Biden team will want existing conditions to be effectively met and insist on implementation of all aspects of the Doha agreement. As Barnett Rubin (former special adviser at the State Department) told me: “In deciding on how best to implement the agreement, the US is likely to follow the provision of the agreement stating that all of its components are ‘inter-related’.” According to him, the Biden administration “will

focus on comprehensive implementation of the Doha agreement to ensure a safe US withdrawal but also engage in robust regional diplomacy to back that up”.

The Biden administration is widely expected to reaffirm the framework of the Doha agreement. But there is every possibility that it will push the Taliban much harder to ensure they are, as a US National Security Council spokesperson put it, “living up to their commitments to cut ties with terrorist groups, reduce violence in Afghanistan, and engage in meaningful negotiations with the Afghan government and other stakeholders”. A Pentagon spokesman said as much but added that Washington remains committed to the agreement. A more serious US effort is also likely aimed at eliciting Taliban assurances that women’s rights and human rights are protected and respected.

In order to secure compliance with these commitments Washington may shift the May timeframe of its final withdrawal making it contingent on comprehensive implementation of the Doha agreement, especially reduction of violence and real progress in intra-Afghan talks. How the Taliban will react to a delayed pullout is an open question.

As a key stakeholder Pakistan should engage early with the Biden administration to convey its views so that the review takes them into account. Islamabad is looking to Washington to reaffirm the Doha agreement and believes that it offers the best and perhaps only chance for a negotiated peace. This warrants active US backing for the peace talks and pressing both, not just one of the parties, towards a settlement. But if the US decides to delay the deadline for its withdrawal it will need much effort to prevent the peace process from unravelling.

The writer is a former ambassador to the US, UK and UN.

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A Foreign Policy Reset | Editorial

The new US administration might just have come into office two weeks ago but that hasn't stopped the official from making some sweeping statements about foreign policy. President Joe Biden announced on Thursday that he would end American support for Saudi and United Arab Emirates-led "offensive operations" in Yemen, echoing promises he made on the campaign trail in 2019.

This announcement by Joe Biden is distancing away from both the Obama and Trump administration's stance on Yemen, as it marks six years of military assistance from Washington for the Saudi-led coalition that is fighting Iran-linked rebels in the impoverished Arab country. This does not seem like a mere perfunctory gesture—the move has been accompanied by the US temporarily freezing a massive package of F-35 jets to the United Arab Emirates and arms to Saudi Arabia for review. This is a substantial development, indicating that the Biden administration is serious about resetting the Trump-era US policies towards the Middle East.

This, however, does not mean that relations between the US and Arab countries will sour. It could bring about much-needed change in the foreign policy status quo, as it indicates that there will be many new negotiations and deliberations in the region. If dealt with sensitively and inclusively, it could lead to greater peace in the region, especially between the US, Saudi Arabia and Iran—peace that is urgently needed as the Trump administration's quarrels with Iran proved that the region cannot withstand more conflict or threat of nuclear war. Old resentments should be replaced by cooperative attempts to bring peace.

However, this will not be simple. There is the risk of the new US administration falling into the trap of opposing everything Trump did, like undoing the Trump goodwill with Russia. Already, the Biden administration has made statements indicating they will be tougher on Russia. Considering Russia has a stake in the Middle East too, the hostility between the two countries will undoubtedly play into Middle East politics as well. A careful balancing act needs to be considered by all stakeholders.

Source: <https://nation.com.pk/06-Feb-2021/a-foreign-policy-reset>

Short of War By Kevin Rudd

Officials in Washington and Beijing don't agree on much these days, but there is one thing on which they see eye to eye: the contest between their two countries will enter a decisive phase in the 2020s. This will be the decade of living dangerously. No matter what strategies the two sides pursue or what events unfold, the tension between the United States and China will grow, and competition will intensify; it is inevitable. War, however, is not. It remains possible for the two countries to put in place guardrails that would prevent a catastrophe: a joint framework for what I call "managed strategic competition" would reduce the risk of competition escalating into open conflict.

The Chinese Communist Party is increasingly confident that by the decade's end, China's economy will finally surpass that of the United States as the world's largest in terms of GDP at market exchange rates. Western elites may dismiss the significance of that milestone; the CCP's Politburo does not. For China, size always matters. Taking the number one slot will turbocharge Beijing's confidence, assertiveness, and leverage in its dealings with Washington, and it will make China's central bank more likely to float the yuan, open its capital account, and challenge the U.S. dollar as the main global reserve currency. Meanwhile, China continues to advance on other fronts, as well. A new policy plan, announced last fall, aims to allow China to dominate in all new technology domains, including artificial intelligence, by 2035. And Beijing now intends to complete its military modernization program by 2027 (seven years ahead of the previous schedule), with the main goal of giving China a decisive edge in all conceivable scenarios for a conflict with the United States over Taiwan. A victory in such a conflict would allow President Xi Jinping to carry out a forced reunification with Taiwan before leaving power—an achievement that would put him on the same level within the CCP pantheon as Mao Zedong.

Washington must decide how to respond to Beijing's assertive agenda—and quickly. If it were to opt for economic decoupling and open confrontation, every country in the world would be forced to take sides, and the risk of escalation would only grow. Among policymakers and experts, there is understandable skepticism as to whether Washington and Beijing can avoid such an outcome. Many doubt that U.S. and Chinese leaders can find their way to a framework to manage their diplomatic relations, military operations, and activities in

cyberspace within agreed parameters that would maximize stability, avoid accidental escalation, and make room for both competitive and collaborative forces in the relationship. The two countries need to consider something akin to the procedures and mechanisms that the United States and the Soviet Union put in place to govern their relations after the Cuban missile crisis—but in this case, without first going through the near-death experience of a barely avoided war.

Managed strategic competition would involve establishing certain hard limits on each country's security policies and conduct but would allow for full and open competition in the diplomatic, economic, and ideological realms. It would also make it possible for Washington and Beijing to cooperate in certain areas, through bilateral arrangements and also multilateral forums. Although such a framework would be difficult to construct, doing so is still possible—and the alternatives are likely to be catastrophic.

BEIJING'S LONG VIEW

In the United States, few have paid much attention to the domestic political and economic drivers of Chinese grand strategy, the content of that strategy, or the ways in which China has been operationalizing it in recent decades. The conversation in Washington has been all about what the United States ought to do, without much reflection on whether any given course of action might result in real changes to China's strategic course. A prime example of this type of foreign policy myopia was an address that then Secretary of State Mike Pompeo delivered last July, in which he effectively called for the overthrow of the CCP. "We, the freedom-loving nations of the world, must induce China to change," he declared, including by "empower[ing] the Chinese people."

The only thing that could lead the Chinese people to rise up against the party-state, however, is their own frustration with the CCP's poor performance on addressing unemployment, its radical mismanagement of a natural disaster (such as a pandemic), or its massive extension of what is already intense political repression. Outside encouragement of such discontent, especially from the United States, is unlikely to help and quite likely to hinder any change. Besides, U.S. allies would never support such an approach; regime change has not exactly been a winning strategy in recent decades. Finally, bombastic statements such as Pompeo's are utterly counterproductive, because they strengthen Xi's hand at home, allowing him to point to the threat of foreign subversion to justify

ever-tighter domestic security measures, thereby making it easier for him to rally disgruntled CCP elites in solidarity against an external threat.

That last factor is particularly important for Xi, because one of his main goals is to remain in power until 2035, by which time he will be 82, the age at which Mao passed away. Xi's determination to do so is reflected in the party's abolition of term limits, its recent announcement of an economic plan that extends all the way to 2035, and the fact that Xi has not even hinted at who might succeed him even though only two years remain in his official term. Xi experienced some difficulty in the early part of 2020, owing to a slowing economy and the COVID-19 pandemic, whose Chinese origins put the CCP on the defensive. But by the year's end, official Chinese media were hailing him as the party's new "great navigator and helmsman," who had prevailed in a heroic "people's war" against the novel coronavirus. Indeed, Xi's standing has been aided greatly by the shambolic management of the pandemic in the United States and a number of other Western countries, which the CCP has highlighted as evidence of the inherent superiority of the Chinese authoritarian system. And just in case any ambitious party officials harbor thoughts about an alternative candidate to lead the party after Xi's term is supposed to end in 2022, Xi recently launched a major purge—a "rectification campaign," as the CCP calls it—of members deemed insufficiently loyal.

Meanwhile, Xi has carried out a massive crackdown on China's Uighur minority in the region of Xinjiang; launched campaigns of repression in Hong Kong, Inner Mongolia, and Tibet; and stifled dissent among intellectuals, lawyers, artists, and religious organizations across China. Xi has come to believe that China should no longer fear any sanctions that the United States might impose on his country, or on individual Chinese officials, in response to violations of human rights. In his view, China's economy is now strong enough to weather such sanctions, and the party can protect officials from any fallout, as well. Furthermore, unilateral U.S. sanctions are unlikely to be adopted by other countries, for fear of Chinese retaliation. Nonetheless, the CCP remains sensitive to the damage that can be done to China's global brand by continuing revelations about its treatment of minorities. That is why Beijing has become more active in international forums, including the UN Human Rights Council, where it has rallied support for its campaign to push back against long-established universal norms on human rights, while also regularly attacking the United States for its own alleged abuses of those very norms.

Xi is also intent on achieving Chinese self-sufficiency to head off any effort by Washington to decouple the United States' economy from that of China or to use U.S. control of the global financial system to block China's rise. This push lies at the heart of what Xi describes as China's "dual circulation economy": its shift away from export dependency and toward domestic consumption as the long-term driver of economic growth and its plan to rely on the gravitational pull of the world's biggest consumer market to attract foreign investors and suppliers to China on Beijing's terms. Xi also recently announced a new strategy for technology R & D and manufacturing to reduce China's dependence on imports of certain core technologies, such as semiconductors.

Beijing has concluded that the United States would never fight a war it could not win.

The trouble with this approach is that it prioritizes party control and state-owned enterprises over China's hard-working, innovative, and entrepreneurial private sector, which has been primarily responsible for the country's remarkable economic success over the last two decades. In order to deal with a perceived external economic threat from Washington and an internal political threat from private entrepreneurs whose long-term influence threatens the power of the CCP, Xi faces a dilemma familiar to all authoritarian regimes: how to tighten central political control without extinguishing business confidence and dynamism.

Xi faces a similar dilemma when it comes to what is perhaps his paramount goal: securing control over Taiwan. Xi appears to have concluded that China and Taiwan are now further away from peaceful reunification than at any time in the past 70 years. This is probably correct. But China often ignores its own role in widening the gulf. Many of those who believed that China would gradually liberalize its political system as it opened up its economic system and became more connected with the rest of the world also hoped that that process would eventually allow Taiwan to become more comfortable with some form of reunification. Instead, China has become more authoritarian under Xi, and the promise of reunification under a "one country, two systems" formula has evaporated as the Taiwanese look to Hong Kong, where China has imposed a harsh new national security law, arrested opposition politicians, and restricted media freedom.

With peaceful reunification off the table, Xi's strategy now is clear: to vastly increase the level of military power that China can exert in the Taiwan Strait, to the extent that the United States would become unwilling to fight a battle that Washington itself judged it would probably lose. Without U.S. backing, Xi believes, Taiwan would either capitulate or fight on its own and lose. This approach, however, radically underestimates three factors: the difficulty of occupying an island that is the size of the Netherlands, has the terrain of Norway, and boasts a well-armed population of 25 million; the irreparable damage to China's international political legitimacy that would arise from such a brutal use of military force; and the deep unpredictability of U.S. domestic politics, which would determine the nature of the U.S. response if and when such a crisis arose. Beijing, in projecting its own deep strategic realism onto Washington, has concluded that the United States would never fight a war it could not win, because to do so would be terminal for the future of American power, prestige, and global standing. What China does not include in this calculus is the reverse possibility: that the failure to fight for a fellow democracy that the United States has supported for the entire postwar period would also be catastrophic for Washington, particularly in terms of the perception of U.S. allies in Asia, who might conclude that the American security guarantees they have long relied on are worthless—and then seek their own arrangements with China.

As for China's maritime and territorial claims in the East China and South China Seas, Xi will not concede an inch. Beijing will continue to sustain pressure on its Southeast Asian neighbors in the South China Sea, actively contesting freedom-of-navigation operations, probing for any weakening of individual or collective resolve—but stopping short of a provocation that might trigger a direct military confrontation with Washington, because at this stage, China is not fully confident it would win. In the meantime, Beijing will seek to cast itself in as reasonable a light as possible in its ongoing negotiations with Southeast Asian claimant states on the joint use of energy resources and fisheries in the South China Sea. Here, as elsewhere, China will fully deploy its economic leverage in the hope of securing the region's neutrality in the event of a military incident or crisis involving the United States or its allies. In the East China Sea, China will continue to increase its military pressure on Japan around the disputed Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands, but as in Southeast Asia, here too Beijing is unlikely to risk an armed conflict, particularly given the unequivocal nature of the U.S. security guarantee to Japan. Any risk, however small, of China losing such a

conflict would be politically unsustainable in Beijing and have massive domestic political consequences for Xi.

AMERICA THROUGH XI'S EYES

Underneath all these strategic choices lies Xi's belief, reflected in official Chinese pronouncements and CCP literature, that the United States is experiencing a steady, irreversible structural decline. This belief is now grounded in a considerable body of evidence. A divided U.S. government failed to craft a national strategy for long-term investment in infrastructure, education, and basic scientific and technological research. The Trump administration damaged U.S. alliances, abandoned trade liberalization, withdrew the United States from its leadership of the postwar international order, and crippled U.S. diplomatic capacity. The Republican Party has been hijacked by the far right, and the American political class and electorate are so deeply polarized that it will prove difficult for any president to win support for a long-term bipartisan strategy on China. Washington, Xi believes, is highly unlikely to recover its credibility and confidence as a regional and global leader. And he is betting that as the next decade progresses, other world leaders will come to share this view and begin to adjust their strategic postures accordingly, gradually shifting from balancing with Washington against Beijing, to hedging between the two powers, to bandwagoning with China.

But China worries about the possibility of Washington lashing out at Beijing in the years before U.S. power finally dissipates. Xi's concern is not just a potential military conflict but also any rapid and radical economic decoupling. Moreover, the CCP's diplomatic establishment fears that the Biden administration, realizing that the United States will soon be unable to match Chinese power on its own, might form an effective coalition of countries across the democratic capitalist world with the express aim of counterbalancing China collectively. In particular, CCP leaders fear that President Joe Biden's proposal to hold a summit of the world's major democracies represents a first step on that path, which is why China acted rapidly to secure new trade and investment agreements in Asia and Europe before the new administration came into office.

Washington, Xi believes, is unlikely to recover its credibility and confidence as a global leader.

