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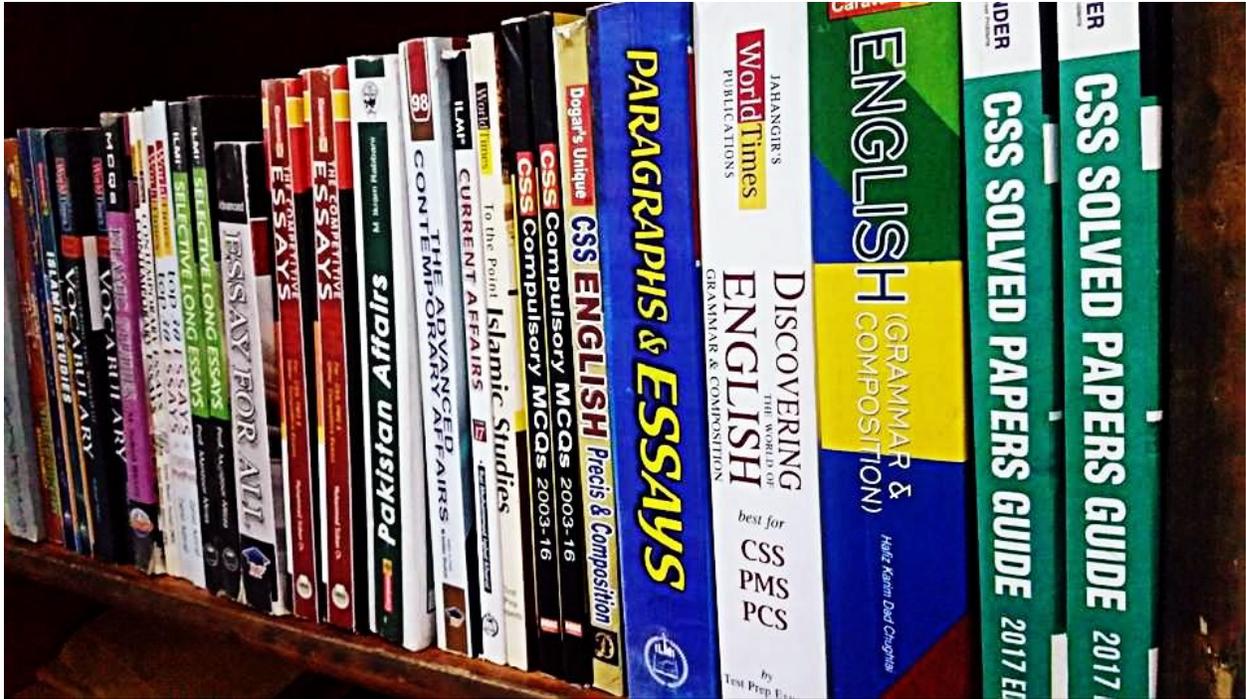
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PAKISTAN

US-Pakistan- India After Trump By Asia Maqsood

SINCE Donald Trump came to power there are less policy clues but from his inauguration speech to anti-globalisation, anti-internationalism broadly pointed at its nationalistic stance. In all probabilities, Trump's priorities are inclined towards trade, immigration, terrorism, the Iran nuclear deal and relations with Israel, while the rest of foreign policy including geopolitics or strategic issues are likely to have institutional zest. Now what are the deterministic factors of US-Pakistan relations? It is pertinent to discuss here that Pak-US relations primarily depend upon the Trump's approach towards war on terrorism and towards Afghanistan. The last Obama Administration lost its way dealing with Pakistan while investing too much in India on the basis of legacy and to counter China which is a major factor in Pak-US relations. The other element is that Obama was in urgency in paving the way for stability in Afghanistan which put too much pressure on Pakistan; consequently Pak-US relations remained strained on three sides.

Contemporary international political scenario, Trump has no such political baggage and will be assisted by a Secretary of Defence who seems to be a thoughtful and well-aware military leader having history of wars and conflicts. Here question arises that will a continuation of Obama's policy work? In my understanding it will not be easy for US to think up a new good policy in immediate future because its engagement in the region revolving around two categorized ideas- China and war on terrorism in which Afghanistan is crucial part. For first idea US needs India and for the second it needs Pakistan. With the new developments of China and Pakistan on China-Pakistan Economic Corridor and other different joint ventures, both India and US are on the same ground to oppose these developments in the region containing China.

Pakistan's priority to do joint ventures with China or cooperative strategic partnership in particular are to counterbalance India, not against US. So US may not undermine or demoralize Pakistan in prioritising its bilateral relations with India at the cost of China-Pak relations at strategic level. This makes its Pak-US relations very complex and needed to be reconciled. Along these China-Pakistan relations, the unresolved conflict in Afghanistan, continued militancy in Pakistan and Afghanistan, revolutionary Iran and resurging Russia Pakistan is factor in all this needed to be dealt fairly not discriminately. media reports quoting US officials said that the potential of Trump Administration responses being discussed include expanding US drone attacks, redirecting or

withholding some aid to Pakistan eventually may downgrade Pakistan's status as major non-NATO ally.

Some US officials and experts on the region scoff at the title "Pakistan is not an ally- it's not North Korea or Iran. But it's not an ally", said Bruce Riedel, a Pakistan expert at the Brookings Institute. By this title would be seen to Pakistan as a major blow. Lisa Curtis, senior Director for South and Central Asia at the National Security Council co-authored a report with Hussain Haqqani, Pakistan's former ambassador to Washington in which they recommended the Trump Administration warn Pakistan, the status could be evoked in six months, according to the February report "Thinking of Pakistan as an ally will continue to create problems for the next administration as it did for the last one". But it is unclear how seriously the current administration was considering the proposal.

Since the Indo-US nuclear deal in 2008, Indo-US strategic partnership is growing. Ahead of PM Narendra Modi's visit to US on June 26, 2017 is yet to be seen as how US current administration takes PM Modi's concerns against Pakistan as According to times of India that Modi would raise terrorism emanating from Pakistan and US aid to Islamabad. This will be their first meeting, though they have spoken at least three times on Phone starting with the morning after Trump's stunning election victory in November 2016. It is reported that top issues for both sides are likely to be discussed counter terrorism, followed by H-1B visa system for India and trade for the US. The ongoing US review of its policy on Afghanistan is expected to figure out prominently and India will be keen to know if the Americans are staying there, and for how long?

The current scenario which is witnessing the successes of the development projects such as CPEC bringing the prosperity and peace in Pakistan is not favouring both India and US and they are collectively expressing their opposition. The strategic partnership of both US and India plays a very infertile role in the whole stability and peace in South Asia's geostrategic fulcrum. Pakistan compelled to seek other strategic partners such as China and Russia but not at the cost of Pak-US relations whereas to counter India's ambitious regional role with the assistance of US. Critically analysing one can say that India-US relations will be flourishing during Trump whereas Pak-US relations may remain strained to certain extent yet to be seen.

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Source: <http://pakobserver.net/us-pakistan-india-trump/>

Pak-Afghan Differences Remain Unresolved | Editorial

Need for genuine confidence building measures

The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) summit provided Nawaz Sharif an opportunity to hold talks with Afghan President Ashraf Ghani. The meeting initially scheduled for half an hour was however prolonged to nearly an hour. That there was no joint statement after the talks indicated that there was no agreement on how to resolve major differences.

Each one of the two countries continues to accuse the other of allowing terrorists network to use its territory as a launching pad to play havoc in the other's domain. Lists of wanted terrorists and organisations have been exchanged along with demands for action. There being no end to the deep rooted mistrust between the two sides, both maintain that no action is being taken by the other side. According to FO, Pakistan and Afghanistan have agreed to use the Quadrilateral Coordination Group (QCG) as well as bilateral mechanisms for verification of each other's actions against terrorist groups. If true, the agreement could have been announced jointly from Astana.

The facts on ground tell a different story. Mutual consultations and use of bilateral channels has yet to show any positive results. In April a military delegation from Pakistan held talks with their Afghan counterparts in Kabul. It was followed by a parliamentary delegation from Pakistan. Within days of the visits however there were violent clashes between the two sides at Chaman leading to several casualties on the part of civilian and security personnel on both sides. While one welcomes the Astana meeting between Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and President Ashraf Ghani, one has yet to see any positive development on ground. The QCG has not met for over a year now. With Trump administration yet to decide its Afghan policy, activating QCG may not be immediately possible. Pakistan badly needs to improve relations with Afghanistan to ensure its own security and stability. Islamabad should come up with more realistic suggestions regarding a commonly acceptable mechanism for verification of action against terrorist groups.

Source: <https://www.pakistantoday.com.pk/2017/06/12/pak-afghan-differences-remain-unresolved/>

Pakistan's Role in the Mideast Crisis By Talat Masood

The decision by Saudi Arabia and its allies to boycott Qatar was in the making for some time, although it was not expected to be that harsh. There is a strong feeling that it was the Trump factor that emboldened Saudi Arabia to take the tough stand.

While on the one hand President Trump continues to support the policy of isolating Qatar and on the other, wants to play the role of a mediator. Perhaps, President Trump was initially unaware, until reminded by his staff that Qatar is home to CENTCOM, US biggest military base in the region with 8,000 troops stationed there. Not surprising that US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson took the opposite position that sanctions against Qatar be eased as it is causing unintended humanitarian consequences and hindering military action in the region and affecting the fight against the Islamic State. German Chancellor Merkel has echoed similar support for lifting sanctions on Qatar.

Secretary Tillerson has sought the cooperation of Turkey in defusing the crisis. It is, however, not clear whether the different positions taken by the president and the secretary of state are by design or reflect the state of confusion in US policy.

In a region where free speech is considered criminal activity Al Jazeera has become highly contentious. Its more vocal and independent reporting of events is unacceptable to insecure and authoritarian regimes of the Middle East. Qatar's political and moral support and providing asylum to Muslim Brotherhood leaders is another bone of contention. What is troubling the Arab regimes is also Qatar's relation with Iran and support of Hamas.

By adopting an independent and balanced policy Qatar aims at increasing its leverage. Moreover, its policies are dictated by economic considerations. A demonstration of this is sharing a gas field with Iran. But Saudi Arabia and its allies find Qatar's independent stance quite unacceptable.

This is not to overlook the ambitious designs of Iran in the Middle East conundrum. Its support for Bashar Assad's regime in Syria, despite its flagrant violation of human rights, unwavering support of Hezbollah and military and political dominance of Iraq give rise to a clash of interests and invite a response from Arab countries.

The latest decision by Turkey to support Qatar gives a new twist to how regional countries are positioning themselves to protect and advance their interests. Ankara may

be seeing it as an opportunity to establish its foothold in an Arab country to enhance its influence in the Middle East. Sending its troops is a clear signal that Turkey will defend the territorial integrity of Qatar. By supporting Qatar, Turkey also aims to moderate the influence of Iran and act as check against the growing footprint of Israel in the region.

What makes Qatar vulnerable is its heavy dependence on imports. Eighty per cent of food necessities come from Saudi Arabia. And the main land route connects Qatar with Saudi Arabia. That should normally restrict taking independent positions. But with Iran flying over 450 tons of food necessities and Turkey equally keen to win over Qatar the blockade is unlikely to make an impact. This measure would also hurt Saudi businessmen, as they would lose the attractive Qatar market. Despite external support Qatar would eventually have to extend some concessions and Saudi Arabia and its allies will have to soften their position. Prudence demands national decisions should be compatible with national power. Apparently, Hamas leadership is relocating itself either in Sudan or Iran.

It is truly an irony that the rivalry of the Sunni regimes against Iran is so intense that there are no qualms in accepting Israel as an ally. Indeed, Tel Aviv is one of the main beneficiaries of this confrontation.

All these ominous developments reinforce the deep and expanding crisis in the Muslim world. It makes a mockery of the stated objective of the Islamic military alliance to forge a united front to fight terrorism and extremism. Differences between Saudi Arabia and Qatar are not between its people as much as these are between the ruling families. In fact, the people of both the countries have so much in common and are like one society with different rulers.

The Arab divide places Pakistan in a delicate and challenging situation. Saudi Arabia is Pakistan's staunch strategic ally. It has stood steadfast with Pakistan in crises and extended financial and diplomatic support. Nearly 1.8 million Pakistani expatriates are working in the Kingdom. Saudi Arabia is home to Makkah and Madina, the holiest places for Muslims. Nawaz Sharif personally owes a lot to the Saudi monarchy and enjoys a strong personal relationship.

With Qatar Pakistan enjoys close fraternal relations. It is the primary source of supply of gas. About 80,000 Pakistani expatriates are in Qatar. The prospect of nearly an additional 100,000 Pakistanis being hired before the World Olympics is an added attraction.

There have been voices raised for calling back General Raheel Sharif. I do not foresee any immediate role for him in the Saudi-Qatar confrontation. The Saudi alliance is not planning any military action against Qatar; the thrust is in persuading it to change policies and if possible force the present ruler to quit through diplomatic isolation and economic coercion. In any case it would take a year or two before the military force that is planned by Prince Mohammed would be operational.

Historically, Pakistan has never taken sides in intra-Arab feuds. In the Yemen conflict too Pakistan took a neutral position. It realises confrontation among Arab countries has consequences for Muslims worldwide. It will undermine the fight against Islamic State and further weaken the voice of Arab countries at international forums. However, the recent visit of a Qatari delegation to Lahore and its meeting with Shahbaz Sharif and Nawaz Sharif's visit to Saudi Arabia this week suggest Pakistan's efforts at defusing the crisis. If Pakistan, along with Turkey, can contribute in bringing peace to the region it would be a great achievement.

Published in The Express Tribune, June 14th, 2017.

Source: <https://tribune.com.pk/story/1434745/pakistans-role-mideast-crisis/>

US Begins Policy Review Of Its Ties With Pakistan

By Wajid Ali Syed

WASHINGTON: Along with a renewed partnership with Afghanistan, the Trump administration is also conducting an inter-agency policy review of its relations with Pakistan, US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson has announced.

During a Congressional hearing here on Wednesday, the secretary said, “We are beginning an inter-agency policy review towards Pakistan. This [continuation of US aid to Pakistan] is going to be one of the considerations.”

Appearing before the House-Foreign Relations Committee, the secretary discussed the State Department’s annual budget proposals with the US lawmakers. Responding to a question asked by Congressman Dana Rohrabacher as to why the US continues to provide financial assistance to Pakistan.