Mindful of this combination of near-term risks and China's long-term strengths, Xi's general diplomatic strategy toward the Biden administration will be to de-

escalate immediate tensions, stabilize the bilateral relationship as early as possible, and do everything possible to prevent security crises. To this end, Beijing will look to fully reopen the lines of high-level military communication with Washington that were largely cut off during the Trump administration. Xi might seek to convene a regular, high-level political dialogue, as well, although Washington will not be interested in reestablishing the U.S.-China Strategic and Economic Dialogue, which served as the main channel between the two countries until its collapse amid the trade war of 2018–19. Finally, Beijing may moderate its military activity in the immediate period ahead in areas where the People’s Liberation Army rubs up directly against U.S. forces, particularly in the South China Sea and around Taiwan—assuming that the Biden administration discontinues the high-level political visits to Taipei that became a defining feature of the final year of the Trump administration. For Beijing, however, these are changes in tactics, not in strategy.

As Xi tries to ratchet down tensions in the near term, he will have to decide whether to continue pursuing his hard-line strategy against Australia, Canada, and India, which are friends or allies of the United States. This has involved a combination of a deep diplomatic freeze and economic coercion—and, in the case of India, direct military confrontation. Xi will wait for any clear signal from Washington that part of the price for stabilizing the U.S.-Chinese relationship would be an end to such coercive measures against U.S. partners. If no such signal is forthcoming—there was none under President Donald Trump—then Beijing will resume business as usual.

Meanwhile, Xi will seek to work with Biden on climate change. Xi understands this is in China’s interests because of the country’s increasing vulnerability to extreme weather events. He also realizes that Biden has an opportunity to gain international prestige if Beijing cooperates with Washington on climate change, given the weight of Biden’s own climate commitments, and he knows that Biden will want to be able to demonstrate that his engagement with Beijing led to reductions in Chinese carbon emissions. As China sees it, these factors will deliver Xi some leverage in his overall dealings with Biden. And Xi hopes that greater collaboration on climate will help stabilize the U.S.-Chinese relationship more generally.

Adjustments in Chinese policy along these lines, however, are still likely to be tactical rather than strategic. Indeed, there has been remarkable continuity in

Chinese strategy toward the United States since Xi came to power in 2013, and Beijing has been surprised by the relatively limited degree to which Washington has pushed back, at least until recently. Xi, driven by a sense of Marxist-Leninist determinism, also believes that history is on his side. As Mao was before him, Xi has become a formidable strategic competitor for the United States.

UNDER NEW MANAGEMENT

On balance, the Chinese leadership would have preferred to have seen the reelection of Trump in last year's U.S. presidential election. That is not to say that Xi saw strategic value in every element of Trump's foreign policy; he didn't. The CCP found the Trump administration's trade war humiliating, its moves toward decoupling worrying, its criticism of China's human rights record insulting, and its formal declaration of China as a "strategic competitor" sobering. But most in the CCP's foreign policy establishment view the recent shift in U.S. sentiment toward China as structural—an inevitable byproduct of the changing balance of power between the two countries. In fact, a number have been quietly relieved that open strategic competition has replaced the pretense of bilateral cooperation. With Washington having removed the mask, this thinking goes, China could now move more rapidly—and, in some cases, openly—toward realizing its strategic goals, while also claiming to be the aggrieved party in the face of U.S. belligerence.

But by far the greatest gift that Trump delivered to Beijing was the sheer havoc his presidency unleashed within the United States and between Washington and its allies. China was able to exploit the many cracks that developed between liberal democracies as they tried to navigate Trump's protectionism, climate change denialism, nationalism, and contempt for all forms of multilateralism. During the Trump years, Beijing benefited not because of what it offered the world but because of what Washington ceased to offer. The result was that China achieved victories such as the massive Asia-Pacific free-trade deal known as the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership and the EU-China Comprehensive Agreement on Investment, which will enmesh the Chinese and European economies to a far greater degree than Washington would like.

China is wary of the Biden administration's ability to help the United States recover from those self-inflicted wounds. Beijing has seen Washington bounce back from political, economic, and security disasters before. Nonetheless, the CCP remains confident that the inherently divisive nature of U.S. politics will

make it impossible for the new administration to solidify support for any coherent China strategy it might devise.

Biden intends to prove Beijing wrong in its assessment that the United States is now in irreversible decline. He will seek to use his extensive experience on Capitol Hill to forge a domestic economic strategy to rebuild the foundations of U.S. power in the post-pandemic world. He is also likely to continue to strengthen the capabilities of the U.S. military and to do what it takes to sustain American global technological leadership. He has assembled a team of economic, foreign policy, and national security advisers who are experienced professionals and well versed in China—in stark contrast to their predecessors, who, with a couple of midranking exceptions, had little grasp of China and even less grasp of how to make Washington work. Biden's advisers also understand that in order to restore U.S. power abroad, they must rebuild the U.S. economy at home in ways that will reduce the country's staggering inequality and increase economic opportunities for all Americans. Doing so will help Biden maintain the political leverage he'll need to craft a durable China strategy with bipartisan support—no mean feat when opportunistic opponents such as Pompeo will have ample incentive to disparage any plan he puts forward as little more than appeasement.

To lend his strategy credibility, Biden will have to make sure the U.S. military stays several steps ahead of China's increasingly sophisticated array of military capabilities. This task will be made more difficult by intense budgetary constraints, as well as pressure from some factions within the Democratic Party to reduce military spending in order to boost social welfare programs. For Biden's strategy to be seen as credible in Beijing, his administration will need to hold the line on the aggregate defense budget and cover increased expenses in the Indo-Pacific region by redirecting military resources away from less pressing theaters, such as Europe.

As China becomes richer and stronger, the United States' largest and closest allies will become ever more crucial to Washington. For the first time in many decades, the United States will soon require the combined heft of its allies to maintain an overall balance of power against an adversary. China will keep trying to peel countries away from the United States—such as Australia, Canada, France, Germany, Japan, South Korea, and the United Kingdom—using a combination of economic carrots and sticks. To prevent China from succeeding, the Biden administration needs to commit itself to fully opening the U.S. economy

to its major strategic partners. The United States prides itself on having one of the most open economies in the world. But even before Trump's pivot to protectionism, that was not the case. Washington has long burdened even its closest allies with formidable tariff and nontariff barriers to trade, investment, capital, technology, and talent. If the United States wishes to remain the center of what until recently was called "the free world," then it must create a seamless economy across the national boundaries of its major Asian, European, and North American partners and allies. To do so, Biden must overcome the protectionist impulses that Trump exploited and build support for new trade agreements anchored in open markets. To allay the fears of a skeptical electorate, he will need to show Americans that such agreements will ultimately lead to lower prices, better wages, more opportunities for U.S. industry, and stronger environmental protections and assure them that the gains won from trade liberalization can help pay for major domestic improvements in education, childcare, and health care.

The Biden administration will also strive to restore the United States' leadership in multilateral institutions such as the UN, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and the World Trade Organization. Most of the world will welcome this after four years of watching the Trump administration sabotage much of the machinery of the postwar international order. But the damage will not be repaired overnight. The most pressing priorities are fixing the World Trade Organization's broken dispute-resolution process, rejoining the Paris agreement on climate change, increasing the capitalization of both the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (to provide credible alternatives to China's Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank and its Belt and Road Initiative), and restoring U.S. funding for critical UN agencies. Such institutions have not only been instruments of U.S. soft power since Washington helped create them after the last world war; their operations also materially affect American hard power in areas such as nuclear proliferation and arms control. Unless Washington steps up to the plate, the institutions of the international system will increasingly become Chinese satrapies, driven by Chinese finance, influence, and personnel.

MANAGED STRATEGIC COMPETITION

The deeply conflicting nature of U.S. and Chinese strategic objectives and the profoundly competitive nature of the relationship may make conflict, and even war, seem inevitable—even if neither country wants that outcome. China will seek to achieve global economic dominance and regional military superiority over

the United States without provoking direct conflict with Washington and its allies. Once it achieves superiority, China will then incrementally change its behavior toward other states, especially when their policies conflict with China's ever-changing definition of its core national interests. On top of this, China has already sought to gradually make the multilateral system more obliging of its national interests and values.

But a gradual, peaceful transition to an international order that accommodates Chinese leadership now seems far less likely to occur than it did just a few years ago. For all the eccentricities and flaws of the Trump administration, its decision to declare China a strategic competitor, formally end the doctrine of strategic engagement, and launch a trade war with Beijing succeeded in making clear that Washington was willing to put up a significant fight. And the Biden administration's plan to rebuild the fundamentals of national U.S. power at home, rebuild U.S. alliances abroad, and reject a simplistic return to earlier forms of strategic engagement with China signals that the contest will continue, albeit tempered by cooperation in a number of defined areas.

The question for both Washington and Beijing, then, is whether they can conduct this high level of strategic competition within agreed-on parameters that would reduce the risk of a crisis, conflict, and war. In theory, this is possible; in practice, however, the near-complete erosion of trust between the two has radically increased the degree of difficulty. Indeed, many in the U.S. national security community believe that the CCP has never had any compunction about lying or hiding its true intentions in order to deceive its adversaries. In this view, Chinese diplomacy aims to tie opponents' hands and buy time for Beijing's military, security, and intelligence machinery to achieve superiority and establish new facts on the ground. To win broad support from U.S. foreign policy elites, therefore, any concept of managed strategic competition will need to include a stipulation by both parties to base any new rules of the road on a reciprocal practice of "trust but verify."

The idea of managed strategic competition is anchored in a deeply realist view of the global order. It accepts that states will continue to seek security by building a balance of power in their favor, while recognizing that in doing so they are likely to create security dilemmas for other states whose fundamental interests may be disadvantaged by their actions. The trick in this case is to reduce the risk to both sides as the competition between them unfolds by jointly crafting a limited

number of rules of the road that will help prevent war. The rules will enable each side to compete vigorously across all policy and regional domains. But if either side breaches the rules, then all bets are off, and it's back to all the hazardous uncertainties of the law of the jungle.

Washington, Xi believes, is unlikely to recover its credibility and confidence as a global leader.

The first step to building such a framework would be to identify a few immediate steps that each side must take in order for a substantive dialogue to proceed and a limited number of hard limits that both sides (and U.S. allies) must respect. Both sides must abstain, for example, from cyberattacks targeting critical infrastructure. Washington must return to strictly adhering to the "one China" policy, especially by ending the Trump administration's provocative and unnecessary high-level visits to Taipei. For its part, Beijing must dial back its recent pattern of provocative military exercises, deployments, and maneuvers in the Taiwan Strait. In the South China Sea, Beijing must not reclaim or militarize any more islands and must commit to respecting freedom of navigation and aircraft movement without challenge; for its part, the United States and its allies could then (and only then) reduce the number of operations they carry out in the sea. Similarly, China and Japan could cut back their military deployments in the East China Sea by mutual agreement over time.

If both sides could agree on those stipulations, each would have to accept that the other will still try to maximize its advantages while stopping short of breaching the limits. Washington and Beijing would continue to compete for strategic and economic influence across the various regions of the world. They would keep seeking reciprocal access to each other's markets and would still take retaliatory measures when such access was denied. They would still compete in foreign investment markets, technology markets, capital markets, and currency markets. And they would likely carry out a global contest for hearts and minds, with Washington stressing the importance of democracy, open economies, and human rights and Beijing highlighting its approach to authoritarian capitalism and what it calls "the China development model."

Even amid escalating competition, however, there will be some room for cooperation in a number of critical areas. This occurred even between the United States and the Soviet Union at the height of the Cold War. It should certainly be

possible now between the United States and China, when the stakes are not nearly as high. Aside from collaborating on climate change, the two countries could conduct bilateral nuclear arms control negotiations, including on mutual ratification of the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty, and work toward an agreement on acceptable military applications of artificial intelligence. They could cooperate on North Korean nuclear disarmament and on preventing Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons. They could undertake a series of confidence-building measures across the Indo-Pacific region, such as coordinated disaster-response and humanitarian missions. They could work together to improve global financial stability, especially by agreeing to reschedule the debts of developing countries hit hard by the pandemic. And they could jointly build a better system for distributing COVID-19 vaccines in the developing world.

That list is far from exhaustive. But the strategic rationale for all the items is the same: it is better for both countries to operate within a joint framework of managed competition than to have no rules at all. The framework would need to be negotiated between a designated and trusted high-level representative of Biden and a Chinese counterpart close to Xi; only a direct, high-level channel of that sort could lead to confidential understandings on the hard limits to be respected by both sides. These two people would also become the points of contact when violations occurred, as they are bound to from time to time, and the ones to police the consequences of any such violations. Over time, a minimum level of strategic trust might emerge. And maybe both sides would also discover that the benefits of continued collaboration on common planetary challenges, such as climate change, might begin to affect the other, more competitive and even conflictual areas of the relationship.

There will be many who will criticize this approach as naive. Their responsibility, however, is to come up with something better. Both the United States and China are currently in search of a formula to manage their relationship for the dangerous decade ahead. The hard truth is that no relationship can ever be managed unless there is a basic agreement between the parties on the terms of that management.

GAME ON

What would be the measures of success should the United States and China agree on such a joint strategic framework? One sign of success would be if by 2030 they have avoided a military crisis or conflict across the Taiwan Strait or a

debilitating cyberattack. A convention banning various forms of robotic warfare would be a clear victory, as would the United States and China acting immediately together, and with the World Health Organization, to combat the next pandemic. Perhaps the most important sign of success, however, would be a situation in which both countries competed in an open and vigorous campaign for global support for the ideas, values, and problem-solving approaches that their respective systems offer—with the outcome still to be determined.

Success, of course, has a thousand fathers, but failure is an orphan. But the most demonstrable example of a failed approach to managed strategic competition would be over Taiwan. If Xi were to calculate that he could call Washington's bluff by unilaterally breaking out of whatever agreement had been privately reached with Washington, the world would find itself in a world of pain. In one fell swoop, such a crisis would rewrite the future of the global order.

A few days before Biden's inauguration, Chen Yixin, the secretary-general of the CCP's Central Political and Legal Affairs Commission, stated that "the rise of the East and the decline of the West has become [a global] trend and changes of the international landscape are in our favor." Chen is a close confidant of Xi and a central figure in China's normally cautious national security apparatus, and so the hubris in his statement is notable. In reality, there is a long way to go in this race. China has multiple domestic vulnerabilities that are rarely noted in the media. The United States, on the other hand, always has its weaknesses on full public display—but has repeatedly demonstrated its capacity for reinvention and restoration. Managed strategic competition would highlight the strengths and test the weaknesses of both great powers—and may the best system win.