“The president has asked the question specifically about our level of support and funding to Pakistan. No decision is to be taken until we complete that policy review,” Tillerson responded.

He further said, “Pakistan and our relationship with them touches on some much broader issues relative to stability in Afghanistan and how we achieve that, but also stability in the Indo-Pacific region. It is a very complex relationship we have with the government of Pakistan, but your concerns are all well founded.”

Congressman Rohrabacher mentioned Shakeel Afridi, who he said helped the US capture and kill Osama bin Laden. He also blamed Pakistan for the US shortcomings in Afghanistan. “If we don’t succeed in Afghanistan, it will be because of the ISI in Pakistan,” Rohrabacher said.

Congressman Ted Poe also joined in saying, “We give them money. That money ends up in the hands of bad guys in Afghanistan who hurt Americans. And I personally think that Pakistan should not get any American money.”

Secretary Tillerson said, “I mention that in the context of Pakistan because you cannot work one without the other. In the interim, though, we have had inter-agency discussions with the president about how to preserve the opportunity for a long-term solution in Afghanistan where we do not leave Afghanistan, where we never allow

Afghanistan to become the platform for terrorism to be launched against the United States or certainly others.”

What the US is following now are the policies of the prior administration, and some steps need to be taken to stem the effects of those while the Trump government gets its policies in place, Tillerson said, adding that the review should be completed in coming weeks and would be discussed with President Trump for the final decision.

Source: <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/210927-US-begins-policy-review-of-its-ties-with-Pakistan>

Pak-India Likely to Improve Bilateral Relations After Joining SCO: China

BEIJING : China Thursday hoped that Pakistan and India, after becoming the full members of Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) during upcoming Astana Summit, would strictly follow the idea of good neighborliness and improve their bilateral relations by upholding the Shanghai spirit.

“We hope, Pakistan and India will strictly follow the charter of SCO and the idea of good neighborliness, uphold the Shanghai spirit to improve their relations and inject new impetus to the development of SCO,” Spokesperson of Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Hua Chunying said during her regular press briefing.

She said both Pakistan and India would complete process of becoming full members of the SCO making it the world’s most populous and largest regional cooperative organization, which would bring unprecedented development capacity and cooperation potential.

“Now, the SCO will complete the first membership expansion since its establishment and it will become a regional organization with largest coverage and involving the biggest population,” she said while responding to question asked by the APP correspondent.

About the completion of membership process, she informed that in the SCO Summit held at Ufa, Russia, the member countries of the SCO had launched the process to accept membership of Pakistan and India.

“Now, the members of the SCO are accelerating the legal process on implementation of a memorandum of understanding in this regard and everything is going smoothly,” she added.

Hua Chunying hoped that India and Pakistan would be full members at Astana Summit to be held this month, adding, “We also expect the Astana Summit will fulfill the admission procedures of the two countries.”

The SCO summit is likely to be held this month in Astana, Kazakhstan when welcoming its seventh and eighth member nations would be a key item on the agenda.

This year marks the 15th anniversary of the signing of the SCO Charter and the 10th anniversary of the signing of the treaty on long-term good-neighborliness, friendship and cooperation by SCO members. China will take over the SCO rotating presidency after the Astana summit.

Source: <https://www.thenews.com.pk/latest/208011-Pak-India-likely-to-improve-bilateral-relations-after-joining-SCO-Chin>

Tensions With Iran | Editorial

The uneasy relationship between Pakistan and Iran took another turn for the worse after the Foreign Office confirmed that on Monday Pakistan Airforce had shot down an unmanned Iranian drone that had crossed 3-4 kilometres across the border. The confirmation was followed by a strong condemnation, with FO Spokesperson Nafees Zakaria reiterating that the presence of the drone was a violation of our sovereignty and would not be tolerated. Ties have been strained since late April, when 11 Iranian border guards were killed in an attack by Jaishul Adl militants. Iran had claimed that the militants came from and retreated to Pakistani territory after the attack – an allegation Pakistan has strongly denied. Iran also threatened to go after militants across the border should another such situation arise. Iran possesses both armed and unarmed drones and neither country has confirmed which kind of drone had been shot down. It is likely, though, that the drone was being used for surveillance purposes. While that is not as bad as the armed drone strikes the US has repeatedly carried out in Pakistan, it nonetheless cannot be accepted. If Iran is concerned about militants possibly seeking refuge in Pakistan then it needs to work with us so that both sides can share intelligence to counter the threat.

The problems between the two countries are not restricted to the militancy issue. Far more tension has been created by what Iran perceives as Pakistan's decision to side with Saudi Arabia in the proxy battles being fought in the Middle East. Pakistan's official position is one of neutrality but with former army chief Raheel Sharif heading the Saudi military alliance and PM Nawaz Sharif attending the summit in Riyadh, Iran is wary. Foreign Affairs Adviser Sartaj Aziz has told parliament that Raheel Sharif has gone to Saudi Arabia as a private citizen and so cannot be recalled – although some would say that the government could always cancel his NoC. Pakistan has to do a better job of staying out of the various conflicts in the Middle East and it also needs to ensure its friendship with Saudi Arabia does not affect its relationship with Iran. The drone incident makes that more difficult but the way forward is through regular engagement on matters of trade and a border mechanism that allows for better communication between forces on both sides.

Source: <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/212328-Tensions-with-Iran>

An Uncertain Foreign Policy | Editorial

The US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, while answering questions of lawmakers at a budget hearing of the House Foreign Affairs Committee this week, announced an inter-agency review of US funding and support to Pakistan.

While this is the first explicit mention of Pakistan by the current administration, it in no way clears up what the policy towards the country will be.

Hostile lawmakers have been present in the past and so have been military aid reductions, the real question here is what the top administration thinks.

That remains shrouded in mystery.

For much of his term up till now, Donald Trump's administration has been too busy battling internal crises to pay much attention to foreign policy.

Even aspects of domestic policy which have an effect on foreign policy – such as the infamous 'travel ban' – have been mired in controversy.

The upshot of all this is that apart from a grand show of strengthened relationship with Saudi Arabia – orchestrated by the Saudis themselves – and an irreverent visit to the European Union followed by withdrawal from the Paris climate agreement there is very little the presidency has done itself, leaving the running of foreign policy in the hands of career diplomats and military officials.

This is certainly not a bad thing, as most career officials are better versed in the global situation and invested in maintaining status quo policies.

However, working as de facto authority in absence of leadership means that policies can be changed from the top at any time.

This is especially true for the current presidency, which has branded Qatar as a "sponsor of terrorism" and took credit for its isolation, and sold it arms worth millions weeks later while still maintaining the largest US military base in the Middle East in that country.

All this comes at the statements of career diplomats and military officials, who have struggled to reconcile these seismic changes.

For now, Pakistan should pay attention to Rex Tillerson and Gen James Mattis – the Defence Secretary filling the “Commander-in-Chief” role in absentia.

Their actions and stated policy will govern the relationship between the two countries, but it should be mindful that this can change at any time.

With a visit of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi to the US coming up, it is likely that this will happen sooner than later.

The statements that Donald Trump makes after being prompted by the Indian Prime Minister will be much more revealing of how he plans to approach the Indo-Pak-Afghan region.

Source: <http://nation.com.pk/editorials/18-Jun-2017/an-uncertain-foreign-policy>

Pakistan and its Neighbours By Anjum Altaf

Look at the map of Pakistan. The overwhelming length of its land border — 92% of a total of 6,774kms — is shared with three countries: India (43%), Afghanistan (36%) and Iran (13%). Pakistan has poor relations with each of these three neighbours.

Has anyone seriously asked the two obvious questions: Why? And, at what cost?

Before we jump on the moral high-horse and go into paroxysms of indignant self-righteousness, we could consider the following:

When George Bush asks “Why do they hate us?” and answers “Because we are so good,” we marvel at his intelligence. When we proclaim the same, we want to be taken seriously?

Surely, some self-reflection is in order.

Point number one: When nobody likes you, the problem could very well be with you. At the very least, intellectual honesty demands one should be open to the possibility.

All right, there is a ready-to-serve narrative for the hostility with India. It is a Hindu country and Hindus are different from Muslims and want nothing better than to undo Pakistan. Ergo, we have to terrorise them from time to time lest, God forbid, they change their minds.

But what about our fellow-Muslim neighbours. Do we have semi-plausible narratives to explain our unhappiness with them?

We need to have a friendly regime in Afghanistan so we can be friends with them. Of course, this involves regime change about which we have serious qualms except when we are desperately seeking friends. And a little strategic depth won't hurt either because when we have to pole-vault over the Indian border, we can start running from much further back.

Meanwhile, as former US secretary of state Madeleine Albright said about the death of 500,000 Iraqis: “I think this is a very hard choice, but the price — we think the price is worth it.”

And Iran, don't they belong to a different sect? In any case, the enemy of our friend is our enemy, isn't it?

Okay, I am exaggerating (slightly) but could we put some more coherent narratives on the table and have a national discussion without being defensive or afraid. And, while we are at it, could we also discuss who are the geniuses making these brilliant foreign policy decisions? Because it is certainly not the citizens.

We do seem to have a surreal notion of how to resolve our issues. Instead of trying to get along with the neighbours we have, we seem desperate to relocate ourselves to another neighbourhood. If only we could become 'Bakistan' and cuddle up to Saudi Arabia or attach ourselves to the underside of those wonderful 'stans, or be an extension of China, wouldn't everything be so wonderful?

Quite aside from the fact that moving a country is not quite the same as moving a family from quarrelsome Harbanspura to peaceful Bedian, the nice thing about counterfactuals is that they never need to be put to the test. Having made a hash of Saarc and RCD, we can boldly dream we would make a great success of CAP (Central Asia and Pakistan — seriously).

It does help to have a short memory. Didn't we have a neighbour (a little more than that, actually) about a 1,000 miles to the east and what exactly did we do to it that it could not bear our embrace?

Is everyone in this pipedream too smoked up to keep track of the contradictions? We launched a jihad in Afghanistan because godless communists were being nasty to our fellow Muslims and now our best friends are godless communists who allegedly won't allow Muslims in their country to grow beards or fast during Ramazan (sorry, Ramadan). We are sincerely upset about Kashmir but, please, could we sincerely avert our eyes from Xinjiang. Or else.

More and more this comes across as a melange of self-serving gibberish that just doesn't hold together. But who is to say and we know who there is to hear.

And what about the benefits and costs? Every situation has its winners and losers and in almost every case two truths are held: the winners are few and the losers many, and the winners convince the losers that everything is happening in the latter's interest and is exactly as the Good Lord willed. How much better the reward when it is finally conferred in the Hereafter.

There's no prize for guessing the winners and the losers. Just look for the folks whose lifestyle is immune to whatever happens on the borders and those who are laughing to

the bank and onwards to the Bahamas. There go your winners. As for the losers, think of those for whom a few rupees less in the price of food would mean two meals a day instead of one.

You may not be able to do much about it but I am sure you can figure it out.

Published in The Express Tribune, July 5th, 2017.

Source: <https://tribune.com.pk/story/1450265/pakistan-and-its-neighbours/>

Constitutional Capture By Abid Hussain Chattha

The Constitution of Pakistan is a living and dynamic document based on sacred and internationally accepted democratic ideals designed to promote indiscriminate well-being of citizens, orderly conduct of the state, people's participation at all levels of governance and equitable distribution of resources.

Constitutional capture that can reverse these objectives remains the worst nightmare of those seeking constitution's supremacy. The landmark Panama Papers verdict in general and the minority view on it in particular aptly highlights this constitutional capture by a family in the most bizarre sense of the term. The practical manifestation of the famous saying, "all power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely", has been articulately documented in the judgement by Honourable Justice Asif Saeed Khosa.

It all began when a scion of a trading family was inducted as a nominee Punjab Minister by a military regime in 1982. Political power was ruthlessly employed to gain control of state institutions. Huge loans were obtained from nationalised banks setting up industry after industry. Heads of key institutions were appointed in defiance of merit and based entirely on personal loyalty. All dirty tricks were set loose: issuance of time-bound favourable SROs to gain quick trading dividends; subsidies to boost targeted businesses; evasion of taxes; prevention, manipulation or curbs on hostile legal actions and cases; bestowing of state resources in the shape of plots, permits and licenses to win over political adversaries and promote friends; receiving commissions and kick-backs on mega-projects; purchase of real estate and trading in stock exchange through inside privileged information; and money laundering in and out of the country.

Equality before the law and indiscriminate and enforcement of fundamental rights were effectively made selective. Mighty and powerful were exempted. Party tickets were awarded purely on personal loyalty. If elected, one must vote, speak, and act as per party head's directions. Otherwise, you stand disqualified. Any independent rational voice and sagacity was disallowed. Either toe the line or leave the system. Bureaucracy was personalised. Those who worked for institutions, law and the state were parked to sideline assignments and made to face inquiries, wait for promotions and get frequent abrupt transfers and suspensions.

The option of forced military interventions to fix our institutional problems has not yielded any positive results

PPP and to a lesser extent smaller parties in the country's politics have ascribed to similar norms. Consequently, the country has been left with a bleeding economy,

shattered institutions, personalised bureaucracy, immense poverty, rising inequality, worse exploitation, public mistrust and an insensitive nation without hope and resilience. The mood is that everything is fixed, pre-settled, for sale and compromised. Those who remain committed to honesty, morality, rule of law, fair practices, and halal living in all facets of life are either wiped out or cut to size. The old political culture of patronage and personalised service to friends coupled with revenge and punishment for foes is replaced with new paradigm: spend money to win tickets and elections and then use political power to plunder and accumulate money. This vicious circle continues to dominate with ferocious manifestations.

The vital question remains that if a state is trapped in a constitutional capture of this kind, how can it be set free? How can a political system fairly and equally open up to all citizens of the state to attract best leadership at all levels of electorate system? How can a policy be made in the best public interest free from extraneous and corrupt considerations? How can development agenda be set and achieved in a transparent and efficacious manner? How can institutions start realising objectives of their creation? How can the democratic ideals and spirit of the constitution be rightfully enforced?

The first option is forced interventions through the military. The experiment did not yield any positive result. The second option is to wait for divine intervention — the natural path of rise and fall of nations, individuals and families. This does not require any action on our part. The third option is judicial intervention for affirmative action. This option has never been employed in a comprehensive and over-arching manner.

The judiciary does not have a glorious history. With isolated cases of triumph and glory, the overall public trust in judiciary and the provision of justice have always remained questionable. Notwithstanding, the judiciary has the capacity, duty and responsibility to come forward with a comprehensive plan to direct, monitor and oversee political and institutional reforms aimed at cleansing political and state institutions — as ordained by the Constitution. To do so, it would require public support. PTI chief Imran Khan has been credited for having remained un-purchasable and steadfast in his struggle to break this constitutional capture. More factions of civil society should join.

The Panama Papers verdict may prove to be the start of the greater role that the Apex court may choose to play. This role if employed rapidly and effectively can go a long way to demolish constitutional and institutional capture that has stagnated Pakistan. The direction of the state must be set right to allow Pakistan to realise its full potential. The Supreme Court has taken upon itself the duty to take the verdict to a logical end. It must act swiftly to break the shackles of constitutional capture and it should not allow its

activism to get lost in a blind alley. Public pressure coupled with judicial activism is the only way forward.

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Source: <http://dailytimes.com.pk/opinion/20-Jun-17/constitutional-capture>

An Insider's View on Pak-India Ties By M Ziauddin

Washington seems to be mulling over the idea of winning Pakistan's cooperation in Afghanistan by helping it resolve its India problems. This is one of the options being looked at by the US strategists trying to find a way out of the 16-year long Afghanistan quagmire for America. The other options seem centred on forcing Pakistan into cooperation by denying it economic aid and sending drones deep into the country targeting terror hide-outs.

The self-induced fear of the US that nuclear weapons would easily fall into the hands of terrorists with the state of Pakistan presumably going into tail-spin as the punishment would take effect is said to be persuading these Trump administration strategists to try the India-Pakistan talk felicitation option first failing which the other harsher options could be employed.

But before this option is finalised and put into motion it would be prudent on the part of these US strategists to do a close reading of 'Choices', a book by Ambassador Shivshankar Menon who has served India as National Security Adviser to the Prime Minister (January 2010 to May 2014), as Foreign Secretary (October 2006 to July 2009) and also as his country's High Commissioner to Pakistan (July 2003 to September 2006).

Ambassador Shivshankar Menon concedes that India 'today lacks the power to solve its Pakistan problem,' which he believed largely stemmed from Pakistan's own condition. Though the book contains a huge treasure of useful information for those who wish to know how India looks at itself and at the outside world, particularly the region in which it is located and its global designs driven by its world power ambitions, it is essentially a dense book as it reads more like jumbled theses contained within the framework assigned by the Brookings Institution where the author is a Distinguished Fellow.

Suave and soft spoken High Commissioner Menon had three gruelling years in Islamabad as in that short period India had suffered a large number of terror attacks including the one on August 25, 2003 in Mumbai which took a toll of 52 lives, next on October 29, 2005 in which 70 lives were lost and third on July 11, 2006 in which 209 people died when a series of seven train bombings had occurred.

India had blamed all these attacks on Pakistan. The mood in our Eastern neighbour had seemingly gone too foul for Pakistan's comfort. But High Commissioner Menon seemingly kept his cool and perhaps even kept an enraged New Delhi on a tight leash through the ministry of external affairs. I suspected as much at that time because at the

reception he had hosted to celebrate India's independence day on August 15, 2006 I asked him in an understandably worried tone for his opinion on how the anger in India at the July bombings was going to affect the on-going normalization process between our two countries. His answer in a tone icy calm to a fault: Mr Ziauddin we are not going to let the terrorists dictate our foreign policy. We will not let such incidents derail the normalization process.

So, one can imagine the extent of my surprise when I came to the passage in 'Choices' where he says (page 91): "For me Pakistan had crossed a line (26/11), and that action demanded more than a standard response. My preference was for overt action against LeT headquarters in Muridke or the LeT camps in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir and covert action against their sponsors, the ISI."

His suggestion was not accepted and instead India according to the book successfully exploited the incident to its own strategic advantage on the international front.

Menon concedes (page 108) that India-Pakistan relations 'are one of the few major failures of Indian foreign policy.'

Taking a deeper look into the problem at one point (page 111) he further concedes that India 'today lacks the power to solve its Pakistan problem,' which he believes largely stemmed from Pakistan's own condition.

He seems to be throwing up his hands in despair as he recalls (page 113-14) that on each occasion when 'we had a chance to change the unsatisfactory trajectory of India-Pakistan relations — the signing of the India-Pakistan Simla Agreement in July 1972, Rajiv Gandhi's 1988 visit to Pakistan, Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee's visits in 1999 and 2004 and the 2004-07 process led by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh — domestic politics with not a little help from the great powers, has prevented us from changing that relationship.'

Further down he says: "In the forty-odd years since the Simla Agreement was signed, in July 1972, India and Pakistan have fallen into repetitive pattern or dance of their own. They engage in talks, the terms of which are the same, whether they are called a composite dialogue or by any other name, and during the talks some progress is achieved and small steps are taken, arousing popular enthusiasm and warmth. The moment there is a real prospect of major issues being solved, however, there is a big disruption, most often a terrorist incident or attack, and then the negotiations start the cycle all over again, first tentatively and then a little more surely. That stage of tentative beginning seems to be where we are again in late 2015."

When it is time to revise the edition, perhaps the author would ruefully state that even the 2015 beginning went the way the previous ones did. Dictated by terrorism?

He asserts that for this pattern to be broken, something fundamental has to change in what creates this cycle in India, in Pakistan, in the environment. He says many have tried to disrupt the cycle, and all have failed. For him the one that came closest was Prime Minister Singh in 2004-06. Blaming what he terms as 'Pakistan's secular decline into irrelevance' he warns Indian motives to address India-Pakistan issues were diminishing which he thinks is bad news. He contends that Pakistan was increasingly becoming a single issue country in Indian discourse, 'and that issue is the zero-sum one of security'. He calls this a tragedy. As a result, it is harder and harder, he believes, to interest a young and aspirational Indian public outside the Punjab (and its colonies, such as Delhi) in the relationship with Pakistan.

So the foreign policy of an India with great power ambitions continues to refuse not to be dictated by New Delhi's self-serving notion of terrorism.

The writer is a senior journalist based in Islamabad. He served as the Executive Editor of Express Tribune until 2014

Source: <http://dailytimes.com.pk/opinion/23-Jun-17/an-insiders-view-on-pak-india-ties>

US Ends Role of Special Envoy to Afghanistan and Pakistan

WASHINGTON: Washington's special envoy to Afghanistan and Pakistan stepped down on Friday, just as the United States is preparing to send thousands more troops to the region.

A senior State Department official told AFP that acting special representative Laurel Miller left the post without a replacement being named.

State Department spokesperson Heather Nauert said Miller is returning to a position at the Rand Corporation and that Secretary of State Rex Tillerson has not yet decided what to do with post.

The office was created when US officials decided that the conflicts in Afghanistan and Pakistan are inextricably linked and ought to be dealt with together.

President Donald Trump came to office planning to slash diplomatic spending and Tillerson plans to cut several special envoy roles.

Miller's responsibilities will now fall under the department's South and Central Asian Affairs Bureau, which has a much bigger footprint that includes India. But this bureau is itself leaderless, with no assistant secretary appointed to lead it and no one nominated by the new administration for Senate approval.

When news site Politico broke the news that the envoy post had gone, it cited diplomats complaining of a rushed process and a dangerous leadership vacuum. But, also speaking on condition of anonymity, a senior official told AFP the decision was part of a broader policy review.

Tillerson thinks the issue is best handled at a regional level, the official said, arguing that it made sense to consider India part of the equation.

Trump has given the Pentagon and US commanders wide latitude to decide on the future of Washington's longest ever war — the 16-year slog in Afghanistan. Defense Secretary Jim Mattis is reportedly planning to deploy up to 5,000 extra troops to bolster efforts to train Afghan forces to repel a resurgent Taliban insurgency.

Source: <https://tribune.com.pk/story/1443836/us-ends-role-special-envoy-afghanistan-pakistan/>

Our Foreign Policy Challenges By Talat Masood

The latest visit of Prime Minister Narendra Modi to the US has been lauded as a great success by both the Indian and Western press. A lot of preparatory work had gone into the trip and, considering the type of relationship shared by the two countries and the congruence of their interests, this was expected. As regards what was mentioned in the communiqué and at the news conference about Pakistan is worrisome to say the least.

Over the years, there have been several ups and downs in our relationship with the US but Pakistan's civil and military establishment knew how to react and protect our national interests. One hopes this time too we will manage, but Trump's unpredictability and tight embrace of the two countries poses a serious challenge for Pakistan's foreign policy.

Compounding this is Trump's utter disdain for Muslims which is reflected in his attitude and policies toward them. Trump's prejudice against Muslims finds a similar contempt in Modi's policies towards India's Muslim population. Initially there was not a single Muslim in Modi's cabinet although they constitute about 15% of its population. Later three were included in the Council of Ministers but how effectively they will contribute in protecting and promoting their interests is to be seen.

The communiqué released after the Trump-Modi meeting is a testimony of this convergence. There is unanimity of views on China. Trump is encouraging and building India to counter balance Beijing at the regional level so that it is not able to fully focus on neutralising America's daunting policies. This from Washington's perspective would also help to maintain the desired balance of power in Asia.

The relationship is broad based with Indian counterparts interacting with all branches of the US — Congress, the State Department and the private sector. It would be fair to assume that Indian influence in the US is only second to Israel and is continuously growing.

On the issue of Pakistan, the US and India share similar concerns and accuse it of supporting the Haqqani network, Afghan Taliban, Lashkar-e-Taiba, etc, that are considered their common enemies.

Washington wants New Delhi to be a hegemonic power influencing events in Afghanistan and the region and to take the lead in countering terrorism. By doing so it

ignores the geographic, cultural and political reality of the region wherein the role of Pakistan, Iran and China is critical in bringing stability to Afghanistan.

The US proximity to India has resulted in ignoring its rights violations in Kashmir. It is indeed sad that standing for human rights was at one time the hallmark of American foreign policy. And what is further distressing that the communiqué issued after the recent Modi-Trump meeting equates the Kashmiri freedom struggle as terrorism. Moreover, the US recent move to designate Syed Salahuddin head of Hizbul Mujahideen as global terrorist raises serious questions about its motive. This indicates to what extent the present US administration is prepared to compromise on principles to align its policies with India.

Instead of supporting the efforts of Beijing and Islamabad to bring peace in Kabul, Washington is encouraging India to enhance its role in the region. Moreover, Pakistan's efforts at ensuring that its territory is not used by any of the militant Afghan groups are not appreciated. The same mantra of "do more" is repeated. This policy only impedes the possibility of any political solution of Afghanistan. Increasing the US forces' strength by another 5,000 soldiers or so and intensifying military activity will only prolong the misery of the Afghans. The country desperately needs a political solution and reducing military activity should create conditions favourable for it and not the other way as is being planned.

The threat of using drones against Pakistani targets could seriously vitiate the relationship. A more sensible approach would be to share intelligence with Pakistan so that it takes action on its own. Of course, for this to occur the trust level between the militaries and intelligence services has to considerably improve. Until that happens it will be difficult to achieve peace in Afghanistan.

There are areas where current US policy is at variance with what the Indian government would like it to follow. Trump going by what he had promised during his election campaign is discouraging outsourcing of information technology and industrial production to Indian companies and would prefer indigenous development.

Modi has developed an extremely close relationship with Israel. He will be the first Indian PM to make an official visit to Israel. This shows how the alignment between the US, India and Israel has gained strength over the years.

The discriminatory policies of Washington towards Islamabad are reflected in the way it continues to oppose Pakistan's membership of the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG). It also has been applying pressure on Pakistan to reduce its fissile material production.

On the contrary, it has been actively supporting India's entry in the NSG and turns a blind eye to its nuclear buildup at its unguarded facilities. If it were not for Chinese opposition, India would have been a NSG member long ago.

The irony is that despite these sermons the US is once again seriously looking at the option for new and better nuclear weapons.

India, along with Pakistan, has recently become a full member of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO). It has to be seen how the US factor will play out in India's dealings with SCO countries.

Pakistan finds relations with China invaluable not only to counter the US-India pressure but also to build its economy on a long-term sustainable basis. Recent moves of strengthening ties with Russia and Central Asian states as a part of SCO and at the individual country level would provide sufficient resilience to counter outside pressures.

Chinese efforts at bringing reconciliation between Pakistan and Afghanistan provide once again an opportunity to improve their relations. China being a neutral party with no previous blemish could exercise greater leverage than others.

Published in The Express Tribune, July 5th, 2017.

Source: <https://tribune.com.pk/story/1450261/foreign-policy-challenges-4/>

Pakistan-US ties

THE devastating attacks in Parachinar and Quetta have bloodily underlined an inarguable reality: Pakistan needs the support of its allies and friends in the fight against militancy.

Unhappily, as the administration of US President Donald Trump debates its strategy in Afghanistan, there are signs that the US is preparing to revive its 'do more' mantra and willing to consider troubling actions against this country.

That would be a mistake. For more than a decade and a half, since the start of the US-led war in Afghanistan, the US has viewed relations with Pakistan through an Afghan prism.

Whether money has flowed to Pakistan or assistance has been sought of it, much of what the US has done has been linked to its quest to defeat the Afghan Taliban or degrade their strength.

To be sure, Pakistan's own policy choices and perception of its security interests have been flawed at times.

But Afghanistan has not been, is not and will not be unstable fundamentally because of Pakistani security policy choices. The Taliban are strong and Kabul weak for reasons that are mostly intrinsic to Afghanistan.

The foolhardiness of a get-tough approach towards Pakistan can be gauged by two questions: who is advocating it and what can it achieve?

Unsurprisingly, the most ardent advocates of this get-tough US approach are strategists and policymakers who are perennially hostile to Pakistan and advocate for India as a hegemonic power in the region.

But if the bilateral Pak-US relationship is used by the US to try and rebalance power in South Asia, it will surely only exacerbate Pakistan's security concerns and increase the risk of conflict in the region.

Moreover, it is not clear what such a policy can realistically achieve on Afghanistan. Across administrations, the US has articulated a similar desired outcome in

Afghanistan: eroding the Taliban threat to the extent that Kabul can negotiate a political settlement favourable to the current dispensation.

But the US has also visibly struggled with the idea of a peace settlement with the Taliban.