Source: <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2021-02-05/kevin-rudd-usa-chinese-confrontation-short-of-war>

President Biden and South Asia By Imran Malik

President Biden will find a vastly changed South Asia than the one he dealt with earlier as a Senator, Chairman Senate Foreign Affairs Committee and as Vice President of the US. South Asia has undergone striking paradigm shifts in the geopolitical, geostrategic and geo-economic dimensions throwing up very complex challenges for the US.

He will find three inter-linked centres of conflict in South Asia that he must tackle simultaneously—the Afghan quagmire, the unrelenting Indo-Pakistan hostility and the Indo-China bust up. All will directly or indirectly impact his pursuit of US' vital national interest in Asia—the containment of China. At the moment, there is a Mexican standoff in the larger Kashmir region with China, India and Pakistan at the verge of an ominous conventional-nuclear war!

Afghanistan, which is conjoined with South Asia, writhes in chaos, unrest and instability. The Afghan Peace Process is stuck in a rut. The intra-Afghan dialogue is stalling while ferocious clashes between the Afghan Taliban and the ANDSF persist. Terrorist groups thrive unchallenged. RAW and NDS, the Indian and Afghan intelligence organisations, continue to compound internal and regional instability by launching state sponsored terrorist attacks into Pakistan from Afghanistan and Iran. The US remains undecided on how to bring its badly misfiring Afghan Campaign to a viable closure. Afghanistan's volatility contributes directly to the region's instability.

PM Khan assures to provide social protection to poor segments of society Pakistan's democracy continues to gain root as the BRI-CPEC boosts its economic credentials and viability. It is successfully fighting off the multidimensional hybrid war unleashed by India. It has defeated the scourge of terrorism expelling all terrorist groups from its territories. However, threats on its western and eastern borders still persevere menacingly. The RAW-NDS launched terrorist attacks from Afghan and Iranian soils continue unabated. It has maintained its strategic composure and balance on both western and eastern fronts. It has emerged as a very self-confident and formidable military-nuclear power in the region, denying India the status of the regional hegemon. It has

weathered the COVID-19 pandemic better than most in the world with its economy on the rebound. Its multidimensional partnership with China has acquired phenomenal, irreversible proportions. This Sino-Pak alliance checks Indian belligerence effectively and brings vital stability to the region.

India, has degenerated into a fascist, extremist, Hindutva-crazed country led by an ultra-nationalist RSS-BJP inspired regime. Not only has the RSS-BJP government tried to implement its extremist and ultranationalist policies within the country but has also senselessly tried to enforce them in the region too. Resultantly, India now finds itself truly isolated within South Asia as all its neighbours have refused to accept its malign conduct and policies. India is fast imploding under the centrifugal forces unleashed by the divisive policies of the RSS-BJP Government. It is fast splintering on religious, ethnic, sectarian, linguistic et al fault lines as all its minorities, especially the Indian Muslims, feel the unbearable heat of the RSS-BJP government's contentious policies. The Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu & Kashmir Region (IIOJ&KR), in particular, reels under savage and unfettered Indian repression. The Kashmiri Muslims have been held incommunicado since August 2019 and have been denied all civil freedoms and human rights. Ironically, the so-called free world led by the US itself has chosen to turn a blind eye towards it. The CAA, the NCR, the NPR, the abrogation of Articles 370 and 35A from the Indian Constitution, the demolition of the Babri Mosque and the construction of a Ram Temple in its stead, the violent subjugation of the mostly Sikh farmers in Indian Punjab (giving impetus to the call for an independent Khalistan) all present a picture of a country divided on itself and moving headlong into a vortex of instability and disintegration. A tanking economy during the deadly COVID-19 pandemic has further worsened its woes. Most alarmingly, President Biden will find an India facing two very formidable military-nuclear powers on its north-eastern (LAC) and north-western (LOC) extremities, courtesy its disastrous megalomania and Hindutva-crazed policies. India is essentially at war; with itself, its neighbours and with the region at large.

Police fires tear gas on protestors in Islamabad

The other South Asian countries too, find the benefits of the BRI, irresistible. Chinese ingress into Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bhutan, Maldives even Myanmar has created an economic stake in their ties with it. India's neighbours are now more positively inclined towards China than it. India is worried. China has clearly outmanoeuvred the US in interconnecting with South Asia and creating mutually beneficial economic interdependence. India, however, sits on

the side-lines and sulks as the region moves rapidly towards economic development and prosperity.

China has made a massive ingress into South Asia through the BRI-CPEC and has emphatically expanded its sphere of influence and strategic reach to encompass the region and beyond. The CPEC, the flagship project of the BRI, is progressing rapidly and very well. China now is not only an Indo-Pacific and Indian Ocean power but also truly the most dominant South Asian power as well. It threatens to supersede the US as the major net security provider in the region at large. India has always been vying for ascendance in this region however, its ambitions to become the regional hegemon have been summarily circumscribed and overwhelmed by China, or say the Sino-Pak Combine. China is now well poised to dominate and manage South Asia.

Pakistan Navy releases promo of new song

President Biden will have to be cognisant of the changed ground realities in South Asia and the fragile peace that prevails there. India was never the hegemon of the region and is increasingly less likely to ever acquire that mantle. He must comprehend India's real position and status in South Asia and re-evaluate his policy objectives accordingly. He must realistically perceive the latent dangers that lurk within a thoroughly destabilised South Asia, in particular, in the larger Kashmir region—the most probable nuclear flashpoint in the world! It is here that the vital interests of China, India, Pakistan and perhaps even the US (?) clash.

President Biden will thus start his engagement with South Asia from an unfavourable position. Will he sue for peace or turn the obtaining strategic environment around to his advantage?

Source: <https://nation.com.pk/07-Feb-2021/president-biden-and-south-asia>

Foreign troops to stay in Afghanistan for some more time **By Iqbal Khan**

PAKISTAN'S Foreign Minister has held a detailed discussion with the US Secretary of State on Afghanistan. Post Trump popular theme is that the US should not, simply hand over a victory to the Taliban. A troop withdrawal in May "would not only leave America more vulnerable to terrorist threats; it would also have catastrophic effects in Afghanistan and the region that would not be in the interest of any of the key actors, including the Taliban". These views have been articulated in a report by the 15-member bipartisan "Afghanistan Study Group", commissioned by Congress in 2019. The report has supported efforts by the former Trump Administration for creating a "pathway" for peace, however, it recommends a "significant revision of US policy".

The report argues that, given the six-month delay in the start of peace talks that had been scheduled to begin in March 2020, the Biden Administration "can make the case that there has been insufficient time for these negotiations to create the hoped-for conditions under which international military forces could leave Afghanistan by May, as envisaged in the Doha Agreement." Taliban representatives have threatened to return to an all-out war footing and abandon the peace process if the Americans and other NATO-led forces do not withdraw by May.

The Group was led by three co-chairs, former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and former US commander in Afghanistan General Joe Dunford; former Republican Senator from New Hampshire Kelly Ayotte and former senior official of the US Agency for International Development Nancy Lindborg. The study group included retired ambassadors and senior figures from both Democrats and Republicans, including Susan Gordon, former Principal Deputy Director of National Intelligence and Mark Green, who served as head of USAID under the Trump Administration.

According to Dan De Luce "The report, released on 03 February, urges the Biden Administration to postpone a May deadline for the withdrawal of US troops from Afghanistan, warning an early exit would allow terrorist groups to re-emerge and undercut a tenuous peace process". Leaving too soon could trigger civil war,

hand the Taliban victory and spur the re-emergence of terror groups that could threaten the US, says the report.

Issuance of report has coincided with an urgent policy review by the Biden Administration, which has already said it is weighing options on Afghanistan and suggested it may delay the scheduled May troop withdrawal. In general, American intelligentsia supports a closure to two decades long war. The report said, "Withdrawing US troops irresponsibly is likely to lead to a new civil war in Afghanistan, inviting the reconstitution of anti-US terrorist groups that could threaten our homeland and providing them with a narrative of victory against the world's most powerful country."

The report said its recommended approach "depends on the US negotiating team making clear to the Taliban that they have not fulfilled the conditions in the Doha Agreement under which a US withdrawal can take place. "And, further US troop withdrawals should be conditioned on the Taliban's demonstrated willingness and capacity to contain terrorist groups, on a reduction in the Taliban's violence against the Afghan people, and on real progress toward a compromised political settlement," it said.

Trump era US-Taliban agreement signed in Doha on 29 February 2020 binds the US to fully withdraw its remaining 2,500 troops by end May. However, the bipartisan report has recommended an "immediate diplomatic effort to extend the current withdrawal date "in order to give the peace process sufficient time to produce an acceptable result."

The report also reminds the US to consult its NATO allies and other partners that have troops on the ground, saying earlier troop reductions had taken place without appropriate consultations. And further such withdrawal could damage America's credibility with its European allies. "The United States should view the goal of its military presence in Afghanistan as not only to counter terrorist threats such as Al Qaeda and the Islamic State militants but to help secure a lasting peace settlement between the Taliban and the Afghan government", the report added.

On their part, Taliban say they have abided by the terms of the agreement, and that they have made good on promises to the US for to not targeting the US forces or stage attacks on Afghan cities. Taliban say that current waves of

violence are not of their making, and that Daesh and other spoilers are orchestrating violence so that it could be blamed on Taliban.

The Afghan Taliban have made a startling revelation that the United States forces in Afghanistan were involved in transporting Daesh militants into the war-torn country through their helicopters. Senior members of Taliban, during a visit to Iran to discuss the peace process, made the statement at a news conference in Tehran on 03 February.

They went on to add that the US forces were also helping the Islamic State militants escape the areas under the Taliban's control. Blaming the American forces for the recent uptick in violence in the country, the leaders said the US had defaulted on the terms agreed during the agreement in February and resumed the attacks. "We have no access to the media but they have. They attribute violence to us and that is not true. They start the violence. They start the violent action and that's still continuing."

India is also playing a spoiler's role and a number of terrorist outfits of Indian origin are carrying out violent attacks on Afghan military and people which are being blamed on Taliban. State Department spokesperson Ned Price said the Administration was assessing "whether the Taliban are fulfilling their commitments to cut ties with terrorist groups, to reduce violence and to engage in meaningful negotiations with the Afghan government and other stakeholders."

Nonetheless, it is a foregone conclusion that US-led foreign occupation forces are poised to stay in Afghanistan for an indefinite period. Narrative is being strengthened on to support the inevitable. Now US allies shall, one after the other, come out with statements supporting retention of troops in Afghanistan. German Foreign Minister has made the beginning by saying that "Afghanistan troop withdrawal should be tied with peace talk progress". Unilateral tempering with troop withdrawal schedule by the US is not likely to go down well with Taliban. Unless such offer is time specific, and embedded with a quid pro quo, Taliban may walk away from the deal.

Retention of Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad, as chief negotiator, by the Biden Administration indicates such likelihood.

Source: <https://pakobserver.net/foreign-troops-to-stay-in-afghanistan-for-some-more-time/>

Global Warming and the Pandemic! By

Khalid Saleem

THE Covid-19 Pandemic descended upon Man kind like a bolt from the blue. The past is witness that other calamities afflicting humankind, more often than not, had served a decent notice and crept up gradually on humanity. Not so with the Coronavirus Pandemic! One can only hope and pray that this woe too shall pass the way it emerged; all in a jiffy! One would have surmised that like the calamities of another ilk – Climate Change for one – this one too would have served sufficient notice of sorts. But this was not fated to be! Talking of Climate Change, a rather alarming recent news report, datelined Berlin, warns that 60 percent of fish species may not survive a five degree centigrade rise in temperature due to global warming. This is the first time that the effect of global warming on the human food chain has been highlighted. Mother Nature has her own ways.

The news report aforementioned tends to confirm that Global Warming represents a major disaster waiting to happen. The mere fact that it creeps on gradually rather than descend as a bolt from the blue does not make it any the less calamitous. The one positive aspect, though, is that the world has plenty of warning to prepare itself or to make amends before the disaster unfolds. If only people who matter would pay heed before it is too late! A peep over the shoulder may be in order. Thanks to the pressure exerted by the agitating minority, some progress has been registered in the field of Global Warming. Still not sufficient advantage has been taken of several timely notices by Mother Nature.

In the course of several multilateral Conferences where the subject of global warming came up, it was brushed aside by the developed world as a Third World worry. From their jaundiced point of view, this matter was hardly worth sacrificing the First World's prerogative to burn fossil fuel to its heart's content! They also found it expedient to fob off the ultimate responsibility on those Third World states that were eking out a measly living through the clandestine sale of their rain-forest timber. The North felt secure in the belief that states of the Developed World would never ever be on the receiving end of things.

Nature is a great leveller, though. Man-made disasters may be designed to be partial against the poor and the deprived, but nature shows no such bias. One

found it both interesting and somewhat edifying to come across, years back, a series of articles on the subject by Barry James published in the International Herald Tribune. Under the chapeau title of “Four Battlefronts in the War against Effects of Climate Change”, the author had identified four locales, all in the Developed World that had the potentiality of becoming casualties in the battle against ‘climate change’. This came as something of a revelation in that for the first time it was revealed that global warming was more than just a Third World problem. As it is, tens of millions of hapless people, mainly in South and Southeast Asia, face serious or permanent flooding of their lands if the climate change predictions associated with global warming become a reality. Would it be at all realistic to nurture the hope that someone from the developing world will take it upon himself to study and report upon this problem from the point of view of the poor and deprived lands? Given the past record, though, this is destined to remain one of those idealistic but unfulfilled dreams.

The World Metrological Organisation (WMO) had termed a past decade as the warmest since accurate records began in the mid-nineteenth century. The collapse of a huge ice shelf in the eastern Antarctic was reported some years ago. This was apparently due to the gradual rise in the temperatures in the region. Scientists have surmised that – if the present trends continue unabated – the Arctic could well turn into a navigable ocean by the middle of this century. This is a prospect hardly to be taken lightly. The ecological disaster that such a phenomenon could bring in its wake is too horrible to contemplate.

Nearer home, the landslide tragedy in the Siachin sector some years ago should have served as a wake-up call to both sides. Regrettably, this did not happen. Substantiated fears have been expressed that global warming could well lead to the melting of the Siachin glacier, an eventuality that could result in an ecological disaster of immense proportions. While the two bickering neighbours play a never-ending game of going round and round the mulberry bush, Mother Nature may have other and more venomous plans for the region.

Our ill-starred SAARC region is particularly prone. At least two member states can see global warming looming over the horizon. Some others have been victims of draught, floods and earthquakes. The planners in the member states of this Organization could, and should, have made common cause to counter these and other potential natural disasters, if only the powers that be had not been playing ducks and drakes with the issues that are crying out for settlement

betimes. Be that as it may, humankind should understand that it never pays to play ducks and drakes with the laws of nature. And those that think that they can get away with wreaking havoc away from their shores may well discover that they are doing so at their own peril. If nothing else, Nature has rightfully earned the reputation of being the great leveller! There may be a lesson in this, considering the way Mankind was taken completely off-guard in the case of the Pandemic?