So could getting tough on Pakistan just be a slippery slope towards trying to militarily defeat the Taliban in Afghanistan, the real, unstated goal of the US?

Therein lies a further problem: suspicion of US motives by regional powers other than India and concern that the US is fundamentally on the wrong course in Afghanistan.

Complicated as the Pak-US relationship is, the US ought to recognise that Pakistan is locked in a long-term fight against militancy — a fight that aligns with US interests — and that Pakistan, a country of 200 million with a growing economy, is an important country to maintain relations with in its own right.

Reviving the 'do more' mantra runs the risk of Pakistani policymakers saying 'no more' in response — an outcome that can and should be avoided.

Published in Dawn, June 29th, 2017

US Sees no Threat to Pakistan From Arms Deal With India

With the United States expected to authorize India's purchase of naval drones, a senior White House official cautioned on Friday that any U.S. military transfer to India would not represent a threat to its rival neighbor Pakistan.

The official spoke to reporters in advance of U.S. President Donald Trump's first meeting with Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday, a White House visit that will include one-on-one talks and a working dinner.

Securing agreement on the purchase of 22 unarmed drones, worth more than \$2 billion, is seen in New Delhi as a key test of defense ties that flourished under former President Barack Obama but have drifted under Trump, who has courted Asian rival China as he seeks Beijing's help to contain North Korea's nuclear program.

The U.S.-based company that makes the drones, General Atomics Aeronautical Systems Inc, said on Friday that the U.S. government had approved the sale of a naval variant of the Predator drone to India.

The senior White House official said any arms transfer would take into account the regional situation.

"We want to avoid a situation that escalates the tension" between India and Pakistan, the official said. India and Pakistan should engage in direct talks and seek a normalization of ties, the official said.

"Some of the defense systems we're talking about we don't believe impact Pakistan," the official added.

The Indian navy wants the surveillance drones, variants of the Predator drones, to keep watch over the Indian Ocean. The deal would be the first such purchase by a country that is not a member of North Atlantic Treaty Organization.

India, a big buyer of U.S. arms that was recently named by Washington as a major defense ally, wants to protect its 7,500- km (4,700-mile) coastline as Beijing expands its maritime trade routes and Chinese submarines increasingly lurk in regional waters.

But sources tracking the discussions say the U.S. State Department has been concerned about the potential destabilizing impact of introducing high-tech drones into South Asia, where tensions are simmering between India and Pakistan, particularly over Kashmir, which is divided between them.

Such a sale of sensitive military hardware must be authorized by the State Department before being sent to Congress for review. The drone deal would still require approval by Congress. The State Department declined comment ahead of any notification.

Defense cooperation, the U.S. trade deficit with India, counter-terrorism efforts and regional tensions are expected to be discussed between the two leaders.

Modi's two-day visit to Washington begins on Sunday. Trump met Chinese President Xi Jinping in April and has also had face time with the leaders of nations including Japan, Britain and Vietnam since taking office in January, prompting anxiety in New Delhi that India is no longer a priority in Washington.

Other strains have emerged in U.S.-India relations, with the United States vexed by a growing bilateral trade deficit and Trump accusing New Delhi of negotiating unscrupulously at the Paris climate talks to walk away with billions in aid.

U.S. officials expect a relatively low-key visit by Modi, without the fanfare of some of his previous trips to the United States, and one geared to giving the Indian leader the chance to get to know Trump personally and to show that he is doing so.

India and the United States will also discuss the sale of U.S. fighter jets during Modi's trip, in what could be the biggest deal since they began deepening defense ties more than a decade ago.

Source: <http://nation.com.pk/national/24-Jun-2017/us-sees-no-threat-to-pakistan-from-arms-deal-with-india>

A Global Struggle | Editorial

While the final results of Pakistan's census are unlikely to be out before April 2018, the UN's Department of Economic and Social Affairs' Population Division has made some astounding projections for the future. Within the next six years, the world's population is likely to hit the eight-billion mark. And by 2050 we could potentially be looking at a world of nearly 10 billion souls. Our planet will be more overcrowded than it has ever been in any period of human history. Some 83 million people are added to the world's population every year despite a steady drop in fertility rates since the 1960s. The latest UN projections are alarming and deserve our immediate interest as it involves the future of mankind. Upon our collective response will rest the entire fate of the earth.

One of the biggest fallouts from this unprecedented rise in population is the massive strain on resources that will fuel high unemployment and poverty. The threat does not stop there because these are the very conditions that lead to civil unrest, war, displacement and terrorism.

The population boom is all the more remarkable considering that the globe as we know it had happily sustained just under a billion people for thousands of years. Then suddenly within a period of 300 years or so, it swelled up to more than 6 billion — a figure that was supposedly passed in 1999. This is a staggering contrast.

In the midst of these important demographic changes, India is likely to displace China as the most populous nation within the next seven years. In another three decades, the United States is expected to lose its place to Nigeria as the third most populous country. We must understand that despite the high global population it is critical to devise strategies that will work out how people will produce, distribute and consume goods and services while managing to lower their environmental footprint.

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Source: <https://tribune.com.pk/story/1442315/a-global-struggle/>

India-Pakistan and the SCO Platform By Amna Ejaz Rafi

IN the globalised world of today, where terrorism, extremism, drug trafficking, border security and environmental degradation have altered the security landscape of the world, multilateral approaches are being employed to address the transnational challenges. A number of regional as well as international organizations have emerged on the world stage, the political actors in pursuance of economic goals and to counter the security threats opt for multilateral approaches.

Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) is one such organization, wherein, the regional states have endeavoured to foster cooperation against transnational challenges. China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan are its member states. The organization has established diplomatic connections and partnerships with other multilateral institutions. SCO has an observer status in the UN General Assembly. The SCO's geopolitical discourse on many issues — both international and regional does contrast its positions with those of the West; in particular, the West's influence/interference in Eurasia. However, the global fight against terrorism, situation in Afghanistan, drug trafficking and the threat of Daesh offer scope of cooperation.

The new entries in SCO are Pakistan and India (SCO summit, Astana, June 8-9, 2017). Russian President Vladimir Putin stated: “the accession of India and Pakistan would increase the organization's relevance, both in the region and worldwide.” The membership of South Asian players in SCO would expand the organization's zone of influence South, towards the warm waters of Indian Ocean. Pakistan and India, as SCO members will have to work towards betterment of their bilateral ties (SCO Charter: “the memberstates should not have an active military conflict, and work towards stabilizing the border regions, while building military trust for maintaining peace and stability”).

The South Asian players will have to put aside their differences and work towards a secure region. However, the level of mistrust, disturbance along the Line of Control (LoC) and unrest in Indian Occupied Kashmir offers little hope for a Islamabad-New Delhi dialogue. India also has a territorial dispute with China. Both the countries have contesting claims over the territories of Arunachal Pradesh (held with India) and Aksai Chin (under Chinese control). The Line of Actual Control (LAC) between the two neighbouring countries has seen intermittent violence.

Pankaj Saran, India's Ambassador to Russia said: "We have conveyed our views to the Russian side that military cooperation with Pakistan, which is a state that sponsors and practises terrorism as a matter of state policy, is a wrong approach. It will only create further problems." The Indian psyche still revolves around the old Cold War politics and the legacy of partition, not realizing that Pakistan's geostrategic location is such that the country cannot be isolated. Pakistan's geo-strategic location gives it an added advantage. The upcoming China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) will connect China, Pakistan, Central Asia, Caucasus and Russia.

CPEC is an integral part of China's Belt and Road initiative, the corridor has been endorsed by the SCO and is expected to cement Pakistan's role as a vital regional hub in the economic development of Central Asia, which has a strong presence in the SCO – Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan are all members. Pakistan can also improve ties with Russia and China, and evolve measures to restore the regional balance of power (the US-India strategic partnership).

SCO's thrust towards regional security, primarily stems from the threats of "terrorism, separatism, extremism". SCO's quest for regional peace is not confined to security only rather, the member countries have engineered economic cooperation also. SCO has an observer status in the UN General Assembly.

Terrorism, Afghan stability and regional connectivity are the areas where Pakistan can cooperate with the SCO states. Pakistan's experience in countering terrorism and the SCO's anti-terrorism structure (Regional Anti-Terror Structure-RATS) can complement each other. The terrorist attacks in Pakistan have a regional link. The terrorist attack in Lahore (February 13) was carried out by a suicide bomber from Kunar, Afghanistan. Jamaat-ul-Ahrar, splinter group of TTP (Tehreek-i-Taliban). Pakistan could discuss the issue of cross border terrorism on the SCO platform, which can be helpful in dealing with foreign miscreants fomenting the situation in Balochistan and FATA.

Meanwhile, India's use of force against unarmed civilians in Indian Occupied Kashmir is a violation of international humanitarian law. Indian Army has been firing pellets and hundreds of young men and women have been blinded. As per Article 1 Goals and Tasks of the SCO Charter: "to promote human rights and fundamental freedoms in accordance with the international obligations of the member states and their national legislation," the member states shall have to adhere to the Charter. Pakistan can raise the issue of human rights in IOK on the organizational platform.

Source; <http://pakobserver.net/india-pakistan-sco-platform/>

Pakistan and the Building Tensions in the Middle East By Shahid Javed Burki

A number of developments have occurred in and around the Middle East that would likely make the region even more volatile than in the past. These events will have consequences for Pakistan for reasons that need to be understood by the policymakers working in Islamabad. Some of what has happened in the last several months is the result of the policies adopted by President Donald Trump.

His approach to the Middle East is part of his ambition to unwind what he and some of his close associates call “Obamaism”, the stance adopted by Barack Obama in foreign affairs. The former president dealt with the problem-infested Middle East by choosing not to involve his country in the many disputes that had the region become volatile and unpredictable. At the same time, he made a point of sending a message to the Muslim world that he and his country had great respect for Islam while recognising that, on several occasions in the past, Islam and the West had been in conflict. In a powerful speech given at Al Azhar University in Cairo, in front of an audience made up largely of students, he promised to work with the followers of the Islamic faith to produce a more stable world which will have greater opportunities for the young. This is not the way Trump sees the Middle East.

The most significant step taken by the new president was to draw very close to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the royal family that rules it. The new American president feels that his country and the Kingdom share a number of interests on which a close and lasting relationship could be built. During the Obama years, the United States had pulled back a bit from Saudi Arabia while initiating a programme to bring Iran out of isolation. Riyadh had long regarded Tehran as a rival. The Saudi Kingdom did not wish to see Iran expand its influence in the Middle East. The 1979 revolution that brought the Shia clerics to power had done so by removing the king who had ruled over the country for decades. The overthrow of the monarchy and the introduction of a more representative political system were seen as threats by the rulers of Saudi Arabia.

There was no subtlety in the way the new American administration swung Washington towards Riyadh. Trump chose Saudi Arabia as the first country to visit as president. Once there and in a public speech in front of a gathering of some 50 heads of Muslim countries that included Pakistan’s Nawaz Sharif, the American president focused on his commitment to destroy Islamist radicalism. He was advised not to use the terms “Islamic terrorism,” “Islamic radicalism,” “Islamic extremism,” since to Muslim ears it

would sound as though these were the attributes of their religion. Instead he used “Islamist” as the defining element since that referred to political Islam. In the speech, he implied that Islamist terrorism gained foothold in some areas of the Muslim world because of the support given to it by Iran. The Saudi response to these words was ecstatic.

The Saudi rulers have three interests that guide their policymaking: to preserve the House of Saud, to beat back any possible challenge from Iran for leadership in the Middle East and West Asia, and to diversify the country’s economy. All three have consequences for Pakistan.

Riyadh is now engaged in the delicate task of passing the reins of power from the second generation of the Saudi dynasty to the third. Until now King Abdulaziz Ibn Saud, the founder of the Saudi state, was succeeded by six of his sons who together have governed for 64 years. King Salman who came to the throne in 2015 is now 81 years old and is not in good health. After ascending the throne, King Salman named Muhammad bin Nayef, his nephew, as the crown prince. Soon after the Trump visit to Riyadh, he appointed his 31-year-old son, Muhammad bin Sultan, commonly known as MBS, as the crown prince. MBS was appointed deputy crown prince and was given significant responsibilities, including the portfolios of defence and energy. The young prince is a favourite of Trump’s son-in-law, Jared Kushner, who began cultivating the Saudi royal soon after his father-in-law moved into the White House.

Riyadh is nervous about the “Arab Spring” types of movement. In 2011, these succeeded in deposing several authoritarian governments, in particular in Egypt, Libya, Tunisia and Yemen. What made the Saudi rulers nervous was the merging of interests of the restive Arab youth and political Islam. The two forces worked together to push the long-serving Hosni Mubarak from office. In the elections that followed the Muslim Brotherhood came to power, a development of great concern for those who were wedded to the old order. The military struck in Cairo and removed the Brotherhood-led government and established an administration even more authoritarian under General Fatah al-Sisi. Egypt joined Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and the UAE to sever all relations with the tiny but oil-and-gas rich nation of Qatar. This move won the support of President Trump who boasted that it was the outcome of his visit to Riyadh.

What this means is that the hold of authoritarianism in much of the Middle East will endure with a nod of approval from the United States. The restive youth will become even more agitated and ultimately challenge the established order. The region is faced with instability.

Published in The Express Tribune, July 3rd, 2017.

Source: <https://tribune.com.pk/story/1448833/pakistan-building-tensions-middle-east/>

ECONOMY

Can Pakistan Benefit From The SCO? By Wali Zahid

Pakistan has been admitted into Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) as a Full Member at the SCO Astana Summit in Kazakhstan. SCO leaders have hailed the event as carrying 'historic significance'.

So, what does SCO membership mean for Pakistan? How significant it truly is? And will Pakistan be able to benefit from SCO membership?

First, the upside.

SCO membership is significant for four reasons:

One, relationship with China is strengthened. The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is already included in China's Belt and Road Initiative as a flagship project. Now, we are accepted in the Shanghai club which is China-led.

Two, the membership upgrade from Observer to Full Member is a message to the world that attempts to isolate Pakistan diplomatically will not bear fruit. And that Pakistan is siding with the right powers at this critical juncture and is on the right side of history. If we combine the SCO membership with Pakistan's inclusion in the MSCI Emerging Markets Index a week ago on 1 June, this is also an economic success and that we are getting back on economic track.

Three, it is an opportunity for Pakistan to increase trade volumes and economic ties with Eurasian countries which didn't quite show up on Pakistan's radar earlier.

Four, it allows Pakistan to sort out bilateral issues with neighbouring India, which also became the Full Member in Astana Summit, under Treaty on Long-Term Good-Neighborliness, Friendship and Cooperation, which is second most important document after SCO Charter.

For China, this had been the most desirable outcome and China had conveyed this even before the Summit. Speaking at a briefing in Beijing on 1 June, spokesperson of Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs Hua Chunying had said China hoped Pakistan and

India would improve bilateral relations after becoming the full members of SCO. “We hope that Pakistan and India will inject new impetus to the development of SCO.”

Now, the downside.

Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif could not have one-on-one meeting with his Indian counterpart Prime Minister Narendra Modi in spite of increasing tensions between the two countries. The exchange remained limited to a customary hi.

Only a day after the membership upgrade, tensions mounted on the Line of Control (LoC) with India and Pakistan army chief visiting troops after the reported LoC violations.

This is clearly a message that new economic possibilities and realities will not be able to heal old wounds so quickly. Perhaps this is what Chinese President Xi Jinping had referred to in his opening address: “Recent acts of terrorism in this region show that the fight against three forces (of terrorism, separatism and extremism) remains a long and arduous task.”

Similarly, the kidnapping and reported killing of two Chinese teachers from Quetta caused PM Sharif embarrassment in facing the Chinese President Xi Jinping during the customary farewell meeting.

So, to the question ‘Will Pakistan be able to benefit from SCO membership?’ the jury is still out.

However, two other achievements from the Astana Summit are noteworthy.

One, Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif’s one-on-one meeting with Afghan President Ashraf Ghani on the sidelines of the SCO Summit. This is significant because Kabul had recently been hit by one of the worst suicide attacks killing 150 people with Ghani tweeting that ‘Pakistan continues to host terrorist sanctuaries’ and that it ‘still believes that sponsoring terror is a controllable tool that can be switched on and off as part of the means to achieve goals.’ What emerged from the meeting that both Pakistani and Afghan leaders agreed to ‘intensify joint efforts to fight terrorism in all of its forms that threaten the security and stability of the two countries and use Quadrilateral Coordination Group (QCG) mechanism as well as bilateral meetings to agree on specific actions, and monitor the actions taken against such terrorist groups.’

Kabul and Islamabad also 'agreed to assign working teams to put together plans to intensify measures to eliminate terrorist networks in their respective territories. The first meeting will be hosted in Kabul followed by Islamabad.' The QCG includes China, US, Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Two, PM Sharif's one-on-one meeting with Russian President Putin. In the Riyadh Summit last month, media reports suggested that US President Donald Trump skipped mentioning Pakistan and PM Sharif causing him embarrassment at home. In this backdrop, Sharif meeting with Putin and discussing bilateral ties was a welcome relief.

In response to Sharif's warm-up "we want a multidimensional relationship with Russia in the fields of trade, defence, energy, infrastructure, culture and other spheres," Putin assured Sharif that Russia would extend cooperation in every field especially Islamabad's war against terrorism.

So, what can the world expect from SCO?

Under President Trump, the US is slowly and gradually leaving the world leadership. Only recently US abandoned the Paris Climate Agreement. It earlier withdrew from TPP (Trans-Pacific Pact).

China's visionary leader Xi Jinping is strategically filling these gaps. SCO is now an eight-member body, two of which are permanent members of UN Security Council and four are nuclear powers. In term of population served, it's the world's largest club.

I tend to think that SCO and China are the new leaders of the emerging world, connecting and impacting people and leaders in Asia-Pacific, East Asia, South Asia, West Asia and Eurasia regions.

After the Astana summit, China took over the rotating chair of the SCO. It will host the next SCO summit in June 2018 in China.

An important SCO pillar is increasing people-to-people bonds, youth in particular. Since China spent the last century as a self-contained country, China is now opening up to the world for a two-way understanding.

Xi proposed media cooperation among the SCO member states, saying China would host the first SCO media summit.

Hinting at a long haul, Xi said China will ensure the success of the SCO University, the youth exchange camp and the summer camp for elementary and middle-school students. China will host SCO activities like cultural and art festival, women's forum and skills contest of workers, and strive for progress of SCO cooperation in health, disaster relief, environment protection, sports and tourism.

China will launch a 'China-SCO cooperation program in human resources development', under which China will invite representatives from SCO states to seminars and workshops in China, send Chinese experts to SCO states to give policy advice, carry out local training programs in SCO states and provide government scholarships.

The above indicates that it's not mere security, terrorism or trade that SCO (and China) is planning to achieve, it perhaps has a 50-year plan to influence the next two generations and unite them under China's leadership.

Source: <http://nation.com.pk/columns/12-Jun-2017/can-pakistan-benefit-from-the-sco>

CPEC Going Global By Farhat Ali

It is reported that the Asian Development Bank, under its programme “Scoping of Economic Corridor Development in Pakistan”, aims to identify potential economic corridors to enhance trade, regional connectivity, growth, and job creation through evidence-based mapping. “The ADB is conducting a study on the potential economic development along the corridor for which ADB would select node cities,” Farzana Noshab, senior economics officer ADB, said while giving a detailed presentation at the headquarters of Board of Investment (BoI). The study shall cover the area/city/location and match it with its economic potential, ie, market niche so that investment and economic activity is generated on the potential. Under focus is CPEC, Pakistan Economic Corridors Programme (PECP), and Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation (CAREC) as the economic corridors immensely impacting the economy of Pakistan.

Asian Development Bank has been a strong partner in the development of Pakistan in the Energy sector, infrastructure and social sector through its technical support and soft term financing. Lately, it has pledged to support Peshawar Mass Transit Mega project. This is one strategic and tested partner Pakistan must work with extensively.

The UK after Brexit and the EU shaken from the “US first policy” are looking for new markets and business alignments to fill in the gap and sustain their economies. The most promising candidate for the CPEC is the UK. After Britons voted in favour of Brexit this past summer, the UK sees the need to bring its investments into the non-EU projects, and the CPEC could become this very platform for investments.

UK Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs Boris Johnson echoed his country’s interest in the CPEC during his most recent visit to Pakistan. Johnson even described the CPEC as “a wonder project” and expressed his desire for the UK companies to participate in various projects of it.

“I am very excited about the CPEC idea. And I would like the UK firms to participate in the construction of this fabulous venture,” Johnson said while addressing the students and faculty of the Government College University in Lahore. “But this should be part of an even more ambitious vision that would revive the ancient Silk Route and see the rebirth of trading caravans connecting East and West.” Boris Johnson urged UK businesspeople to invest in Pakistan. Johnson also said that Karachi should be Asia’s “biggest trading entrepot” alongside Singapore and Shanghai. The British Secretary of State also pledged that his country will “play a part” in helping Pakistan achieve closer economic integration.

He praised Islamabad for making a huge progress in recent years, noting that national security in Pakistan has improved while democracy has been strengthened. Those are the two key points to attracting investors, as they serve as an indication of stability in the country. So his words may be interpreted as a direct invitation to British firms to invest in various sectors of Pakistan's economy and become part of the CPEC. All of this has a positive effect and a number of UK businesses are visiting Pakistan these days.

France too is interested in the CPEC. Ambassador Fenet stated that his country is keen to further strengthen bilateral trade and economic relations between the two nations. Praising the CPEC for creating many business and investment opportunities, Fenet said that France is taking a huge interest in the South Asia country. In a message that was backed by the French Embassy's Head of Economic Department, Philippe Fouet, Fenet also said that his country has what Pakistan needs to boost its economy – the advanced technology and expertise.

German companies are keen to join China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) to further improve trade relations, said Ina Lepel, German Ambassador to Pakistan in her recent address at Federation of Pakistan Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FPCCI). Germany is the second largest partner in trade with Pakistan in Europe and will do whatever possible to improve these ties, she added. The ambassador said there is a lot of potential for enhanced cooperation.

The Swiss Embassy in Islamabad and the Swiss Consulate in Karachi, in collaboration with Swiss Business Council Pakistan, recently organised events in Islamabad and Karachi to mobilise the interest of the Foreign Investors, notably, the European investors to invest in the CPEC. The events were participated by diplomats, business chambers, media and government functionaries. The next event on the subject of the CPEC will be organised in Switzerland in early July 2017.

Russia too is looking forward to investing in the CPEC. It is learnt that Russian companies investments in energy, coal mining and metal industry of Pakistan may reach \$5 billion over the next five years. Iranian President Hassan Rouhani has expressed his country's desire to become a part of the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) during his meeting with Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif on the sidelines of 71th UNGA session. The Iranian president lauded Islamabad's vision for translating the CPEC into a strong reality and pointed out that connectivity projects were recognised by both countries as vital to the progress of the region. "The two leaders reiterated the complementarity between Gwadar and Chabahar sea ports that could boost regional trade exponentially in the decades ahead," he said.

President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has urged Turkish businessmen to invest in the CPEC, arguing that the CPEC is a game changer for the region. He stated this while addressing the Pakistan-Turkey Roundtable Investment Conference recently. Afghanistan's Ambassador to Pakistan Dr Omer Zakhilwal said Kabul absolutely supports the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and wants to become a part of the project. "The CPEC was a great project that was equally relevant to Afghanistan like Pakistan, and anything that will be good for Pakistan will be good for the entire region." The Afghan envoy asserted that the people of Afghanistan are "thirsty for development" and wants to see their homeland prosper. "I think the CPEC is not limited to Pakistan; it is for the entire region particularly Central Asia," the envoy maintained.

In the recent bilateral meetings held with the President of Turkmenistan in Islamabad, the indications are that Turkmenistan will become part of the CPEC project. Its decision will encourage other Central Asia states to be part of the corridor. Moreover, Pakistan and Belarus recently signed a roadmap for bilateral cooperation and decided to establish special economic zones. The two countries also plan on conducting a study for exploring the possibilities of participating infrastructure projects within the framework of China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC).

With the interest and goodwill of all these countries from Europe, Russia, Central Asia and our neighbouring countries we have a great chance to work on them and position their footprints in Pakistan as stakeholders in the CPEC in real terms. This could turn out to be a great investment mix and dispel the apprehensions of CPEC being an all-China affair. We must take on board other countries, notably, Japan and South Korea with a view to achieving the global mix insofar as CPEC is concerned.

(The writer is former President, Overseas Investors Chamber of Commerce and Industry)

Source: <http://fp.brecorder.com/2017/06/20170603184750/>

Pakistan's New Development Trajectory By Ahsan Iqbal

Pakistan is on a new trajectory of growth after a decade. After remaining stuck on 3% GDP growth for almost a decade, it achieved 5.3% GDP growth for the first time this year. The world is looking at it as a story of positive transformation and turnaround. The Public Sector Development Programme (PSDP) for the fiscal year 2017-18 is a classic example of this positive transformation.

The current federal PSDP has received the highest-ever allocation of funds in the country's history: Rs1001 billion. In FY 2012-13, this amount was only Rs360 billion. This is an increase of 178 per cent. The allocation of funds in the current PSDP are predicated on the priorities set in Vision 2025: inclusive and sustainable development. Similarly, Rs1,112 billion have been allocated for development in provinces whereas in 2012-13 it was only Rs515 billion.

The current government is cognisant of the fact that there are regional disparities in Pakistan. Therefore, to materialise inclusive development in Pakistan, significant funds are allocated for historically disadvantaged places. For Azad Jammu Kashmir (AJK) Rs22 billion are allocated in this PSDP. This is an increase of 120% as compared to 2012-13 when AJK only received Rs10 billion. Similarly, a sum of Rs15 billion is allocated for Gilgit-Baltistan in this PSDP as compared to Rs7 billion in 2012-13. This is an increase of 110%. The Federally Administered Tribal Areas (Fata) has historically been ignored by governments in Islamabad, to remedy this, we have increased Fata's budget to Rs24.5 billion. It was only Rs16 billion in 2012-13. This is an increase of more than 50%.

New development projects for Faisalabad approved

The main driver behind this rise in PSDP and provincial development budgets has been the steady increase in revenues of the federal government via better tax collection. Tax-to-GDP ratio has increased to 12.6% for FY 2016. Back in FY 2013, it was only 9.8%. This reflects the improvement in governance and institutions.

In a short span of four years, the PML-N government has literally transformed the development portfolio of Pakistan. The most impressive thing about this PSDP is that it did not come at the expense of fiscal deficit. The fiscal deficit for FY 2016 is 4.6 per cent of the gross domestic product (GDP). In FY 2013 it was 8.2 per cent. Historically,

governments in Pakistan in their last year of their tenure lose fiscal discipline. But this government has set a new trend by demonstrating fiscal responsibility and discipline and did not give into any election year pressures.

When the PML-N government assumed office in 2013 it set three priority areas: energy, infrastructure and education. In each area, the government has made major strides. In the energy sector, investments were only around Rs185 billion in 2012-13. Today, they stand at Rs404 billion — an increase of 118 per cent.

Road and rail networks are the backbone of any modern economy. Up to Rs411 billion have been allocated for infrastructure development in the current year. In stark contrast, only Rs142 billion were allocated for the same in 2012-13. This is an increase of 189%. Up to Rs180 billion have been allocated for CPEC projects. Because of the construction of highways and motorways, Pakistan will in the coming years become a hub for trade and commerce in the region. Moreover, efficient movement of goods will greatly improve the economy's logistical competitiveness.

In an unprecedented manner Rs35.662 billion have been allocated for the Higher Education Commission (HEC) in the current PSDP. In FY 2012-13, HEC's development budget was only Rs15 billion. Since PM Sharif assumed office, there has been a phenomenal increase (more than 100 per cent) in the allocation of funds to HEC within a span of four years. These investments will yield huge dividends in the long run. But even in the short run, higher education statistics have immensely improved in the last four years. There has been an 82% increase in merit-based scholarships in the last four years. Many new campuses have been started under the University Campus in Every District initiative. The US-Pakistan Knowledge Corridor is offering 10,000 PhD scholarships to the best and the brightest. A Rs1 billion Technology Innovation Fund has been set up to promote academia-industry link. Some 100,000 youth will be trained in Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) softwares.

Under the Prime Minister's Youth Initiative, Rs20 billion have been allocated in this PSDP. This includes the youth laptop programme, youth training scheme, fee reimbursement scheme, interest free loan schemes and skill development programme. These programmes will allow our youth to economically and digitally empower themselves and contribute positively to the development of Pakistan.