— The writer is a former Ambassador and former Assistant Secretary General of OIC.

Source: <https://pakobserver.net/global-warming-and-the-pandemic/>

Can America Restore Its Credibility in Asia?

By Michael Green and Evan Medeiros

President Joe Biden entered the White House determined to restore the world's confidence in the United States. That task is particularly important in the Indo-Pacific, a region that has become as central to geopolitics as Europe was during the Cold War. The United States' presence, influence, and credibility in the region are flagging, and restoring them will require Biden to climb out of a deep hole. North Korea's nuclear and missile programs have continued to grow despite President Donald Trump's reality-show summitry. Southeast Asia is looking past Washington to forge new trade agreements within Asia and with Europe. And China is pushing the boundaries on myriad fronts: crackdowns in Hong Kong, Tibet, and Xinjiang; a targeted economic embargo on Australia; and military efforts to advance its territorial claims on water and land. The United States' domestic difficulties, including the Trump administration's bungling of the pandemic response and the recent insurrection at the U.S. Capitol, have further damaged U.S. prestige among Asian policymakers and publics alike.

The Biden administration will need a bold and farsighted strategy if it is to restore confidence in U.S. competence and staying power in the Indo-Pacific. Secretary of State George Shultz once compared diplomacy to gardening, with security and prosperity preserved through the patient nurturing of relationships and the pulling of weeds. But in the Indo-Pacific today, good gardening will simply not be enough, given the intensity of competition and the deep anxieties about U.S. capability and commitment. Biden will need more than just good gardening to shake the region out of its post-Trump anxiety and restore confidence in U.S. leadership.

The United States has faced this challenge in Asia before. Washington managed to achieve and preserve U.S. prominence in the region in large part because, at key junctures, it reversed perceptions of decline with unexpected demonstrations of strategic ambition and ability. During World War II, Franklin Roosevelt burst the image of Japanese invincibility with the April 1942 Doolittle air raid on Tokyo. In the 1970s, Richard Nixon reversed American disadvantage with his opening to China. Ronald Reagan turned the tide on the Soviets after the invasions of Afghanistan and Cambodia by linking arms with Japan to bottle up the Soviet

Fleet and prevent it from expanding further into the Pacific. These were bold and somewhat risky moves that confirmed American strength, decisiveness, and leadership.

Biden will have to show similar ambition. He may not have the chance to make strategic moves on the scale of those made by Roosevelt and Nixon. But there are at least four major plays—on economics, infrastructure, alliances, and defense—that can help restore confidence in the United States' commitment and competence in the Indo-Pacific.

IT'S THE ECONOMY, STUPID

In economic competition, Washington is on its back foot. The United States can no longer rely on the size and gravitational pull of its economy or the vibrancy of its private sector to persuade countries to work within the international rules and systems it has championed. China is rapidly replacing the United States as the top source of investment and final demand for Asian exports, thus becoming the economic reference point for Asian governments. (That is even true for China: as of 2020, Southeast Asia, rather than the United States or Europe, is its larger trading partner.) In recent years, the region has concluded two sweeping trade agreements—the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) and the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP)—neither of which includes the United States.

The United States desperately needs to get back into the economic game in the Indo-Pacific. Biden could best regain momentum by signaling that he will rejoin the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) or its successor, but domestic politics won't allow him to do so. Instead, the administration should articulate an ambitious vision for working with Asian economies based on the principles of shared growth, sustainable prosperity, and responsible innovation. Washington cannot offer an agenda that focuses exclusively on countering China's economic footprint, but it must show that it aims to boost the economic well-being of the middle classes across the Indo-Pacific. To that end, Biden should address matters of broad regional concern, such as public health, income inequality, and climate change.

In the Indo-Pacific today, good gardening will simply not be enough, given the deep anxieties about U.S. capability.

The United States can make a powerful case for its economic leadership by stressing fairness, transparency, and accountability. Many of China's practices that conflict with such values compromise the interests of Indo-Pacific economies. These include the tight control that China exerts over information flows and the digital economy; its disrespect for both personal privacy and intellectual property rights; its excessive subsidization of its state-owned businesses; and its blurring of lines between military and commercial activities. Bringing American economic values into the picture will not only serve U.S. commercial interests but also help counter malign influence from China.

The United States can take practical steps to advance this vision. The Biden administration should negotiate a digital trade agreement that shapes the regional approach to the responsible use of private data and artificial intelligence. It should push for a government-private sector alliance focused on boosting U.S. investment in Asian infrastructure and clean energy projects and organize an Asia-specific initiative to set rules on state competition that would also provide momentum for parallel efforts in the World Trade Organization. It must work closely with Tokyo, fostering U.S.-Japanese economic policy initiatives to bring fairness and transparency to regional economic activities, such as clean energy and infrastructure financing. And to jump-start leadership in economic affairs, Biden should immediately raise his hand to host the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation in 2023, working with the 2021 and 2022 chairs, New Zealand and Thailand, to build a set of strong substantive breakthroughs.

BUILD, BUILD, BUILD

Infrastructure investment has become another arena for competition. Beijing has effectively used the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) to extend its influence, investing more than \$100 billion in transportation, power, and digital projects to integrate Asia and link it up with Europe. From a subway system in Jakarta to a port in Cambodia, fiber-optic cables across Pakistan to a power plant in Bangladesh, Chinese infrastructure muscle is felt across the region.

Washington has neither the resources nor the capabilities to compete head-on. The Trump administration tried to counter China's presence directly with programs that were creative but far from sufficient. The United States does, however, have its own relevant strengths. Washington is at its best when it sets high standards for the design and execution of large projects, provides high-quality project financing and management, and creates reliable mechanisms to

monitor the quality of contracts and projects. Applying these advantages to Asian infrastructure will mean building frameworks and agreements rather than ports and railroads. Australia and Japan have already begun working with the United States on these efforts, and those partnerships should be broadened to include India, South Korea, Europe, and others.

The Biden administration should convene a biannual global infrastructure summit modeled on President Barack Obama's Nuclear Security Summit and Global Health Security Agenda Summit. These meetings—which could include China—would allow the United States to create and then drive a global conversation about infrastructure that focuses on financing and debt sustainability, project design, labor and environmental rights, and multinational cooperation. As an incentive to participate, the United States could consider inviting foreign investors to contribute to funding U.S. infrastructure projects. The idea is not to compete directly with China but to go bigger, creating frameworks and incentives that raise the bar on BRI projects and allow the United States to get into the game in a meaningful and sustainable way. Much as the United States intended to do with the TPP, the goal is to create a body that encourages China to raise its standards in order to gain or retain access to projects in Asia and around the world.

WEST MEETS EAST

The time has also come for the United States and its European allies and partners to build a shared China strategy. European views of China have hardened during these past four years, with the EU calling China a “systemic rival” and major players such as France and Germany adopting their own Indo-Pacific strategies. The United States and Europe broadly share the same concerns about the Chinese approaches to economics, human rights, and climate change. And both U.S. and European firms wish to gain greater access to Chinese markets and to achieve a more level playing field there.

The recently concluded Comprehensive Agreement on Investment between the EU and China is not a great start. The EU's willingness to sign a modest deal in December 2020, after seven years of delays by Beijing, undoubtedly hands China a major diplomatic victory. But it is more of a speed bump than a roadblock. The deal is far from complete—it still requires approval from the European Council and the European Parliament—and in any case, it offers little in terms of substantial concessions and lacks credible enforcement provisions,

already a source of disagreement within the EU. Now is in fact a good time for the Biden administration to make the case for a common agenda and credible collective action.

At the core of efforts between the United States and the EU should be economics, technology, human rights, and climate. Given the diversity of views across Europe and the complexity of cooperating with the EU itself, the most effective approach would be to focus on building coalitions of the willing on specific issues, dispensing with the desire to forge EU-wide unity before taking action and instead generating alternating groups of countries focused on specific problems. Well-publicized joint initiatives on these issues (such as 5G communications or data-privacy rules) would signal to Beijing that the United States and European powers are united around the principles of free markets, democratic governance, and the peaceful resolution of disputes. The more effective these efforts are, the more the United States and its allies must be prepared for blowback from Beijing, both rhetorical and economic. Holding coalitions together under such circumstances will require statesmanship from Biden and mutual assistance among the participating countries in the face of Chinese economic pressure.

Washington should also quietly explore the expansion of Chinese-focused military and intelligence cooperation with Europe. Most European countries do not see significant security interests of their own in the Indo-Pacific, but they do share an interest in maintaining freedom of navigation and respect for international law. (Just in the last year, the navies of France and the United Kingdom conducted transits through the South China Sea to signal their rejection of Beijing's vague sovereignty claims.) European governments should also recognize that a deteriorating security situation in Asia will eventually mean fewer U.S. resources devoted to Europe's defense. The Biden administration needs to persuade Europeans that China's boycotts against Australia and South Korea have a direct bearing on the security of Germany or the United Kingdom, even if the coercion is happening on the other side of the world.

CORE COMPETENCY

Although a sustainable U.S. strategy in the Indo-Pacific needs to be about more than security, Washington cannot ignore its unique role as the central provider of regional security—a role that the Biden administration must double down on to highlight U.S. capability and resolve. Congress has provided an excellent

instrument in the form of the Pacific Deterrence Initiative, which it passed in December 2020. The PDI funds weapons and defense infrastructure programs that help deter aggression and underwrites efforts to improve security cooperation with allies and partners.

Among the diverse priorities included in the PDI, the Biden administration should focus on a few that will immediately send strong signals to both China and the region. One of the greatest benefits of the PDI is that it forces the Defense Department to invest in developing and improving its own capabilities, such as hardening U.S. defense facilities and enhancing missile defenses to protect the U.S. forward military presence on Guam and in Japan and South Korea. (These are precisely the kinds of investments that otherwise have no natural constituency in debates over U.S. defense spending.) But in addition to enhancing U.S. defense capabilities, the Biden administration should also be ambitious about building a network of security partnerships in the Indo-Pacific: enhancing existing “hub-and-spoke” ties between the United States and its formal allies and “spoke-to-spoke” ties among partners such as Australia and Vietnam. U.S. allies are not about to sign up for an Asian NATO, but increasing connectivity among them will signal to Beijing the high costs of coercion and better prepare U.S. partners to respond.

The time has come for the United States and its European allies and partners to build a shared China strategy.

With Japan, this means upgrading command-and-control relationships (for example, establishing a joint operational task force for U.S. and Japanese forces headquartered in Japan) so that U.S. and Japanese forces plan, train, and equip as they would be required to do in a real contingency. Although the Biden administration cannot end political tensions between Seoul and Tokyo, it can encourage greater U.S.-South Korean-Japanese cooperation—on infrastructure lending and the building of military capacity, for example—to reaffirm common values and reduce vulnerability to Chinese coercion. The Quad alliance among Australia, India, Japan, and the United States rests on an increasingly tight trilateral security relationship among Canberra, Tokyo, and Washington, but Delhi is becoming more ambitious now about security cooperation in the wake of Chinese attacks on Indian troops in the Himalayas. The Biden administration should signal early support for the arrangement by convening defense ministers

to follow up on the foreign ministers' meeting this past November. Intelligence sharing among Quad members is a logical step, as well.

Alliances and partnerships represent the United States' strongest card in Asia, which is why Beijing has been targeting allies such as Australia and South Korea with economic boycotts as a means of softening political support for working with the United States to balance Chinese power. A bold move for the Quad would be to announce a coordination mechanism to assist countries such as Australia that come under Chinese boycotts: a commitment, modeled on NATO's Article 5, to respond collectively to economic aggression. This could involve a reserve fund or a quick response mechanism among U.S. allies to condemn Chinese actions, provide financial relief, and prepare cases for the World Trade Organization. If successful, this initiative could grow, as Asian nations may welcome being part of an agreement that protects them from Chinese coercion.

The Biden administration should further reinforce international support for a democratic Taiwan, free from all types of coercion. The Trump administration's last-minute elimination of restrictions on U.S. diplomatic interaction with Taiwan was more of a political gesture designed to trap Biden than a principled policy reform. Real support will mean working with others in the Indo-Pacific (and in Europe) to create an ecosystem of cooperation that helps Taipei minimize its vulnerabilities to China and contribute to regional problem solving, while affording Taiwan the dignity and respect it deserves. The new U.S. administration should seek economic and other nonmilitary options for allies and partners to help Taipei weather Beijing's intimidation tactics and encourage others in Asia and Europe to recognize Taiwan's contributions to global affairs.

GETTING BACK TO GARDENING

The Indo-Pacific is at a turning point. Many countries in the region are struggling to reconcile their desire to resist Chinese domination with their aversion to choosing between Washington and Beijing. For four years under Trump, the United States overweighted the former and underappreciated the latter and further marginalized Washington at the very time Beijing's pressure was growing. As a new administration takes the reins in Washington, U.S. allies and partners in the Indo-Pacific have made clear that they want the United States to compete with China but not in a manner that forces the costs onto them—even as they question the United States' ability and willingness to do so.

To demonstrate its seriousness, the United States needs to make big moves in Asia—moves that will shape the regional environment around China and loudly signal the return of U.S. capability, activism, and creativity. Past administrations have tried to begin their Asia policies by building “positive, cooperative, and constructive” relationships with China. The time for such an approach has passed. Instead, the United States must focus on building up a new position of strength and advantage in the surrounding region—taking bold moves now and turning to Shultz’s gardening to sustain them over the long term.

Source: <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2021-02-15/can-america-restore-its-credibility-asia>

The ‘Return’ Of America: Biden’s Maiden Foreign Policy Speech – OpEd By Binoy Kampmark

Few could have been slack-jawed at the first significant foreign policy speech of US President Joe Biden. It can easily be filed under the “America is back” label. Back as well, as if the previous administration had been incapable of it, was a promise for that practice unflatteringly called jaw-jaw. “Diplomacy,” the President states from the outset, “is back at the centre of our foreign policy.”

Doing so naturally meant much cap doffing to the US State Department, that long time enunciator of Washington’s imperial policies. President Donald Trump had held a rather different view of the department he generally saw as fustian and obstructive. Biden tried reassuring department staff that he valued their expertise, respected them and would have their back. “This administration is going to empower you to do your jobs, not target or politicize you.”

The effort of the new administration, outlined Biden, will focus on repairing and restoring. Paint and scaffolding will be provided. Alliances will be revisited, the world engaged with. He strikes a collaborative note: cooperation with other states will be needed to fight the pandemic, climate change and nuclear proliferation.

The speech has the usual sprinklings of concern and fear that other powers are posing challenges to US power, but is odd in not mentioning such states as Iran, at least explicitly, or North Korea. “American leadership,” he urges, “must meet this new moment of advancing authoritarianism, including the growing ambitions of China to rival the United States and the determination of Russia to damage and disrupt our democracy.” Beijing remained “our most serious competitor” and needed to be pushed back “on human rights, intellectual property, and global governance.” He asserts that the US will not roll over “in the face of Russia’s aggressive actions” and will be more “effective in dealing” with Moscow “in coalition and coordination with other like-minded partners.”

This leaves the impression that the Trump administration was in the business of playing amiable golf with the Putin regime, a point that Democrats in Congress

were always keen to push. But whatever Trump's strong man admiration might have been for President Vladimir Putin, the US record during his time in office was far from accommodating. An overview of the various retaliatory sanctions is provided by the Brookings Institute. They are many and include, among others, the imposition of sanctions in response to Russia's alleged use of a nerve agent in the British town of Salisbury in 2018; the sanctioning of Russian and a Chechen group for human rights abuses, including extrajudicial killings and torture; and sanctions for alleged Russian electoral interference in 2018.

The speech also pays a mandatory pound of cant masquerading as homage to the misunderstood idea of democracy. He spoke of defending "America's most cherished democratic values: defending freedom, championing opportunity, upholding universal human rights, respecting the rule of law, and treating every person with dignity."

Democracy is always a conceptual problem for presidents, largely because the US executive and the country's political system is a creation of a distinctly non-democratic mindset. The framers of the US Constitution pooh-poohed democracy and purposely crafted a document and political system that would protect property, stifle the emancipation of slaves, and neutralise factionalism.

Historians such as Charles Beard developed these ideas in *An Economic Interpretation of the Constitution* (1913), noting how that celebrated document was ratified by fewer than one-sixth of adult males and excluding the unpropertied franchise. "The Constitution was not created by the 'whole people', as the jurists said ... but was the work of a consolidated group whose interests knew no state boundaries and were truly national in scope." Drafters of the Constitution "with a few exceptions, immediately, directly and personally interested in, and derived economic advantages from, the establishment of a new system." Things were off to a cracking start.

A recent smattering of critique of that problematic notion that is American democracy can also be found, if one cares to look. Political scientist Yascha Mounk, looking at the foiled efforts of residents in Oxford, Massachusetts to secure the local water supply by buying out the company in question, Aquarion, furnishes us a gloomy example. Despite securing enough funding to achieve their goal, the lobbyists and a generous effort at sabotage ensured that the water company would remain the supplier. "The preferences of the average American

appear,” rues Mounk, “to have only a miniscule, near-zero, statistically non-significant impact upon public policy.”

The Trump era, while channelling the concerns of the powerless, left it at that. Elites were still in rampant play, if only those elites preferred by the president. The US republic moved ever more deeply into a terrain crawling with billionaires and lobbyists. It was left for those against Trump and the Democrats to simply identify how best to retake old, unequitable terrain with their substitutes. The participating voter could well sod off.

Problematically, we return to democracy as an exportable commodity, an effort that has been, for the most part, a disastrous platform of US foreign policy. Previous sages warned that democracy grown in indigenous climes, like certain wines, travel poorly. Not acknowledging this fact has led to quagmires, the destruction of states and the crippling of regional and in some cases global security.

Despite the US being sketchy about democratic ideals (he does allude to the Capitol riots), Biden is optimistic that “the American people are going to emerge from this moment stronger, more determined, and better equipped to unite the world in fighting to defend democracy, because we have fought for it ourselves.” He also announced “additional steps to course-correct our foreign policy and better unite democratic values with our diplomatic leadership.” A Global Posture Review of US forces would be conducted, which could only mean one thing: butting the brake on withdrawing US troops and reversing Trump’s policy in various theatres.

He suggests an example of democracy promotion in action: marshalling cooperative support to address the military coup in Burma; reaching out to the Republicans to test the waters (Senator Mitch McConnell also “shared concerns about the situation in Burma”). Force, he proclaimed “should never seek to overrule the will of the people or attempt to erase the outcome of a credible election.” The ghosts of Chile’s Salvador Allende and Iran’s Mohammad Mosaddegh, along with many other casualties of US efforts to overrule the will of the people, would beg to differ.

A more positive note is made on the issue of US support for the Saudi-led military campaign in Yemen, where an effort will be made to support UN-led

initiatives “to impose a ceasefire, open humanitarian channels, and restore long-dormant peace talks.” US support for offensive operations in the war, including arms sales, will also cease.

What we can expect for a good deal of the Biden administration will be the resuscitation of the hackneyed and weary. Even such an ordinary speech had Fred Kaplan claiming that Biden’s cliché’s, after Trump, sounded “revolutionary”. Trump’s four years had been characterised by “diplomatic decline and atrophy”; Biden’s views, in light of that, “seemed fresh, even bracing.” But Kaplan is not immune to the substance here. Talk about stiffening democracy’s sinews, shoring up alliances when allies are doing their own deals with opponents, can come across as rather weak. The pudding, and the proof that will come with it, is still being made.

Source: <https://www.eurasiareview.com/16022021-the-return-of-america-bidens- maiden-foreign-policy-speech-oped/>

Globalization Has Affected How Wars Are Fought By Ahmed Jawad

The 20th century was one of great events and developments in every part of human life. The century was marked by the deadliest wars, deadliest weapons and unprecedented interconnectedness. The destructive power of A-bombs and the interconnectedness that transformed world into a global village infused the traditional wisdom about conflict resolution with great confusions. New conflicts demanded new solutions. Globalization transformed the traditional theatre of conflict; war.

War in the 21st century has acquired a whole new character. The state, which was once the almighty Leviathan, has lost its monopoly over violence, and the erosion of its monopoly over violence from globalization has transformed the character of war. The wars of today are not fought between states; rather there is network of state and non-state actors which includes mercenaries, private security companies, hired thugs, and many more such actors etc. Globalization has unleashed a plethora of problems by undermining state sovereignty. Globalization, which was supposed to encourage cosmopolitan politics and cooperation, ended up creating more divisions.

'New Wars' political, technological and economical developments highlight the need for evaluation of old ideas and encourage the need for new ideas. As the aphorism goes "modern problems require modern solutions", wars of today are modern and they require modern solutions as the traditional ones are not adequate enough

Mary Kaldor, professor at the London School of Economics, is among those scholars who have acknowledged the impact of globalization on the character of war. In her book, *New and Old Wars: Organized Violence in a Global Era*, she highlights this change in the character of war. Highlighting the difference between new and old, she wrote that new wars are different from old wars because of who fight these wars, for what reason these wars are fought, how these wars are financed and the way these wars are fought. Old wars were fought by states, financed by states, were waged for ideological purposes and battles were the defining character. However, in new wars; actors are networks of state and non-

state actors, which are to a greater extent privately financed and direct confrontation between opposite forces is rare. Kaldor is of the view that this change in the character of war is caused by globalization. Kaldor is of the view that this transformation is a consequence of globalization and disintegration of state.

Along with globalization, clash of symmetrical opponents can destroy the world. The advent of nuclear weapons has changed the traditional military logic. In fact, any war according to the old military logic, is simply not beneficial anymore. War between nuclear powers will leave neither party at benefit, since the costs of such victory cancel the benefits it holds. Avoiding direct war serves the political interest better than waging one. This change in military logic is evident from the change in tactics of the wars of today. Today's wars are fought through guerillas, and counter-insurgency tactics are the tactics. The majority of conflicts involves one state and one or more than one non-state actor. These are battles between wolves and shepherds where wolves attack the flock while shepherds try to save the sheep.

However, it is not the change in military logic and innovation of new types of weapons that have transformed the character of war. Rather transformation in politics is the defining element of this change. Politics of 'new wars' is identity politics which is very different from the politics of old wars. Old wars were largely driven by ideological politics, whereas new wars are driven entirely by identity politics. In the words of Professor Kaldor, "Identity politics is about right to power in the name of a specific group whereas ideological politics is about winning power in order to carry out a particular ideological programme". Globalization prompted groups to securitize their identity. War for these actors is either a mean for keeping their identity or claiming lands in the name of that identity.

Another dimension of the problems caused by globalization for the concept of war is the proliferation of capitalism. The ideas of capitalism and free market motivated such actors who saw a potential for profit in war. These actors established private security firms and were up for grabs for the highest bidder. Companies like Titan and Blackwater are profit-maximizing companies whose only motivation is the accumulation of wealth. These institutions introduced in the concept of war further complexities, and the legitimacy of violence further degenerated. These developments underline the need for a new conceptualization of war. To address these complexities and set the basis for

future exploration, Kaldor defines war as a “mutual enterprise” rather than a “contest of wills”. The reason illustrated by Kaldor is that the latter makes the elimination of the enemy the ultimate objective of war whereas the former suggests that both sides are interested “in the enterprise of war, rather than winning and losing, for both political and economic ends”. Although it is very difficult to discern what means one employs for what ends, the protracted conflicts all around the world and the industry which these wars fuel paints a different picture a picture very close to the concept of war as mutual enterprise rather than a contest of wills.

War in nuclear age, where symmetry in capabilities will, eventually, lead to MAD, cannot have the same character it once had. Mankind, frightened by the destructiveness of these weapons and compelled by their natural instinct to clash, is trying to fight the new wars with new weapons according to old principles. This is commendable but not practical as this undermines the capabilities of new weapons by considering them just another weapon of war. Concepts of limited war show the appreciation of this reality. There political, technological and economical developments highlight the need for evaluation of old ideas and encourage the need for new ideas. As the aphorism goes “modern problems require modern solutions”, wars of today are modern and they require modern solutions as the traditional ones are not adequate enough.

Source: <https://www.pakistantoday.com.pk/2021/02/14/globalization-has-affected-how-wars-are-fought/>

Trump ‘Not Guilty’ | Editorial

Former US President Donald Trump unsurprisingly avoided conviction on the charge of “incitement of insurrection”, not because he was innocent, but because Republican senators chose party over country. In fact, Trump’s defence did not even make a serious effort to dispute the charges against him and instead chose to dispute the legitimacy of the case. They did so ‘successfully’, but only because the fix was in before the case even started. Officially, the Republicans claimed to have voted against conviction due to a technicality — that Trump could not be tried by the Senate after leaving office. This is both false and misleading. Trump was impeached by the House of Representatives while he was still president, and the then-Republican-led Senate refused to hear the case until Trump had left office. In addition, the Senate has previously tried a person who was no longer part of the government — former Secretary of War William Belknap in 1876. Meanwhile, the official Congressional Research Service also found no legal reason for the Senate to not impeach a former president.

The Republicans hid behind a false technicality to protect the man who remains the face of their party from being convicted of a crime that stops just a step short of treason. Also, remember that Republicans and Democrats alike referred to the Capitol siege as a “terrorist attack”. If Trump was convicted, he could legally be referred to as the leader of a successful “terrorist attack” on the US Capitol — something even Osama Bin Laden failed to do. The face of the Republican Party would officially be a terrorist leader. But just because Trump can’t legally be given that title — yet — it is still clear that he is the politician favoured by a majority of US citizen terrorists. Even today, death threats are being directed at Republicans who broke from their party and chose to impeach or convict in the House and Senate, respectively. On a lesser level, some were admonished by their Republican constituents for saying they voted based on facts rather than party affiliation. These are the people the Republican party is pandering to when they chose Trump over the United States.

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Source: <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2284291/trump-not-guilty>

Biden's Iranian Dilemma | Editorial

When Joe Biden was elected President of the United States, there was a collective sigh around the Middle East region that the tumultuous conflict with Iran during the Trump administration, which had aggravated both sides quite close to a full-blown war, would subside for a while at least.

The headways made by the Obama Administration were remembered, where the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) was signed, which removed several sanctions on Iran as long as it complied with limitations on its nuclear programme.

Trump announced a US withdrawal from the Plan but after the inauguration of Biden, Obama-former Vice-President, there was hope that the US would re-enter into the Plan again, an agreement which seemed to bring the best and peaceful outcome for all parties involved.

Alas, the events of the past few months make that hope look less and less likely to turn to reality. All sides have been engaging in passive-aggressive diplomatic tactics—Iran this week started producing uranium metal in a new breach of limits laid out in Tehran's nuclear deal, leading to calls of restraint from European powers.

CM Buzdar, Saifullah Niazi discuss strategy for victory in Senate polls
Israel, always a staunch opponent of the deal, is taking advantage of the bad blood and has said that it would not engage with US President Joe Biden on strategy regarding the Iranian nuclear programme, urging tougher sanctions.

Iran is playing its hand, trying to leverage the Trump-era damage to pressure Biden to do more. In some respects, its grievances are valid.

Because of Trump's maximum pressure policy, the Iranian economy has suffered hundreds of billions of dollars of losses while Iran was in full compliance with the terms and conditions of the deal. It is putting this pressure to force a decisive answer out of the US on what approach it means to take.

Whether this will backfire for Iran and lead the way to a better deal will be seen but one outcome is for sure—the Biden administration will have to pick a lane.

Source: <https://nation.com.pk/18-Feb-2021/biden-s-iranian-dilemma>

Russia Will Never See the United States the Same Way Again By Anna Arutunyan

January saw violent protests in both Washington and Moscow. Supporters of then U.S. President Donald Trump stormed the United States Capitol ahead of President-elect Joe Biden's inauguration, and in Russia, opponents of President Vladimir Putin demonstrated against the imprisonment of the opposition leader Alexei Navalny. Chaos, anger, and arrests: the imagery, even the language, was similar—the Kremlin media routinely describe protests as “attempted insurrections”—but beyond these superficial parallels, the equivalence ends. The Russian protesters were trying to establish the rule of law; the Americans to overthrow it.

The Trump presidency and its final act, in particular, revealed the fragility of American democracy. In the eyes of Russia—and of many others—the stature of the United States was diminished. As a result, Washington's default approach to Moscow is no longer tenable. With the exception of Trump, who openly sought Putin's approval, every U.S. president since the end of the Cold War has used moral grandstanding as a means to influence Moscow. If Biden revives this approach—as the rhetoric coming out of the White House and some of his new appointments indicate he might—then U.S.-Russian relations are likely to continue their downward spiral of animosity and “whataboutism.” Lecturing Putin about human rights will only anger the Russian president and could end up hurting the democratic reformers Washington aims to support.

But with humility and pragmatism, the Biden administration can still seek to influence Russian behavior for the better, albeit more modestly than Washington has done in the past. It will require working cooperatively with allies and acknowledging the limits of American power. Having relinquished its exclusive claim to moral leadership, the United States would be wise to scale back its ideological ambitions abroad in favor of self-improvement at home.