Similarly, Rs1 billion has been allocated for the Startup Pakistan initiative to promote entrepreneurship among youth. Startup Pakistan will address a perennial challenge of lack of risk capital within the local eco-system by setting up a publicly funded venture capital fund. This will fasten the pace of business registration and make it friendlier. A

startup window on the Pakistan Stock Exchange will also be created. These steps are the single largest package of reforms aimed at enhancing the startup culture within the country.

Development schemes: Punjab govt allocates Rs1.2 billion

In today's globalised world, it is important to promote a softer image of the country. Pakistan needs to be re-introduced in the global arena and our youth is best placed to do this. Our millennials have fresh and creative ideas and they are much more open towards diversity and adaptation. To concretise this, we have allocated Rs500 million for the Global Youth Internship Programme. We will send the brightest young minds of Pakistan to the top capitals of the world so that they can see how their political systems work. At the same time, these bright young people would get an opportunity to break the stereotypes about Pakistan in the world.

This is the age of the fourth industrial revolution and it has amplified technological bias in the processes of development. Therefore, it is imperative for Pakistan to avail these fourth industrial revolution technologies. With that in mind, the government has launched a programme of establishing hybrid research and innovation platforms in critical and emerging technology areas. Among them are national research centres for artificial intelligence, applied mathematics and higher performance computing, cyber security, robotics and automation, big data and cloud computing. These research centres will lay the foundation of technology-led development in Pakistan.

One of the most influential economic thinkers of the 20th century, John M Keynes, once said: "The difficulty lies not so much in developing new ideas as in escaping from old ones". This is very apt in the case of Pakistan. In the sphere of economy the old idea that haunted us for very long was of 'import substitution'; it did not allow us to build a competitive export-based industries.

In the political sphere, the old idea that has been most detrimental is of disrupting and dislodging elected civilian regimes. It spurs political instability. It is an established fact that no matter how good our economic policies are if we cannot ensure political stability, they will not yield the desired results. Therefore, it is imperative that we maintain political stability in Pakistan. The prerequisite for maintaining political stability is that democratic will and decisions of the people of Pakistan should prevail over everything else.

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Source: <https://tribune.com.pk/story/1439756/pakistans-new-development-trajectory/>

The SCO And CPEC By Yasir Masood

Pakistan has indisputably achieved a diplomatic feat with the acquisition of full-fledged membership in the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) this month. The 17th summit of the SCO at Astana, Kazakhstan, on June 8-9 formally announced a new security architecture covering approximately 60% of Eurasia, with extensive implications for the entire world. With India and Pakistan officially attaining full membership of the organisation, the total population of the SCO countries will be almost 3.5 billion, which roughly accounts for half of the world, and the combined GDP is estimated to be exceeding 25% of the global GDP. Accordingly, the SCO is destined to become the cornerstone of economics and politics in Eurasia and a game changer on the global agenda.

Pakistan's SCO membership will strengthen its ability to seamlessly sail through an economic sea change, the result of landmark projects of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). Since Pakistan's flag has risen at Beijing, the headquarters of SCO, this may usher in a new era of economic and trade growth coupled with the success of CPEC. Both SCO and CPEC complement each other. Russian, Eurasian and Central Asian states are eyeing to partake in CPEC, and in return for participation in CPEC, Pakistan can tap minerals, gas and oil resources from these states to satisfy its energy needs. In fact, CPEC was an underlying reason for Pakistan's entrance into the SCO, since infrastructure developments under CPEC will engender immense opportunities for the SCO member countries. In particular, landlocked Central Asian states will be privy to the shortest access to trade and economic routes through CPEC.

Pakistan's membership will give it influence in the global arena, and the SCO will serve as a platform for the expression of the country's commitment to peaceful regional cooperation. At this multilateral forum, other members may also learn from Pakistan's pursuit of the eradication of terrorism and extremism through a robust anti-terrorism apparatus. Moreover, on the strategic chessboard, this regional bloc offers two vital prospects for Pakistan's foreign policy: first, it will present a positive and responsible image around the globe, and second, it will debunk contrived narratives centered on anti-CPEC rhetoric.

Despite the current stalemate between Pakistan and India, meetings between both counterparts at the SCO can mitigate friction to some extent and leverage of China and Russia can also thwart India's malicious designs of turning SCO into another Saarc. Pakistan and Afghanistan provide the shortest routes for India to connect to Central Asia and Eurasia. Myopic strategy towards "One Belt, One Road" Initiative (OBOR) and

CPEC is not in India's national interest, since it also envisages access to Central Asian markets and in exchange may utilise their oil and gas reservoirs. Pakistan may also enormously profit by becoming a secure transit route for goods and energy supplies from Central Asia to India and vice versa.

It is an irrefutable truth that the security and stability of a state are a precursor to sustainable economic and trade development. Thus, the SCO is also a beacon of hope to resolve the ongoing conundrum in Afghanistan. This might only be possible if all member states formulate a multilateral approach for peace and stability whilst relinquishing unilateral interests. Currently, a resurgent Taliban coupled with strong presence of IS in Afghanistan can wreak havoc upon a regional and transnational spillover. Nevertheless, positive engagement at the SCO in partnership with the CPEC transit trade routes can help Afghanistan wriggle out of its current plight.

To conclude, unity between the SCO and CPEC was memorably articulated by Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif in his speech at the summit. He said, "China's OBOR initiative has transformed the global economic landscape. In Pakistan, we are diligently implementing CPEC. These mega projects will benefit the entire SCO community."

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Source: <https://tribune.com.pk/story/1442328/the-sco-and-cpec/>

Pakistan's Economic Future By Malik Ashraf

The economy of Pakistan has not only been revived but the country has been put on the road to a sustained development. This reality has also been acknowledged by a number of international rating agencies like Moody's, MCI and global lending institutions including IMF, World Bank and ADB besides internationally renowned media like The Economist and Wall Street Journal have also from time to time been acknowledging the turnaround in the Pakistan economy, triggered by sound management of the economy by the PML (N) government.

Management of an economy, particularly a developing country like Pakistan is undoubtedly an arduous task due to international linkages, developments on the global level as well as internal economic, social and political situation. Needless to emphasize that when the PML (N) government was installed in 2013, the economy was in shambles with the GDP growth rate hovering around 3%. Fiscal deficit stood at 8.8% and inflation was in double digits, foreign exchange reserves were at \$ 6.008 billion. The country faced a debilitating energy crisis. Four years down the line the growth rate achieved during the 2016-17 stands at 5.2%, the highest in the last ten years. The international though predicted a growth rate of 5.3%. The fiscal deficit has been reduced to 4.2 % and further squeeze is expected during the next year as announced in the budget. Inflation has been maintained at a single digit. Foreign exchange reserves stand at \$24.258 billion which represent almost four times increase since the present government took over.

The energy crisis that was attributable to the negligence and criminal indifference of the previous governments to the growing energy needs of the country and was hampering progress in the industrial and agricultural sectors in addition to causing difficulties for millions of households across the country, has been checked in its tracks. The power outages have been considerably reduced. Under CPEC power projects with a cumulative production capacity of 10,640 MW have been set rolling and all of them are expected to come on stream by the end of 2018 which means that the energy crisis will not only have been overcome by then but the country would also have enough electricity for the new industrial projects. The government also envisages to add another 30000 MW by the year 2030. The government has also concluded agreement with Qatar for import of LNG and a similar agreement with Azerbaijan for import of LNG is in the offing. Russia reportedly is also interested in exporting LNG to Pakistan. The initiative to diversify the sources of import of LNG is a visionary move to avoid any disruption or crisis due to dependence on a single source.

The PML (N) government very rightly has also been giving top priority to the development of infrastructure. The fact is that all modern growth models invariably rely on development of infrastructure, which is considered as an indispensable ingredient of industrialization and economic growth. The phenomenal economic prosperity and industrial development in Asian countries such as China, South Korea, Singapore and Malaysia during the last three decades is a ranting testimony of this modern reality. The establishment of Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank by China with the objective of development of infrastructure in the Asian countries to spur economic growth is a pointer to that fundamental reality. The criticism by the opponents of the government that giving priority to infrastructure was a wrong approach, lacks credibility and is surely motivated by the political considerations rather than a rational and honest evaluation of the impact that this strategy is going to have on the overall economic situation of the country.

Unfortunately Pakistan has failed to achieve rapid industrialization due to wrong approaches and policies of the successive governments, divorced from the emerging economic compulsions and variables. However it is heartening to note that the PML (N) government has adopted a pragmatic and visionary approach to economic development through building of necessary infrastructure. Peshawar-Karachi motorway which is expected to be completed by 2019 and a network of roads being built across the country will surely act as catalyst to nudging economic growth and bringing about national integration.

Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif was right on money , when inaugurating the first phase of Karachi-Hyderabad motorway he said that people were witnessing the emergence of new Pakistan with improved infrastructure and communication network and the motor ways were life line of the economy. The CPEC is also about building infrastructure which holds the promise of enabling Pakistan not only to make up for the lost opportunities but also to become an economic power house within the next two decades.

In view of the foregoing facts and the future prospects one can safely conclude that Pakistan has a bright economic future and the claims by the Finance Minister that by 2030 the country would join the prestigious clubs of G-20 seem a real possibility, provided the political situation remains stable.

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Source: <http://pakobserver.net/pakistans-economic-future/>

The IMF: Pakistan's History and Future By Sara Cheema

LAST year marked the end of Pakistan's most recent IMF Loan Programme. While many commemorate at the thought of finally coming out of the programme and its forced macroeconomic restrictions, others remain doubtful about our future with the Fund. Are we likely to relapse into the fold of yet another burdensome and economically disastrous programme? In truth, our relationship with the IMF has been a long and uncomfortable one. Loans from the Fund continue to be the gift that keeps on giving, even if at times we do not want it, and certainly regardless of whether or not we are in the position to return it.

As of 1988, Pakistan has entered into 12 different programmes with the IMF, which by contrast, is greater than all countries in the region combined. India till now has signed only 1 facility with the Fund, while countries such as Nepal and Bangladesh have signed a mere 2. Pakistan, for this very reason, was classified as a 'prolonged user' by the IMF in 2002, ranking third in the world, higher than every low-income African nation, but surpassed only by two countries; the Philippines and Panama. One reason for this most certainly has been our constant and very costly effort to keep at par with India, economically and militarily, as well as our long-standing war on terror, all of this done too in the face of exceptionally low levels of savings in the country. As a result of such expenditures, our external accounts have typically remained under pressure, which along with soaring costs of commercial borrowing from international markets, made the IMF was an easy solution to our problems.

For Pakistan unfortunately, out of the programmes we have signed on, we have been unable to complete the majority of them, thereby abandoning them halfway. It would seem, therefore, that any merriment surrounding the completion of our latest programme is exceedingly warranted, given that we have only successfully completed a total of 4 programmes over the last two decades.

As a result of being continuously under several IMF programmes across the last two decades, Pakistan's economy has faced many blows. No loan comes without a price, and in IMF's case, this meant we were obligated to implement a series of poorly designed structural programmes, which left the economy in terrible shape. Under the Fund, we saw dramatic reductions in subsidies, overall public spending on critical areas such as health and education, as well as a wage freeze and a ban on employment in the public sector for the sake of austerity and fiscal consolidation. In a country such as

ours, where the government is the largest employer, this undoubtedly had serious adverse effects. As a result of such policies we saw a fall in investment and growth rates, while unemployment, poverty and inequality rose.

So the question arises, did Pakistan end up in the clutches of an egocentric lender? If so, then why do we continue to borrow, if it does us so much harm? While it would be convenient to make the IMF the culprit for all our troubles, that isn't entirely the case. Turning to the IMF on many occasions has certainly been the right decision given the state of affairs at the time. The IMF is considered as a lender of last resort, meaning when a country is on the verge of a sovereign default and is unable to obtain a loan elsewhere, it turns to the IMF. Therefore, faced often with depleting foreign exchange reserves and balance of payment problems, our unending relationship with the IMF is henceforth not surprising. Once part of a programme however, many at times the reason for our failure has been the result of our own government's lack of political will to implement policies, such as those needed to mobilize funds through domestic resources (for example through taxation) as well as other factors such as widespread corruption, economic mismanagement or numerous exogenous shocks, namely terrorism, unforeseen natural disasters, hike in oil prices, etc.

But does necessity mean we must blindly adhere to all of our lenders demands, in spite of how damaging they may be?

It is no secret that IMF's working model is seriously flawed, and has far-reaching consequences for economies. Most programmes are 'self serving' in nature, aimed to help the Fund retrieve their money rather than fix the economy of the borrowing country. In fact, judged on its mission to 'promote high employment and sustainable economic growth, and reduce poverty around the world', the IMF is an utter failure. The Fund has lent billions of dollars to developing nations since its formation, but such loans have in fact hurt their clients and reduced economic opportunities, instead of promoting growth. Loans from the Fund and other multilateral institutions have left the citizens of borrower nations heavily burdened with enormous debts and, as a result, deprived of meaningful economic opportunities. This anti-growth reputation is as a result of the Fund's fixation with fiscal austerity and stabilization-first policies, an approach it prescribes religiously, irrespective of individual country circumstances.

In addition to its ineffectiveness in maintaining economic stability and growth, many accuse the Fund of being a tool of the United States foreign policy, advancing the country's strategic and economic interests. Being the only nation with an outright veto helps Washington sway decisions to its benefit, which are often taken not on the basis of strong economic motives, but rather political ones. This can be plainly grasped in our

own relationship with the Fund, whose pockets are generous to us during times when Pakistan's position is favourable with the West and penny-pinching otherwise. By far the best example of this has been post 9/11, when we were handed a very large hearted loan package as a compensation for joining America's war on terror.

To conclude, while ending our dependency on the IMF may be far-fetched, one thing remains clear; future programmes with the Fund, if any, must be negotiated bearing in mind the needs and interests of our own people and economy. Furthermore, it is well time for the IMF, along with other Breton Wood Institutions, to change their outlook on the economics of lending and abandon the damaging cookie-cutter approach to which they cling on so dearly.

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An Inclusive Economic Model By M Ziauddin

Isn't it ironic that the countries and multilateral institutions responsible for promoting gross inequality globally, as well as within even the most developed countries by following a highly faulty economic model since at least early 1970s, are now trying to find fault in an economic model that has lifted millions out of poverty in a matter of a decade?