NO GOING BACK

The riot on Capitol Hill, blasted across Russian screens via social media, punctured the myth of American moral superiority. It also seemed to vindicate the Kremlin's portrayal of the United States as a divided, racist, and hypocritical

nation. Whereas police officers had cracked down violently on Black Lives Matter protesters just months earlier in cities across the United States, they now stood back and let a mob of Trump supporters storm the U.S. Capitol.

The spectacle invited some predictable gloating from Russian officials and state media. But even more telling was the dismissive, almost indifferent response from the highest echelons of the Russian government. Putin was largely silent on the American presidential transition. And on the day of Biden's inauguration, the Kremlin issued a statement saying that it was "not preparing for the inauguration. Nothing will change for Russia; it's been around for many hundreds of years and will continue to be." For the first time in decades, Moscow was saying it does not especially care what the United States does or thinks.

Asked to comment on the riots on Russian television, Konstantin Kosachev, chair of Russia's Senate Foreign Affairs Committee, described the U.S. government as aloof from society and American democracy as broken. Vyacheslav Volodin, chair of Russia's parliament, the Duma, and an influential architect of domestic policy, penned a statement arguing that the standards "imposed by the U.S." should be reassessed based on the events in Washington. "The U.S. political system is not only closed, but it's been frozen in development for about 70 years," Volodin wrote. "Two parties have a monopoly on power, not allowing other political forces" to play a role. He concluded with a call for the United States to get its own house in order and to "build its [foreign] policy based on non-interference in the affairs of other sovereign states."

The riot on Capitol Hill punctured the myth of American moral superiority. Volodin had a point. One need not buy into conspiracy theories about the "deep state" stealing the election from Trump to consider that maybe, just maybe, the political crisis in the United States was not purely the result of Russian meddling in 2016, that Trump was as much a symptom of deeper societal conflict as a cause of it, and that U.S.-Russian relations cannot—and should not—simply go back to the way they were pre-Trump.

Even the Russian opposition has been skeptical of attempts to blame everything on Trump and Trumpism. Navalny denounced the former U.S. president's ban from Twitter, and other members of Russia's liberal opposition have been critical of the Black Lives Matter movement. The term "pro-Western opposition" is misleading when applied to antigovernment movements in Belarus and Ukraine

and meaningless when applied to such movements in Russia. The Kremlin's opponents no longer share a universal allegiance to the West. And those who are pro-Western are no longer necessarily pro-American.

As the Biden administration seeks to support opponents of the Kremlin, it may find itself harming more than helping. The Russian government has long accused its political opponents of colluding with hostile powers—an ugly and effective tactic increasingly widespread in the United States, as well. The Kremlin will spin any U.S. support for Navalny, his supporters, and other opposition figures as proof that they are U.S. plants and use it to justify further repression.

WHAT POWER OF EXAMPLE?

A more promising U.S. policy toward Russia would be based on interests rather than ideals. For many years, the buzzword among diplomats and policymakers in Moscow has been “multipolarity”: an international order in which there is no longer a single great power. The Kremlin seeks to navigate and capitalize on an emerging multipolar world by doing business not with ideological allies but with ephemeral, pragmatic partners. Instead of looking for shared values, Moscow looks for shared interests, whether in trade, security, or anything else.

When the Kremlin feels that the nascent multipolar order—or Moscow's regional sphere of influence—is threatened, it acts aggressively (and sometimes illegally) to demonstrate that Washington is no longer the only power that can throw its weight around with impunity. But unlike the Soviet Union during the Cold War, Russia does not want to replace the United States as a political or moral hegemon. It just wants to cut the United States down to size.

When Russia interferes or meddles outside its borders, it does not seek to impose its vision on the world but rather to advance its national interests. Perhaps as a result of this self-interested worldview, the Kremlin sees the United States as similarly motivated. Washington may dress up its intentions in the garb of freedom, universal rights, and democracy, but in U.S. foreign policy the Kremlin still sees a mirror image of its own.

In his inauguration address, Biden said the United States would lead not by “the example of our power but by the power of our example.” But to which examples can Biden credibly point? In Syria, for instance, Russia saw a wrong-headed American intervention couched in moral terms spawn the Islamic State, also

known as ISIS. By contrast, Moscow believes that it applied a legal and practical rationale for backing Syrian President Bashar al-Assad: it supported the strongman not because he was a good guy who did well for his people but because he was the established leader and a Russian ally who guaranteed access to an important naval base.

In U.S. foreign policy the Kremlin still sees a mirror image of its own. Biden's ambition to lead by example is similarly challenged on the home front. Russia might invade its neighbors and poison its political opponents, but from Moscow's perspective American denunciations are rendered meaningless by the United States' own brutality toward Black Americans. The Kremlin does not think Washington has a right to preach, nor does it think American leaders actually believe what they say.

A better approach would be for Washington to accept a greater degree of multipolarity and dial back the public criticism of Putin in favor of private diplomacy. Russia may be in no mood to listen to the United States, but there are others—American allies—whose communications with the Kremlin are less fraught. Germany, a major Russian energy partner and an important mediator in the Ukraine conflict, might prove to be a more effective interlocutor with Moscow. So might Canada, Denmark, or Norway, all of which are members of the Arctic Council, giving them influence over Moscow as it seeks to develop the “High North.” In short, there are many U.S. allies that would receive a more sympathetic hearing in Russia. Rather than insisting that it has to lead, Washington can partner with and even simply support these allies as they seek to influence Moscow on areas of mutual interest.

American policymakers will need to abandon unrealistic expectations about their ability to change Russia's political culture and accept that real change will come gradually, from within, and at its own pace. Standing up to abuses of power may sound like the right thing to do, but U.S. sanctions such as the Magnitsky Act have often backfired—prompting Russia to halt investigations that would have resulted in greater accountability, for instance. In light of Navalny's imprisonment and Moscow's brutal crackdown on his supporters, this may seem like counterintuitive advice. But U.S. policymakers should ask themselves whether sanctions, pressure, or moral grandstanding will help or hurt Navalny or his supporters. Very often, such initiatives are more about signaling American virtue

than about actually helping Russians stand up for themselves. The Biden administration should do what works best, not what feels best.

Rising political unrest and waning influence can make the Russian and American pictures look similar. But the difference is that Russia looks after its interests alone, while the United States—under Biden, if not under his predecessor—still believes that it can do good in the world. Washington wants to counter Moscow’s meddling abroad and halt its abuse of political opponents at home. It is by no means impotent on these issues. But accepting that it no longer has—nor can lay claim to—an exceptional moral position in the eyes of Russia will allow Washington to recalibrate its dealings with Moscow, change the tone of the dialogue, and improve the effectiveness of its policy.

Source: <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2021-02-17/russia-will-never-see-united-states-same-way-again>

America's Middle East Policy Is Outdated and Dangerous By Chris Murphy

In his 1980 State of the Union address, which came in the wake of the oil shocks of 1973 and 1979, U.S. President Jimmy Carter described in grave terms the risks of losing access to Middle Eastern oil. “An attempt by any outside force to gain control of the Persian Gulf region will be regarded as an assault on the vital interests of the United States of America,” he said. “Such an assault will be repelled by any means necessary, including military force.” That pledge became known as the Carter Doctrine, and it has remained a defining feature of U.S. Middle East policy ever since.

At the time of Carter’s pronouncement, the United States relied heavily on oil imports to power its economy, and 29 percent of that oil came from the Persian Gulf. Even two decades later, little had changed: in 2001, the United States still imported 29 percent of its oil from the Gulf. But it’s not 1980 or 2001 anymore. Today, the United States produces as much oil as it gets from abroad, and only 13 percent comes from Gulf countries. The United States now imports more oil from Mexico than it does from Saudi Arabia.

Yet even as the driving rationale for the so-called Carter Doctrine has become obsolete, it continues to shape the United States’ approach to the Gulf—emblematic of a broader failure of U.S. policy to catch up with the broader changes to U.S. interests in the region since the 1980s. President Joe Biden should acknowledge new realities and reset the United States’ relationships in the Gulf in a way that promotes American values, keeps Washington out of unnecessary foreign entanglements, and prioritizes regional peace and stability.

There are myriad reasons for strong relations between the United States and the countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)—Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates. The decisions by Bahrain and the UAE to establish formal ties to Israel are a clear sign of the positive influence these countries can exert. Kuwait and Oman play powerful roles in mediating regional conflicts. The United States’ counterterrorism partnerships with GCC countries, while frequently flawed, are still crucial, as these governments often have information on extremist networks that U.S. intelligence

cannot glean on its own. And the United States is broadening its people-to-people ties with the region: today, tens of thousands of students from the Gulf study at U.S. colleges and universities. Accordingly, the United States must make clear to Gulf allies that its goal is not to pull away from the region but instead to create a more substantive and stable link between the United States and the GCC.

But it is past time to admit that there is a central design flaw in the United States' current approach to the Gulf: the top two GCC priorities for the relationship—sustaining U.S. military assistance to fight regional proxy wars and maintaining U.S. silence on domestic political repression—will, in the long run, destroy the GCC countries themselves. The United States' objective must be to replace this broken foundation with a new system that supports a peaceful Gulf replete with stable, diversified national economies and responsive governments—the kind of future that leaders such as Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman staunchly claim the Gulf is seeking. A U.S.-Gulf relationship built on economic, diplomatic, and governance ties, rather than just brute security partnerships, will accrue to the benefit of both U.S. and Middle Eastern interests.

AVOIDING PROXY WARS

The first step is for the United States to disengage from the GCC's proxy wars with Iran. The Iranian government is a U.S. adversary, but the festering series of hot and cold conflicts in the region—in Iraq, Lebanon, Syria, and Yemen—has simply served to strengthen Iran's influence and create cataclysmic levels of human suffering. A pullback from U.S. intervention in places such as Syria and Yemen will, no doubt, cause immediate consternation in the Gulf. By now, however, the enormous costs of the false belief that the United States can indirectly steer the outcomes in Syria and Yemen are crystal clear. In both theaters, the United States' tepid, halfway military involvement was never substantial enough to tip the balance and has served instead to extend the conflicts. Washington suffers from a hubristic confidence in its ability to accomplish political goals through military interventions. Instead, the most significant effect of recent U.S. Middle East adventurism has been to fuel perpetual wars that embolden extremist groups and allow anti-American sentiment to grow.

It is past time to admit that there is a central design flaw in the United States' current approach to the Gulf.

Although the United States should retain its security partnerships with Gulf nations, the U.S. footprint should be smaller. Before the Gulf War, the United States was able to protect its interests in the region without massive military bases in Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia and without billions in annual arms sales to these same nations. The foreign policy community in Washington acts as if this massive military presence is now mandatory to protect U.S. interests, even though it wasn't prior to the creation of the post-9/11 security state. U.S. bases are costly, drawing focus away from increasingly important theaters such as Africa and Asia; they create pressure on the United States to ignore serious human rights abuses lest criticism puts the troop presence at risk; and they stand out as military targets and propaganda fodder for Iran, al Qaeda, and the Islamic State (or ISIS). As U.S. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin undertakes a global review of the United States' military posture, the Biden administration should seriously consider reducing its military basing in the region. Reconsidering the costs and benefits of basing the Fifth Fleet in Bahrain would be a good start, as the United States' massive footprint is becoming more trouble than it is worth.

Finally, although the United States should continue to sell military equipment to its partners, Washington should ensure that it is selling truly defensive arms. Today, too many American weapons are used irresponsibly and in violation of international law. Others, such as the recently announced Reaper drone sale to the UAE, fuel a regional arms race that runs counter to U.S. security interests. As it pulls back on systems with more offensive capabilities, however, the United States should still be willing to provide more advanced defensive weapons, such as Terminal High-Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) missile technology, that fit the Gulf's real security threats.

If Washington does these things, Saudi Arabia and the UAE will inevitably complain that the United States is abandoning them and empowering Iran. The Biden administration's task will be to convince them that there is an alternative to a never-ending military contest with Tehran. A regional security dialogue that includes all parties can replace the arms race and proxy wars. This may sound like a utopian fantasy, but it is far from it. The green shoots of this dialogue have been showing for years, and able U.S. leadership, applying both vinegar and honey, can begin to create a structure for détente. And although the United States should not give the Emiratis or Saudis veto power over a bilateral nuclear agreement with Iran, a regional dialogue would tie the Gulf countries closer to the

United States on Iran policy and likely give the GCC greater input on any future agreement Washington makes.

TESTING DE-ESCALATION

The Biden administration is best positioned to test the region's readiness for this kind of de-escalation in Yemen. The pieces that have been missing—meaningful pressure and a credible interlocutor—are now moving into position as the Biden administration ends U.S. support for offensive operations and appoints a new special envoy to support the UN peace process. The United States is the only nation that can move the ball forward. If Washington can find a path toward peace in Yemen, where an inclusive post-Hadi Yemeni government coexists with Houthi leaders as the country rebuilds with international aid, it could be proof of concept for a broader dialogue.

De-escalation should be wildly appealing to the United States' Gulf partners. Declining oil revenues mean these nations will soon need to make hard choices between investing in economic reforms and fighting wars in foreign countries. Given these persistent conflicts and the state control of local economies, attracting meaningful foreign investment to the region is largely a fantasy. For the United States, another benefit to decreased tensions between the Gulf and Iran is fewer incentives for Gulf interests to spread Wahhabi Islam throughout the Muslim world. This ultraconservative and intolerant brand of Islam often forms the building blocks of extremist ideology, and the Gulf-Iran feud fuels its export (alongside its revolutionary Shiite counterpart).

Biden has a chance to reset Washington's partnerships with Gulf nations.

The United States must also drive a harder bargain with the Gulf states on questions of human rights. In the wake of Donald Trump's attacks on American democracy, it will be even more important for Biden to match his talk of the rule of law and civil rights with actions at home and abroad. The United States has difficult work ahead to rebuild its global brand, but ending Washington's hear-no-evil, see-no-evil approach in the Gulf will help.

Still, the U.S. conversation with the Gulf on human rights should be realistic. These countries will not become modern democracies overnight. If the Gulf really wants to attract international investment, however, it must address ongoing brutal crackdowns on political dissent and the lack of the rule of law. Serious outside private investment is unlikely as long as these nations torture political prisoners,

maintain a draconian “guardian system” that restricts women’s ability to travel, and constantly harass dissidents abroad. Frankly, Gulf leaders should see expanding political rights as an existential issue. The United States must help these regimes understand that their long-standing social bargain of “no taxation, but no representation either” cannot last. As population growth outstrips oil revenues, royal families will soon no longer be able to afford that payoff. Once subsidies atrophy but repression remains, a disastrous storm of unrest will brew. Luckily, there are models of limited reform in the Gulf that can help the laggards inch along. Kuwaitis, for instance, elect a parliament that maintains some independence from the crown. Although this is far from modern participatory democracy, it provides some guideposts to which more repressive regimes can look.

NO COLD WAR REDUX

In pursuing this new course, some sky-will-fall adherents to the status quo will argue that if the Biden administration drives too hard a bargain, Gulf leaders will turn away from the United States and toward China or Russia. This argument is a red herring, one that plays on a misunderstanding of both the irreplaceability of military alignment with the United States and the willingness of China and Russia to get their hands dirty in Middle Eastern politics. This isn’t the Cold War: Russia has little to offer in the region, and as global oil usage continues to fall, Moscow will inevitably compete with Gulf countries for buyers. Although China will continue to look for economic opportunities in the region, it will be unwilling to play a real security role anytime in the near future. The Chinese navy isn’t going to come to the aid of a Gulf country under attack. If the Bahrainis, Emiratis, or Saudis threaten to turn to other powers, Washington can afford to call their bluff.

As a general matter, U.S. foreign policy has become dangerously anachronistic, an instrument tuned to play a song that the orchestra no longer performs. But U.S. policy is, perhaps, most inconsonant in the Gulf, where the United States’ interests have changed but its policy has not. Biden has a chance to reset Washington’s partnerships with Gulf nations. It will be difficult, painful, and arouse loud protest. But the resulting order will be mutually beneficial, advancing U.S. interests while moving Gulf states closer to the future they claim to aspire to. As they say, the most worthwhile endeavors are never easy.

Source: <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2021-02-19/americas-middle-east-policy-outdated-and-dangerous>

Why Is American Foreign Policy Tilting Towards Iran? By Russell A. Berman

During the past weeks, the contours of the new administration's Middle East policy have become clear. Speaking at the Department of State, President Joe Biden stated that the U.S. will limit military assistance to Saudi Arabia and cease supporting Riyadh's efforts against the Houthis. Meanwhile, Secretary of State Blinken retracted the Trump administration's efforts to initiate "snap back" measures against Iran, effectively conceding Iran's right to import weaponry. That's a one-two punch: reducing support for the Saudis and clearing the way for Iran's military build-up.

Meanwhile, as Washington made these gestures of appeasement, Tehran had its proxies in Yemen, Iraq and Lebanon continue their assaults on American assets or partners, including the February 15 rocket attacks on Erbil, with American casualties. As Iran ratchets up the violence, U.S. leadership makes unconditional concessions. American policy makers are living in a parallel universe, oblivious to the wars on the ground. This lack of realism became painfully clear in recent statements which deserve close reading: an article by Senator Chris Murphy addressing policy in the Gulf and responses by the State Department to gross violations of human rights by the PKK, the Kurdistan Workers' Party, operating in Northern Iraq.

Writing in Foreign Affairs on February 19, Murphy set out a vision for a revised U.S. policy for the region, including prospects for a military drawdown. One might in fact reasonably explore a transformed American presence in the region, as did both Presidents Barack Obama and Donald Trump. However, Murphy barely mentions Iranian ambitions for regional hegemony or considers the consequences if the U.S. abandons its partners. In addition, while correctly arguing that America should hold Saudi Arabia to human rights norms, he is silent on human rights abuses in Iran. This is a glaring double standard, calling out the Saudis but ignoring how Iran regularly tortures prisoners and has its agents murder critics abroad. For instance, the Lebanese activist Luqman Salim was recently executed by the Iran-supported Hezbollah.

Furthermore, Murphy's article includes a factual error that undermines his credibility when he attacks the Gulf states. He criticizes those countries because they "maintain a draconian 'guardian system' that restricts women's ability to travel" without permission of a male authority. Obviously, that is a truly reprehensible practice. Yet, he fails to mention however that Saudi Arabia abolished this practice a couple of years ago as part of the reforms initiated by Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Salman. Murphy is a distinguished member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, therefore a key player in the formulation of U.S. foreign policy. The fact that he can get this important point of information wrong—and that an influential journal like Foreign Affairs did not catch it through fact checking—is evidence of a strategic weakness of thinking in the foreign policy establishment. Apparently, any anti-Saudi claim gets a pass, as the administration steers in its pro-Iran direction.

We have recently also witnessed a comparable gaffe in executive branch foreign policy management. On February 10, Turkey launched an operation into Iraqi Kurdistan with the goal of retrieving hostages whom the PKK had been holding, in some cases for more than five years. As the Turkish forces approached, the PKK executed the hostages in cold blood, with point blank shots to the head. As with all failed rescue missions, one can question the operation retroactively; that debate is underway in Turkey. Yet there is no doubt that the summary execution of hostages is an egregious human rights violation. One would expect the Biden administration to be vocal in its condemnation—and not only because the Turks are a North Atlantic Treaty Organization ally and Washington has labelled the PKK a terrorist organization.

Yet the initial statement issued by the State Department on February 14 was half-hearted at best. Not until the next day did the State Spokesperson offer a correction with a firm condemnation of the PKK. How to explain this waffling? One might be tempted to attribute it to incompetence, but this administration—in contrast to its predecessor—has recruited personnel with considerable prior government experience. This team ought to be able to get things right the first time round. More likely the two statements reflect a tug of war inside Biden's foreign policy group. Some evidently want to cushion, if not entirely shield, the PKK from criticism, presumably because the PKK is crucial to the Obama-era legacy Kurdish strategy in the fight against ISIS: these Kurds were a potential partner in the counter-terrorism campaign and would not antagonize Iran. Yet others in today's State Department seem to be trying to maintain the fiction that

one can separate the PKK terrorists, the bad Kurds, from their alter ego, the YPG (People's Protection Units) whom they view as the good Kurds worthy of American support.

Given the ongoing violence in the region—the wars in Yemen and Syria, the rockets hitting targets in Saudi Arabia, and the political violence across both Iraq and Lebanon—these two misstatements, by Murphy on guardianship and the State Department on the PKK—may seem to pale in significance: they are just words, after all. However, they are also symptomatic of a tendency in parts of Congress and in the administration to tilt toward Iran and its proxies and away from traditional partners, both Saudi Arabia and Turkey. According to this view, the major problems in the region are American presence and the character of U.S. partners and allies; the implication of this vision is for the United States to acquiesce to Iran's campaign for regional hegemony.

An open question remains as to the source of this infatuation with Iran, despite its forty years of fever-pitch anti-Americanism that has never shown any sign of abating. The answer may have to do with some ideological affinity: the revolutionary character of the Islamic Republic may appeal to parts of the liberal Democratic spectrum, while the generally conservative Republicans are more comfortable with stable monarchies.

Yet more importantly, Iran's anti-Americanism evidently confirms progressives' America-centric world view that treats the United States as the primary cause of strife everywhere. It is an "America First" thinking with a negative sign: America as the worst, not the best. The hate-filled slogans from Tehran resonate with the internalized anti-imperialism of American progressives, who prefer to embrace America's enemies instead of supporting its friends. During the next four years, the task for cooler heads in Washington will involve limiting the damage that this mindset can do to American interests and the network of partners and allies on which the United States relies.

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World Environment Day | Editorial

This year, to mark the launch of the UN's Decade on Ecosystem Restoration 2021-2030, Pakistan has officially been made the host of World Environment Day. It seems that our efforts to combat climate change and minimise its effects on the country are receiving international recognition and appreciation.

Taking advantage of the platform being extended to us, we must ensure that we use this opportunity to bolster our diplomatic reach within the environmental sector to learn, emulate and produce innovative solutions to repair the ecosystem.

According to the UN Environment Programme's (UNEP) Executive Director, Inger Andersen, our country has shown immense resolve for the cause of improving environmental conditions. Starting with the 10 Billion Tree Tsunami project to the Ecosystem Restoration Fund and Spring Tree Plantation Campaign that utilises the Miyawaki technique, Pakistan's Ministry of Climate Change has been on the move constantly.

This is a testament to our commitment towards ecological restoration and protection. Hence, hosting the World Environment Day is not only an award but also a chance for our authorities to take charge and lead other nations through the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration.

The event promises to highlight Pakistan and the environmental issues it faces along with the initiatives the government has taken domestically. Our diplomatic reach is bound to expand substantially especially considering that there has never been specific focus on environmental progress we have achieved throughout the years. However, the long ahead is still long. Ecosystem restoration is something the government has worked on, but other aspects of climate change such as pollution lie ignored. It is time to adopt a holistic approach.

Source: <https://nation.com.pk/24-Feb-2021/world-environment-day>

Democracy on the Defense By Yascha Mounk

After the Cold War ended, it looked like democracy was on the march. But that confident optimism was misplaced. With the benefit of hindsight, it is clear that it was naive to expect democracy to spread to all corners of the world. The authoritarian turn of recent years reflects the flaws and failings of democratic systems.

Most analyses of the precarious state of contemporary democracy begin with a similar depiction. They are not altogether incorrect. But they omit an important part of the picture. The story of the last two decades is not just one of democratic weakness; it is also one of authoritarian strength.

Since the 1990s, autocratic regimes have advanced in terms of economic performance and military might. Dictators have learned to use digital tools to oppress opposition movements in sophisticated ways. They have beaten back democratic campaigns that once looked promising, taken hold of countries that seemed to be on the way to becoming more democratic, and vastly increased their international influence. What the world has seen is less a democratic retreat than an authoritarian resurgence. Autocrats, long focused on bare survival, are now on the offensive. The coming decades will feature a long and drawn-out contest between democracy and dictatorship.

The outcome of that contest is not foreordained. To prevail, the United States and its democratic allies need to understand the stakes of this historic moment and work together to protect global democracy in more imaginative and courageous ways than they have in the past. They will also need to solve a dilemma created by the tension between two core objectives: stemming backsliding within their own ranks, on the one hand, and maintaining a unified front against authoritarian regimes such as those in China and Russia, on the other. Simply put, it will be hard to oppose antidemocratic governments in countries whose support is crucial to confronting full-throated, increasingly assertive authoritarians. Dealing with that dilemma will require a skillful approach that preserves the possibility of cooperation with countries that have questionable democratic bona fides while reserving close partnerships for genuinely democratic allies. It will also mean abandoning “democracy promotion” in favor of

“democracy protection”—seeking, for the most part, to secure, rather than expand, the democratic world.

AUTHORITARIANS ON THE MARCH

Donald Trump’s tenure in the White House cast unprecedented doubt on which side the United States would take in the conflict between democracy and dictatorship. Even before 2016, Washington regularly supported autocratic governments when the prospects of finding democratic allies in a strategically important country looked slim. But the past four years marked the first time that a U.S. president seemed to openly favor dictatorships over democracies and boosted autocratic forces within democratic allies.

Trump called the desirability of NATO into question. He repeatedly refused to condemn autocratic attempts to interfere in democratic elections, murder dissidents on foreign soil, or put bounties on the heads of U.S. soldiers. He expressed admiration for dictators including Russia’s Vladimir Putin, Egypt’s Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, and North Korea’s Kim Jong Un even though they and their countries shared little in the way of ideology or geostrategic importance.

Under Trump, the United States also promoted extremist forces within other democratic countries. In an interview with the far-right news outlet Breitbart, Richard Grenell, then the U.S. ambassador to Germany, insinuated that he sought to “empower” populist movements across Europe. Meanwhile, Pete Hoekstra, the U.S. ambassador to the Netherlands, held a private gathering for members of an extremist Dutch political party and its donors at the U.S. embassy. Back home, Trump himself welcomed a series of authoritarian populists to the White House, including Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Put diplomatically, during Trump’s tenure in office, the United States ceased to be the so-called leader of the free world. Put more bluntly, large parts of the Trump administration effectively defected to the autocratic camp.

Autocrats, long focused on bare survival, are now on the offensive.

On the surface, the moderate leaders of powerful democracies in Europe and elsewhere have little in common with Trump. Little love was lost between him and Emmanuel Macron, the president of France, or Angela Merkel, the German chancellor. But despite those European leaders’ putative support for democratic

values and their elegant speeches in support of human rights, their actual deeds have repeatedly aided and abetted the forces of autocracy around the world.

When Merkel was struggling to deal with a large inflow of refugees from the Middle East and sub-Saharan Africa in 2016, for instance, she spearheaded a deal between the EU and Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan that cut off one of the main routes for migrants headed to mainland Europe. Even as Erdogan sought to concentrate power in his own hands and was busy jailing more than 100 journalists, the lucrative agreement helped him cement his political standing. Germany and several other European states also pressed ahead with Nord Stream 2, a Russian-built gas pipeline that would secure their energy supplies while leaving some central and eastern European democracies immensely vulnerable to pressure from the Kremlin.

The most important service that Merkel and other European leaders provided the autocratic camp, however, was their failure to confront democratic backsliding in neighboring countries such as Hungary and Poland. Over the past decade, governments in both Budapest and Warsaw have rapidly eroded the rule of law, weakened the separation of powers, undermined the free press, and rendered elections deeply unfair. Freedom House, an organization that tracks the status of democratic governance around the world, recently downgraded Hungary to “partly free”—a sad first for a member of the EU.

Even so, Brussels has yet to levy serious sanctions on either Hungary or Poland, and both countries continue to receive billions of euros from the EU. Because the bloc has failed to exercise any effective control over the money’s distribution, it has essentially provided the antidemocratic populists who lead the governments in both places with a slush fund to reward their political allies and punish their adversaries.

TOO LITTLE, TOO LATE?

This shameful period of inaction in the face of the authoritarian resurgence is now, hopefully, coming to an end. In the United States, Joe Biden’s victory in last year’s presidential election put politicians deeply committed to democratic values back in power. In the EU, the attacks on democracy by some member states have become so blatant that several crusading politicians, including Mark Rutte, the prime minister of the Netherlands, and Sophie in ’t Veld and Sergey Lagodinsky, two members of the European Parliament, have forced the bloc to

start confronting the authoritarian governments in their midst. But unless democratic leaders recognize the extent of the authoritarian resurgence and the serious threat it poses, their response is likely to be too little, too late.

The EU's attempts to contain autocracy within the bloc is a depressing case study in how halfhearted efforts are likely to fail. In 2020, after years of inaction, the EU finally tried to impose stronger conditions on the funds it disburses across the bloc. A European Commission proposal envisioned a system that would freeze payments to member states if they violated the rule of law in their countries. Poland and Hungary, two likely targets, fought back, threatening to veto an EU budget that included funding for vital COVID-19 relief efforts. True to form, European leaders quickly caved. In a compromise that was designed to save face but mostly demonstrated how autocratic leaders within the EU are now essentially immune from negative repercussions for their attacks on democracy as long as they give one another political cover, the commission abandoned the measure's core elements.