A study of the Silk Road Economic Belt by the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) and the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (Sipri) has identified potential issues that may negate any benefits the initiative brings.

The study speculates that the Chinese will likely accept or reject projects based on whether they serve the needs of Chinese industry, rather than what they bring to the recipients.

It also suspects that political tensions between different countries may impede the smooth rollout of projects.

Local elites, the study further suspects, may corner the "spoils" from new projects, thereby exacerbating social tensions. It has also expressed fears that labour rights and environmental protection may not be given the attention they deserve.

Therefore, the study recommends that:

The EU put forward a joint consultative mechanism with China to ensure projects are implemented smoothly, by ensuring all stakeholders have a hand in planning and supervision. Official development assistance programmes in BRI recipient countries should include assistance in project evaluation. Organisations such as the UNDP and the UN Economic and Social Commission (ESC) for Asia should advise recipient countries on the impact and viability of planned projects. BRI loans should not be allowed to breach the debt burden thresholds determined under the World Bank-IMF debt sustainability framework. And finally, the Belt and Road Initiative needs to attract private capital as there are around \$8.5 trillion "sitting in cash, waiting for better investment opportunities". Bringing in private capital would increase the scale of BRI, open it to non-Chinese companies and allow projects to be implemented more efficiently.

It was perhaps in this frame of mind that some of the delegates at the May Belt and Road Forum had called for a rules-based approach, sensitive to the developmental

needs of recipient countries. The stakeholders such as the US, the EU, Russia, India and Japan, according to the study, need to coordinate among themselves and engage with China to promote more transparent partnerships.

Meanwhile, the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) continues to bug India. Out of fear of being overwhelmed socio-economically by China's Road and Belt Initiative (RBI) India seems to have decided to create problems for the initiative. To start with it has decided not to attend any events connected with the BRI Forum.

What India is most worried about, however, is a collection of infrastructure projects under the label of CPEC, currently under construction throughout Pakistan. It traverses territory which India considers to be disputed. China officially claims not to take sides in the Kashmir dispute, but India believes it has done so by finalising CPEC with Pakistan and ignoring India's position. As well as compromising India's territorial integrity, CPEC, in India's view, is raising other concerns about BRI projects.

India's version on Gwadar port: the seaport has been leased to China until 2059. Chinese companies are operating the port, developing a 1,000-hectare Special Economic Zone nearby, and building an international airport with a Chinese grant of \$230 million. These actions are certainly not driven by altruism. They reflect the strategic value to China of access to the Arabian Sea and proximity to energy-rich West Asia. It should be no surprise that Chinese naval submarines have been spotted in Gwadar.

Clearly, the so-called stakeholders that include the US, the EU, Russia, India and Japan seem either not to have understood the \$4 trillion venture across 69 countries meant presumably to project China's strategic vision for global peace, won through mutually beneficial economic cooperation or they are so fearful of being swamped by its success that they want to stop it before it takes off.

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Source: <https://tribune.com.pk/story/1443447/inclusive-economic-model/>

Currency Depreciation | Editorial

It is extremely worrisome for a country if its finance czar cannot himself understand how the national currency could have depreciated against the dollar by as much as 3.10 per cent on July 5, 2017 — the single-largest drop in rupee value since 2008. What is surprising is that the currency value dipped after being stable for almost three straight years. Since then, Ishaq Dar, the finance minister, has called for an inquiry into this 'artificial' depreciation. He has also hinted at the possibility of exploitation by 'individuals, banks and entities' in the wake of political turbulence over the appearance of Maryam Nawaz before the JIT probing the Panama Papers. There have been calls from exporters and others, including the commerce minister, to revise the currency rate in line with similar adjustments made by China and Turkey. The minister, however, had rebuffed these calls and judging from his current reaction he remains averse to the move.

The State Bank of Pakistan — known for both its tacit and explicit intervention in determining the currency rate through off and on instructions to the treasurers of major banks — has claimed that the depreciation would actually strengthen the country's growth prospects and would address the emerging imbalance in the external account.

For some time now exporters have argued in favour of lowering the value of the rupee, saying this would strengthen their overall competitiveness. In the same vein the International Monetary Fund said last year that the rupee was overvalued by up to 20 per cent.

The trouble with SBP interventions is that they are at odds with the market principles of the exchange rate management. It is important, for instance, to show our creditors that our exchange rate is both stable and determined by the market. Analysts were expecting the Pakistani authorities to devalue the rupee but not quite so soon; it should have come by the year-end or by early 2018. For now the timing of the move and the identity of its author remains a mystery.

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EDUCATION

Civil Service Woes By Nauman Asghar

Civil Service in general and quality of civil servants in particular comes under discussion in media every year after the declaration of Central Superior Services (CSS) examination results. The discussion is mostly about the dismal rate at which candidates clear the CSS examination. Media pundits are often led to link the low rate of success to the sorry state of educational affairs in the country. Speakers on talk shows lament the neglect of education, a couple of op-ed pieces appear, and soon the subject goes off the radar. The same trend was on display over the last couple of weeks.

Framing an issue with the right approach is the key to finding a viable solution.

Low percentage of CSS qualifiers is not the real problem. In all competitive examinations conducted at national or international levels, only a small percentage is able to pass all stages. In 2014, 950,000 candidates registered for Indian Civil Service examination, of which 450,000 actually sat the exam. Only 15,000 cleared the preliminary exam and 1,200 were finally selected, which makes the pass percentage 0.26 percent. In France, less than a hundred people are selected every year for civil service jobs.

Quality of civil servants selected demands a careful and thoroughgoing analysis. Indubitably, the productivity of civil servants has considerably gone down over the last four decades. And any future roadmap for national development is doomed in its tracks without reforming bureaucracy. Our political elite have been disinclined to consider serious reform process. They prefer to tweak with the procedures and introduce small changes here and there, which have proven ineffective to address the deeper malaise.

Civil service examinations are conducted across the world to select people to run the administration. Examinations provide a useful means to filter the candidates who do not possess the basic analytical abilities. The content of examination determines its relevance to the selection of most suitable candidates for jobs. To select the brightest candidates, it must be a competitive, rigorous and meritocratic process. Sadly, the present CSS examination structure does not come up to those standards. The questions asked do not require imaginative solutions, and instead are designed to encourage candidates to memorise stuff without developing an understanding. The predictability of exam questions has facilitated the proliferation of coaching centres.

Unfortunately, these coaching places do not give any attention to the development of cognitive analytical skills and merely prepare students for a particular set of questions to pass an exam.

Civil service in France is famous for selecting the cream of the nation to lead in administration, business and politics. Their selection process is extremely rigorous and by all means separates off the best and the brightest from the rest. The candidates sit five written exams (Public Law, Finance, European Law, Social Policy, and Mathematics), followed by four oral exams (Public Finance, International Relations, European Politics, and General Knowledge), and a 45-minute Grand Oral. Candidates who pass these three stages are put through a sports fitness test. Those selected are guaranteed jobs in the civil service and are imparted training for two years at L'École Nationale d'administration (ENA) — a prestigious institute launched by Charles de Gaulle in 1945.

The most recent CSS exam reform effort in Pakistan made the following changes: one, age limit has been increased by two years for all categories; two, the minimum qualification to sit the exam has been enhanced to sixteen years of education; three, a couple of new subjects — Urban Planning and Criminology — have been introduced; four, the weightage of certain subjects has been increased and decreased for others. A single thread runs through these changes: lack of imagination. Any reform process must define the need to undertake the reform, the objectives to be achieved and the relation of adopted measures to the objectives. Every component of the process was overlooked and big, half-page advertisements in press about civil service reforms have resulted in mere tinkering and most unimaginative steps.

The CSS quota is misused by people who get domiciles of smaller provinces though they have access to education and other services at par with any other candidate. Commentators often make a mistake ascribing the quality of the civil servants to the deteriorating standards of education. They overlook the fact that civil service is not able to attract the best talent available in Pakistan, partly due to the abovementioned examination structure but mainly due to lack of incentive. And the decision-makers have very conveniently put this factor aside. They need to learn from other countries, which have an efficient bureaucracy. In Singapore, the first and most important step undertaken to stop the brain drain into private sector was to offer competitive, market-based salaries to civil servants. The brightest candidates are chosen from schools, awarded government scholarships to study at prestigious institutions in Singapore, followed by scholarships to study abroad at world-class universities. They are bound to return back to the country and join the civil service. Further, they are allowed to continue in one ministry for a sufficiently long period of time to enable development of expertise.

Lastly, our CSS exam process is also not meritocratic because of existence of quotas for geographic regions and for armed forces. Reservation of posts is primarily aimed to give the disadvantaged sections of society a deserving leg-up for a temporary period of time. Quota for armed forces cannot be justified as an affirmative action. Further, at the time of induction of armed forces' officers in civil service, their respective institutions have already invested huge resources on their training and capacity building. Likewise, geographical quota is never supposed to continue forever. But the quota for disadvantaged regions due to end in 1993 has continually been extended since thereafter. Moreover, the quota is misused by people who get domiciles of smaller provinces though they have access to education and other services at par with any other candidate throughout their life. These distortions allow less capable people to enter and hence impact the efficiency of civil service.

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CSS Questions: Ideology or Science? By Anjum Altaf

In connection with the much-discussed concerns with the performance of the civil service in Pakistan, I have suggested that in addition to obvious factors like the quality of education in the country and the terms and conditions of employment during service, it might be useful to look at the particulars of the selection test itself. The objective would be to assess how the test impacts the behaviour of candidates and whether it encourages self-selection of particular types of candidates.

The argument can be motivated with one illustrative question from the compulsory Islamiat paper downloaded from the version of the 2015 CSS examination available on the website of the Federal Public Service Commission. The question is as follows:

“Highlight the importance of Zakat and prove that economic stability of a society can be ensured through its effective implementation.”

Now consider the implications of the question. First, note the word ‘prove’ which is generally used in the context of propositions that are known to be factually true and whose truth is to be demonstrated by empirical verification or logical argumentation. The proposition that the earth is round or that the theorem of Pythagoras holds are familiar examples. Is there really any way to convincingly prove in this sense an article of faith asserting that a religious obligation can ensure economic stability of a society? Is there really any need to prove an article of faith?

Second, assume that nevertheless an attempt is made to prove the proposition. Does the question provide acceptable clarity on what is meant by ‘economic stability of a society’ the existence of which is to be proved? What are the indicators that characterise economic stability? What is to be considered the distinction between stability and instability?

Third, consider the question in a broader economic context. As an obligatory payment levied on wealth and earmarked for poverty alleviation, Zakat is only one instrument among many other economic instruments and policies. Is it realistic to imply that just one instrument can ensure economic stability in a society if many of the other policies are poorly conceived and implemented? Would it suffice if, say, the economy is undergoing hyperinflation?

Fourth, consider the empirical evidence. Zakat is not only widely practised in Pakistan but also compulsorily collected by the state. Many would claim it has not led to an acceptable level of economic stability, however defined, in the country. The only

argument that can be advanced to defend the proposition is the counterfactual one, ie, that if Zakat were to be implemented 'effectively' the objective would be achieved. This reverts to being an article of faith leaving no room to argue that a single instrument, no matter how effectively implemented, might not be sufficient to guarantee economic stability in a society.

Fifth, and most importantly, consider the dilemma of candidates faced with this question. Quite independent of their individual opinions, would anyone risk offering an answer that might be contrary to the belief of an unknown examiner? Would they jeopardise the chance of a prestigious career by expressing intelligent opinions no matter how well argued? Would there be some candidates who would balk at the need to argue contrary to their experiential understanding and what would be the price of their intellectual honesty?

What is the likely outcome of posing this type of question? Zakat is a staple topic that is repeated every few years. It has a safe and acceptable answer that is available for memorisation. My guess is that the majority of the candidates would opt for a safety-first strategy and give the examiners what they presume the latter are looking for. As a result, the answers would be fairly similar and standard reflecting no original thought. This contention could be easily verified by reviewing the answers to this question submitted by successful candidates.

It is possible to frame the same question in a much more neutral manner. One rephrasing could be as follows:

“Many countries rely on a wealth tax to smooth economic inequalities in society. Is there an analogous instrument in Islam? If so, describe briefly the principal characteristics of the instrument. Is the effective implementation of a wealth tax sufficient to alleviate absolute poverty in a society? If yes, describe briefly how that can be achieved in Pakistan. If not, what other measures might be needed to achieve the objective?”

Such a reformulation would allow students much more leeway to demonstrate their independent thinking and analytical abilities. The question would not be seeking a pre-determined correct answer but a broader knowledge of social issues, the mechanisms available to address them in a religious tradition, and the real-life conditions in which the mechanisms are likely to be sufficient and most effective. These qualities rather than the ability to reproduce unquestioned texts should be what is expected of the candidates inducted into the civil service.

Lest it be thought that I have chosen an unrepresentative question I am reproducing another from the same examination paper:

“Argue for supremacy of Wahi as the solution of human problems against other sources of knowledge.”

Readers will note that it is susceptible to the same limitations as the earlier question in that it leaves room for only one safe and acceptable answer. This is what is termed a loaded question and it is not considered good pedagogical practice to include such faith-based tenets in examinations.

Consider further how this question might be reconciled with the following question posed in the Islamic History and Culture paper:

“The Spanish Muslims established the foundations of Knowledge which become the mile stone (sic) of progress in Europe. Explain.” Given that the earlier question calls for an argument for the supremacy of Wahi against other sources of knowledge, did Muslims establish Wahi as the foundation of knowledge in Spain? That is unlikely to have been the case since Europe did not rely on it as a milestone in its progress. So the real question might turn out to be about the evolution of knowledge and the reasons for it in Muslim Spain. Such contradictions are bound to emerge if faith and reason are mixed up in this unthinking manner.

The usual response to such arguments is to deflect attention from their logic and suppress discussion by questioning the nationalism or religious faith of the writer. Such a tendency which has grown manifold in Pakistan is itself an outcome of the kinds of tests of faith to which all students are subjected throughout their education. Many people, including examiners, now believe there is only one correct answer to every question and it is the answer to which they subscribe. Questioning as a quality of mind is to be weeded out rather than encouraged. It is an attitude for which society has to pay a heavy price of which one is the burden of a pliant civil service.