As a result of the deal, the European Commission still cannot withhold funds when member states take steps to weaken the rule of law. To sanction such states, Brussels instead needs to demonstrate that EU funds are being misspent. In another concession, the commission promised not to bring any rule-of-law proceedings against member states until those that are opposed to what is left of the new rules have a chance to contest their constitutionality in front of the European Court of Justice. This effectively guarantees that Orban and other autocratic leaders will win more unfair elections, remaining in power for years to come. In the end, the failed attempt to discipline Hungary and Poland merely illustrated how much impunity autocratic leaders within the EU now enjoy.

Across the Atlantic, it is too early to assess how effective the new U.S. administration will be in bolstering democracy. Initial statements from Biden and members of his senior foreign policy team suggest that they take the autocratic threat seriously and are keen to restore the United States to its role as the "leader of the free world." A year ago, Biden wrote in these pages that "the triumph of democracy and liberalism over fascism and autocracy created the free world. But this contest does not just define our past. It will define our future, as well." This attitude marks a real shift from the last four years. Under Biden's leadership, the short-term survival of NATO will, thankfully, no longer be in doubt,

and countries that depend on the United States for their security will rightly breathe a sigh of relief.

Over the next years, the United States is also more likely to work closely with long-standing democratic allies than with either autocratic states or backsliding democracies. In contrast to Trump, Biden will undoubtedly have better relationships with democratic leaders such as Merkel and South Korean President Moon Jae-in than with autocratic ones such as Erdogan or Sisi. Biden is unlikely to invite antidemocratic populists such as Orban or Modi to the White House, as Trump did on several occasions. And under Antony Blinken's leadership, the State Department will once again express concern over attacks on human rights and free institutions around the world. Populists and autocrats will have to pay a price for attacks on core democratic values.

Biden and his team have also signaled their intention to convene a high-profile summit of democracies. Although the incoming administration has not released details about the summit's timing or content, the proposal's intention is clear: to reinvigorate democratic countries in their fight against autocratic threats. If done right, the summit could send an important signal about the United States' commitment to democratic values.

All these changes will represent a notable improvement over the Trump administration. But even if they are fully implemented, they likely won't suffice to stem the authoritarian resurgence. The problem is that two of the central goals of these efforts—containing the influence of powerful autocracies and halting backsliding in key democracies—are often in conflict with each other. Any attempt to halt the authoritarian resurgence must simultaneously stop embattled democracies such as India and Poland from joining the ranks of the world's dictatorships and prevent countries such as China and Russia from reshaping the international order. But if Washington wants to contain Russia, it needs to preserve a close relationship with Poland, and if it wants to contain China, it needs to keep India onboard.

During Trump's tenure in office, the United States ceased to be the so-called leader of the free world.

This dilemma will make it difficult for the Biden administration to carry out its pro-democracy agenda. When the United States convenes its proposed summit of democracies, for example, it could safely abstain from inviting countries that are

rapidly backsliding and have comparatively little geostrategic importance, such as Hungary. But it will be harder to avoid inviting backsliding democracies such as India or Poland, which, because of their size or location, are important allies in the effort to contain the United States' most powerful authoritarian adversaries.

Democracies will never be able to sidestep this predicament entirely. They can, however, be open about the nature of the problem and publicly commit themselves to a consistent strategy. This would require that the leading democratic states clearly distinguish between two levels in their relations with other countries: a lower tier available to countries that share a geostrategic interest in containing powerful dictatorships, even if they themselves are autocracies or backsliding democracies, and a higher tier for countries that share both democratic values and geostrategic interests.

This strategy would represent a continuation of past foreign policy in recognizing the need to sustain strategic alliances with countries that are less than fully democratic. But it would also represent a marked departure by committing the United States and other powerful democracies to reserving the status of full partner for liberal democracies and downgrading their relationships with other longtime partners if they significantly backslide.

Creating this two-tier structure would provide a modest yet real incentive for governments of countries interested in maintaining a relationship with established democracies to end their attacks on the rule of law. It would also provide pro-democracy activists and movements in those countries with evidence of the international benefits of resisting would-be autocrats. Especially in deeply divided states where pro-democracy forces still have some hope of displacing the government through elections, this policy change might just make the difference between aspiring autocrats' losing power and their holding on to it.

At his proposed summit of democracies, Biden should establish criteria for what would constitute a breach of minimum democratic standards and what costs Washington would impose on countries that failed to live up to them. He should also invite other countries to adopt their own versions of this Biden Doctrine. The more developed democracies pursue this approach, the more powerful its effects will be.

PROTECTING DEMOCRACY

This kind of approach would require policymakers in the United States and Europe to rethink the notion of “democracy promotion.” For the most part, that term has been used to describe admirable efforts to bolster democratic movements in autocratic countries or fledgling democracies. But at times, the United States and others have abused it, misapplying it to destructive attempts to impose democracy by force. The deeper problem, however, is that the very idea of democracy promotion rests on the assumption that the future will be more democratic than the past.

In light of the recent authoritarian resurgence, leaders need to stand this assumption on its head. It is certainly possible that some autocracies will democratize over the coming decades, and when such opportunities arise, developed democracies should do what they can to help. But the primary goal of U.S. and European foreign policy should not be to promote democracy in countries where it does not already exist. Instead, it should be to protect democracy in those countries where it is now seriously at risk.

Just as democracy promotion developed gradually, democracy protection will take time to evolve. But there are some immediate steps that the United States and its allies should take. As Warsaw restricts press freedom, Radio Free Europe should restart its Polish-language broadcast, as it did its Hungarian-language broadcast in 2020. In turn, Voice of America should monitor changes in India that might justify a new Hindi-language program. Organizations such as the National Endowment for Democracy should step up their activities in such places—a shift of resources that is increasingly crucial as governments in those countries stifle civil society and crack down on nongovernmental organizations.

A serious commitment to democracy protection would also mean using diplomatic tools to put pressure on backsliding allies. This would necessarily involve sticks as well as carrots. One potential stick could be the expanded use of targeted sanctions against officials who work to subvert democratic institutions. Another would be to delay or cancel planned initiatives that would boost antidemocratic governments, such as the Pentagon’s intention to move thousands of U.S. troops to Poland.

Democracy protection will also require a greater focus on the connection between foreign policy and domestic politics. Of late, commentators and policymakers have begun to emphasize how international issues such as free

trade affect domestic politics: unless ordinary citizens believe that the liberal international order will improve their daily lives, they will be unwilling to carry its burdens. But the link is just as strong in the other direction: citizens who lose faith in democratic values or no longer believe in their own political system can hardly be effective advocates for democracy.

Leaders in developed democracies need to take on autocratic challengers in their midst. But they must avoid doing so by illiberal means. This can be a tough line to walk: many democracies, for instance, are increasingly willing to ban extremist political parties, restrict speech deemed hateful, and censor social media platforms. The efficacy of all these measures is doubtful. What is certain, however, is that budding autocrats often use strikingly similar laws and regulations as cover for concentrating power in their own hands.

The link between foreign and domestic policy is also a reason to stop autocrats abroad from limiting what citizens of democracies can say at home. Over the past several years, China has mounted a concerted campaign to deter citizens, municipalities, and corporations elsewhere from criticizing its human rights record. In Germany, for example, the city of Heidelberg in 2019 removed a Tibetan flag flown outside its city hall after pressure from Chinese diplomats. Following economic threats from the Chinese government that same year, the National Basketball Association criticized Daryl Morey, then the general manager of the Houston Rockets, for supporting pro-democracy protesters in Hong Kong.

Although it will likely prove impossible to completely prevent this sort of muzzling, the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act of 1977 might serve as a model for an effective response. That U.S. law creates a major deterrent to engaging in graft by imposing stiff punishments on corporations that pay bribes to foreign officials. A similar deterrent could be created by legislation in the United States and Europe that would prohibit corporations and other organizations from punishing their employees for criticizing the policies of autocratic regimes. By tying the hands of organizations such as Nike, Volkswagen, and the Houston Rockets, such laws would make it far easier for them to resist outside pressure to silence their employees.

REFORM OR PERISH

A final step in heading off the authoritarian resurgence would be to reform two of the liberal international order's foundational institutions: the EU and NATO. The

Americans and Europeans who designed those bodies assumed that their own countries would never experience serious democratic backsliding. As a result, neither organization has straightforward means for suspending or expelling a member whose character has fundamentally changed.

This is particularly problematic for the European Union, which requires its members to sacrifice an unusually high degree of sovereignty to join the bloc. Although national politicians sometimes find it hard to explain this to their voters, there are some compelling reasons for the arrangement. On their own, most EU countries are too small to tackle transnational problems such as climate change or significantly influence world politics. Since these countries share a commitment to democracy and the rule of law, giving up a measure of independence enables them to promote their shared values.

According to this same logic, however, the rise of authoritarian leaders within EU states deeply undermines the bloc's legitimacy. It may be rational for citizens in the Netherlands to pool some of their country's sovereignty with that of nearby democracies, such as Greece or Sweden, as their interests are presumably aligned. But it is hard to explain politically or justify morally why rules set in part by would-be dictators in Budapest and Warsaw should bind Dutch citizens. If policymakers in Brussels don't address that contradiction, the EU will face a legitimacy crisis of existential proportions—one that its current institutions are entirely ill equipped to solve.

To address the threat of resurgent authoritarians, the world's democracies need to commit to bold action.

NATO faces a similar problem. Like the EU, the alliance was founded, as the treaty's preamble makes clear, on a determination "to safeguard . . . the principles of democracy, individual liberty and the rule of law." Since the alliance's primary purpose has always been military, however, it has long tolerated some violations of those principles. Portugal, one of NATO's original members, was a dictatorship at the time of the alliance's founding. In the decades after 1952, when Greece and Turkey joined, both countries remained in good standing despite their occasional control by military dictatorships.

The problem that NATO faces today, however, is different. Even when Greece, Portugal, and Turkey were dictatorships, they remained reliable members of the alliance; during the Cold War, they clearly sided with democratic countries such

as the United States rather than communist powers such as the Soviet Union. Now, some member states, including the Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovenia, and Turkey, appear to favor China and Russia over the United States. The Turkish military may have even attacked a U.S. commando outpost in Syria in 2019. These internal contradictions are unsustainable. A mutual-defense pact that includes countries willing to fire on another member's troops will quickly lose all credibility. Ejecting a member from NATO, however, is even more difficult than doing so in the EU. Although some lawyers have suggested clever workarounds, the treaty does not explicitly contain any mechanism for suspending or expelling a member state.

In both organizations, fixing these flaws would take enormous political capital, necessitate serious diplomatic pressure, and potentially require a complete legal or organizational reinvention. All of these are good reasons why democratic leaders likely lack the appetite for making the necessary reforms. But without mechanisms to ensure that member states either stay aligned with each organization's missions or exit it, the EU and NATO will drift into dysfunction and irrelevance.

Politicians who are serious about democracy protection must prioritize reforming these institutions, even if doing so leads to serious internal conflict. Member states whose actions are no longer in line with the core mission of the EU or NATO must either change course or accede to rules that make it possible to expel them. If these reforms prove impossible, however, it may be better to refund both organizations on a more sustainable basis than to let them decay.

European leaders are starting to wake up to the threat of democratic backsliding in their midst. A new U.S. administration has pledged to defend democracy against illiberal threats. For this determination to be translated into meaningful action, statesmen and diplomats will need to look beyond the traditional diplomatic playbook. To address the threat that resurgent authoritarians pose, the world's democracies need to commit to bold action. If they do, they will no doubt face an arduous and uncertain journey—one that will cost them political capital and inspire blowback. The alternative, however, is incomparably worse.

Source: <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2021-02-16/democracy-defense>

Urban Population Growth and Risks By

Abdullah Bin Hamza

In recent times, the urban population has witnessed tremendous growth. As per reports, around 56.2 percent of the world population was situated in urban areas in the year 2020. In the case of the developing world, this growth has overwhelmingly included rural migration to informal settlements in and around cities, more commonly known as “slums”.

A slum is a densely populated urban area with the following characteristics: poor-quality housing, substandard infrastructure, inadequate access to safe water, lack of proper sanitation, sewerage and basic facilities etc. A slum is more than just a place of concentrated poverty; it is an area of physical and social degradation.

Apart from rural-urban migration, a slum is formed due to an overlapping of multiple factors which include economic recession, high unemployment, poor planning, politics, natural disasters, poverty and the informal economy.

Given that all these factors are prevalent in Pakistan, around 40.1 percent of our urban population is living in slums. These settlements have existed for over several decades in our beloved country. They consist of improvised buildings and houses typically made of materials such as mud, brick and wood.

Additionally, many of these shanties are built illegally by local land mafia. They rent out the homes to impoverished people and exploit them by taking advantage of their helplessness.

Given such poor conditions, the living standards of these slum residents are quite horrific. In these areas, crime rates are high and multiple diseases are common. Lack of sanitation and toilet facilities leads to contamination of the groundwater, which relies on soil distinctiveness and distance between sources of water and toilets.

Garbage management and the disposal and drainage systems are also poor. Exposed domestic wastes are quite common in these areas, which is hazardous to health.

The health of women and children in slums is also unsatisfactory due to the lack of check-ups as well as the common occurrence of anaemia during pregnancy, leaving most of the children non-immunised. No wonder then that the infant mortality rate in Pakistan is high, with 67 children aged under 5 dying per 1000 live births.

However, not only human beings are facing the adverse effects of such areas. Rather, the sustainability of the environment is also at stake.

Environmental decay in a city is largely due to rapid urbanisation and a mismatch in the provision and maintenance of housing and infrastructure. In these areas, waste collection is poor, so the amount of contamination is high. This means that slums have a detrimental effect on natural ecosystems.

Their presence can contribute to environmental destruction and loss of natural resources along with water contamination, air pollution, traffic hazards, and the amplification of heatwaves.

These destitute living conditions, along with poor nutrition, inadequate health-seeking behaviour and horrible environmental conditions result in a high prevalence rate of infectious diseases. Diarrhoea, acute respiratory infections, malnutrition, measles, pneumonia, tuberculosis and stunted growth are heavily prevalent in these areas.

Moreover, most of the residents can barely send their children to school (if at all), given their meagre income. As most of these slum dwellers are living below the poverty line alongside being uneducated and without a regular source of income, their socio-economic conditions only tend to become worse by the day rather than improving overtime.

Shelter is a basic human right. Both the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights assert “the right of everyone to an acceptable standard of life for themselves and their families, including adequate food, clothes and accommodation, and the constant

development of living conditions.” And Pakistan as a signatory of all of these commitments, should embrace these settlements as an integral part of the city and develop them properly. Only, then can we prosper as a nation, both socially and economically.

Real Madrid claim 1-0 victory over 10-man Atalanta
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