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Source: <https://tribune.com.pk/story/1430736/css-questions-ideology-science/>

Higher Education Must Go Global By Sami Ullah Bajwa

In the last few decades, the world has seen a steady march towards regional integration and globalisation through economic blocs like BRICs, intercontinental road and rail networks through the One Belt, One Road project and exceeding adaptation of the WTO regime.

However, Britain's impending exit from the European Union and the revival of a nationalist political agenda in some leading countries, indicate that globalisation and wider cross-country collaborations are not exactly a done deal.

Even though globalisation remains a way forward for the world, much more robust efforts are required to promote a global orientation among the masses, and foster cross-cultural collaboration in the realms of economy, technology and education.

For its part, Pakistan presents an interesting case. On the one hand, it is confronted with security challenges, cross-border conflicts and energy shortages while, on the other hand, its strategic geographic location, promising youth bulge, natural endowments and competitive cluster base place it as a centrepiece of the world's economic and political map. It is this potential which has persuaded China to pour in massive investments into Pakistan and the United States to build a knowledge-corridor between the two nations. Recently, China committed \$46 billion on mega-infrastructure projects in Pakistan, while the US has provided financial support to 23 US-based universities for promoting research and academic cooperation with private and public sector Pakistani universities.

The world therefore is seeing Pakistan with a renewed interest, and as a future destination of investment, partnership and prosperity. We have to embrace the dynamics of the post-OBOR world, and prepare the nation to make the most out of this opportunity. Our higher education institutions would have to assume the role of torchbearer in augmenting a cross-cultural orientation and global outlook among the youth. Internationalisation of higher education institutions, therefore, holds the key to the future.

Internationalisation has increasingly been seen as a key facet of academic institutions. However, the challenges for internationalisation in terms of their nature and magnitude for universities in developing countries considerably differ from those operating in

academically advanced countries. Factors like broader socio-political framework, macro economic conditions, education policies and support structure significantly impact opportunities and challenges for universities to internationalise themselves.

For Pakistan, impediments like nascent internal processes of universities, lack of support systems, financial constraints and capacity gaps, etc, are by and large common to developing countries; whereas few, like security problems and cross-border tensions, are somewhat unique to us. In certain cases, inconsistent and evolving policies of government and the Higher Education Commission also put internationalisation efforts of universities at odds.

Despite all these constraints, Pakistani universities have shown notable progress towards internationalisation. Different internalisation avenues like joint-degree programmes, student and faculty exchanges, accreditation and membership of internationalisation bodies, etc, have been explored by both public and private sector universities. Yet, we are just at the beginning of a long journey.

To move forward, there is pressing need for fostering collaboration between the universities. While internationalisation is considered more of a university's individual pursuit, certainly there exists room for undertaking joint efforts for the benefit of the entire sector. There must be a platform where internationalisation office-bearers of various universities could share their respective internationalisation strategies and learning with one another.

Moreover, through this platform key global players could be engaged with Pakistan, making it feasible for individual universities to work on their internationalisation agenda with and through these networks. The platform could also be helpful for gaining policy and technical support for the internationalisation of higher education.

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Is Education a Priority? By Faisal Bari

EVERY year we celebrate the fact that the allocation for education by federal as well as provincial governments goes up by 10 to 15 per cent. This has been happening for quite a few years now. All provinces feel the pressure to raise their education budgets, and they do.

Indeed, some of the increases are substantial — this year, the Higher Education Commission is going to get about Rs5 billion more, while for Punjab the 10pc to 15pc increase means an additional Rs30bn for the education sector.

Even allowing for the fact that the increases mentioned above are in nominal terms, the educational budgets of the provinces have increased by 50pc to 80pc over the last five to seven years. Though we are still only spending about 2.3pc of GDP on education, it is a significant percentage of the provincial budgets.

Will the increase in the education budgets be able to address the inequities in our learning systems?

The government's own statistics acknowledge that some 21 million-plus five- to 16-year-olds are still out of school.

We have not achieved universal enrolment even at the primary level. In fact, if it were not for the increase in enrolment of children in private-sector schools, the overall enrolment rates would be showing a declining trend. Our high dropout rates mean that out of 100 children enrolling in grade 1 in Pakistan, only five to six make it to college level. Our transition rates, from primary to middle and high school are pathetic.

But, despite these increases in the private sector, there are too many two-room primary schools where basic infrastructure facilities are missing, and we do not have enough middle and high schools to offer a higher transition rate from primary to middle schools.

We do not have enough teachers to ensure that every primary school has as many teachers as classes: multi-grade teaching is quite common. Punjab is promising to recruit some 77,000 teachers this year to ensure that there are at least four in every school. The situation in other provinces is no better.

Meanwhile, examination results at all levels — grade 5 or the civil service exams — show that the quality of education that most of our children, barring the minority that go to high-fee private or elite government schools or universities, receive is quite poor.

Grade 5 children, on average, are one or two grades behind where they should be, and only 2pc or so of the candidates who take the civil service examinations even pass the written test.

Given this situation, what will an increase of 10pc to 15pc in the budgets achieve on the education front? What is there to celebrate in such increases? Will these increases allow us to fulfil our constitutional obligation of providing every child in Pakistan with 10 years of quality education?

Will these allow us to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals that we are a signatory to? Will these increases be able to address the tremendous inequities in our education system and allow every child to explore his or her potential fully?

It is not just about the money. All provinces have, consistently, shown a low use of development funds within the education sector: of the money that is budgeted for the sector at the beginning of the year, only 50pc to 70pc is actually spent. The rest of it lapses.

Non-development expenditures are usually utilised well: these are mostly spent on salary budgets. Teachers' salaries are indeed the main expense in the education sector so it is not a surprise that most of the money is spent on these. But the poor utilisation of funds for non-salary heads tells us about the kind of priority we attach to development or quality-enhancing expenditures.

It is also about how the money that we actually spend is utilised.

In Punjab, laptop distributions come out of the education budget. Where is the evidence that giving laptops will improve the quality of education in the country? It might be a popular move and an attempt to get votes, but how is it about educational quality or outcomes? Daanish school expenditures are also educational expenses. The spending of billions on a few schools when 50,000-plus schools are still lacking teachers as well as some basic infrastructure facilities needs to be justified.

We have never seen any sound evaluation of the contribution that the Daanish schools are making. All provinces are moving towards distributing laptops, tablets and LED televisions to teachers and schools: do we have any evidence that these are going to enhance quality and improve learning among children?

Do provincial governments see public education as a priority? If we go by the increases in the provincial budgets, we might say yes and this is how many have been interpreting the increases over the last few years.

But there is another way of thinking. The increased expenditures are definitely not going to address the issues in education as a) the increases are small and the problems very large, b) a significant portion of the increased budget is not going to be spent, c) and even if it is, spending priorities have not been thought through and are not going to address the access or quality issues that we face.

Clearly, governments are according low priority to education issues: the increased funding is just for the political appeasement of concerned lobbies. If education was indeed an area of high priority and governments wanted to accomplish something, there would be a lot more debate on educational issues in political parties and government circles — the best of political leaders would be made education ministers, there would be a lot more innovative thinking on how to achieve our educational goals and there would be political consequences for not delivering. We do not see any of the above.

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Education challenge

It is pointless to expect our public-sector colleges and universities to produce well-rounded graduates when the state has failed to offer quality primary and secondary schooling to all. Although there are some slivers of hope, these do not reflect the real picture of the decades of neglect that Pakistan's education sector has been subjected to. As reported last week, the National University of Science and Technology was ranked 431 in a global listing of 500 top varsities in the QS World University Rankings. Making this list, alongside six other Pakistani varsities, is an accomplishment for a university that also won a prestigious award for design technology at the Stanford Centre in April. Yet, its inclusion in the list does not obscure the abysmal state of learning at most other universities in the country. One of the criteria for evaluating universities globally is a sound academic reputation — grounded in the efforts of an expert faculty that stresses on quality learning. Unfortunately, in this country education is so neglected that only 2pc of students sitting the CSS examinations passed in 2016; 92pc failed the English exam. It is pertinent to note that appointments are made to the bureaucracy, judiciary, Foreign Office, police and other government departments based on these exam results. Moreover, intellectual vigour is critical for high-level appointments in these services. However, when the system is based on rote learning and poor science and math teaching, independent thinking eludes the students.

Only a holistic approach applied from the primary level up, and one that makes learning accessible and affordable, can reform the crisis at the top of the education ladder. For the large out-of-school population to be enrolled and retained, education investment and political commitment are prerequisites. Training teachers to improve learning outcomes and encouraging intellectual curiosity will catapult students towards progress. Our government needs to comprehend why a system based on quality education leads to a tolerant, inclusive and economically stable nation able to stand its own globally.

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WORLD

North Korea's Nuclear Conundrum and Asian Security By Huma Rehman

North Korea is the most persistent challenge facing the global nonproliferation regime. Its continual nuclear testing since 2006 has led to a charged political and strategic environment in the region, stirring anxiety among major powers alongside challenging the limits of their influence on its behaviour. The current level of tensions between the US and North Korea have reached such a grave level of uncertainty that it is endangering international peace and stability. With an impending crisis in the region, the sword of Damocles hangs over the strategic stability in northeast Asia with the inevitable consequences.

The nuclear North Korea is drawing the world's attention as it is impacting the contours of strategic stability in the Korean Peninsula. Some of the most pressing issues that abound the East Asian security environment include efforts to streamline Pyongyang; through more sticks than carrots now. At the root of the problem lies their intransigence, which, at one level, is depicted by its unwillingness to be governed by international regulations and, at another level, is depicted through its futile efforts to diplomatically streamlining North Korea at the world stage. The factors exacerbating the situation include measures like the massive Foal Eagle military exercises involving some 20,000 South Korean and 10,000 US troops as well as annual joint exercises, popularly known as Key Resolve. Although such exercises are undertaken for containment of any future questionable scenario, they add to the chaos in the region. Pyongyang reacts strongly to such provocative scenarios, calling them as plans for an invasion or a "decapitation strike" against the North Korean leadership.

Without doubt, there is no military solution to the North Korean problem. In a recent interview with Reuters, US President Donald Trump praised China's President Xi Jinping for his efforts to resolve the dispute over North Korea's missile and nuclear weapons programmes. But he cautioned that if any diplomatic efforts fail, "there is a chance that we could end up having a major, major conflict with North Korea." The Trump administration also warned of undertaking military action if diplomacy failed. However, it is naive to think that China will help or apply maximum pressure without a serious opening for talks between Washington and Pyongyang or that pressure alone can force North Korea to change course.

In UN's Security Council session, US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson called for new economic sanctions on North Korea and other "painful" measures over its nuclear weapons programme. Tillerson referred to US willingness to negotiate directly with North Korea under the strict condition that it would end its nuclear weapons programme. But that seems unlikely in the near future. Soon after his statement, the North Korean missile test-fire depicted just the opposite, underscoring Pyongyang's determination to show its defiance to increasing international pressure.

Historically, the US and other major powers negotiated with North Korea to end its nuclear, missile development programme and export of ballistic missile technology after its withdrawal from the NPT in 2003. These negotiations had earlier been preceded by unsuccessful attempts. As early as in 1994, it was thought that the issue had been resolved when the US, along with other states, and North Korea signed the Agreed Framework. Under this agreement, Pyongyang committed to cease its plutonium weapons programme and the US committed to provide two light-water reactors and normalisation of the political and economic relations with North Korea. The agreement became ineffective in 2002, when Pyongyang exercised its legal rights by withdrawing from the NPT, straining strategic relations with Washington.

In order to dissuade North Korea from pursuing a nuclear weapons programme 'six-party talks' were initiated in August, 2003. The states involved in these talks were China, Japan, North Korea, Russia, South Korea and the US. In between moments of stalemate and optimism, those talks arrived at a critical breakthrough in 2005. A significant role was played by China as a third party mediating between the US and North Korea. However, the larger objective of mainstreaming Pyongyang was missed.

Currently, the crossfire of statements from the US and North Korea in the past few days are adding further complexity to the political and strategic tension. The US administration is signaling ultimatums to China and threats of overwhelming military force against North Korea. On April 3rd, President Trump stated in an interview to The Financial Times that "if China is not going to solve North Korea, we will." In response, Pyongyang paraded its ballistic missile arsenal, including canisters for new intercontinental ballistic missile variants. Consequently, senior US officials warned that "all options are on the table." On the other hand, North Korea has already refused to hold any talks that would discuss its nuclear abandonment and disbandment.

This tense political and strategic environment demands a vigilant approach by the US, China and other stakeholders in dealing with North Korea. The objective should be to bring Pyongyang to the negotiating table, ultimately leading to the elimination of nuclear

infrastructure and associated technologies from South and North Korea, and establishing internal peace and order on the Korean Peninsula. A viable approach to achieve this goal can be to address North Korea's security concerns, energy shortages and economic woes.

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Climate Change Deal | Editorial

IN withdrawing from the Paris Agreement on climate change, President Donald Trump has in fact walked away from the role of global leadership that the United States has held since the end of the Second World War. Out of the 197 countries that had signed the agreement last year, 147 have already ratified it, meaning the departure of the US from the commitments made at Paris deals a significant blow to cooperative efforts to contain the rise in global temperatures. The saddest part of the whole affair is how the defence of antiquated industries has been invoked by the president at the cost of the welfare of future generations. The latter was reflected symbolically last year when then secretary of state John Kerry, holding his toddler granddaughter in his arms, signed the Paris Agreement. President Trump, on the other hand, stood alone before a group of his admirers, including many who are labelled as 'climate sceptics' and serve in his government in important capacities such as director of the Environment Protection Agency.

As the biggest contributor of global carbon emissions, the US has a special responsibility to lead in the area of climate change. Once before, too, it has walked away from an important global arrangement, the Kyoto Protocol, at the last minute under president George Bush Jr. This cycle of entering into and then walking away from international cooperative efforts to mitigate climate change does serious harm to America's role as a global leader, and leaves a vacuum that is easily filled by rising powers such as China. The fact that only a few days before his disastrous decision to pull out of the Paris Agreement, President Trump was in Europe diluting his country's commitment to the Nato umbrella will also be seen as a dent in America's leadership role. The silver lining here is that it could take up to four years to actually make a departure from the agreement since there are strong laws governing exit, and by then there might well be a new administration in power more amenable to staying. But the troubling signals coming out of Washington, D.C. have already registered in capitals around the world. Germany is now openly considering less reliance on America, while China is talking of international commitments. Whatever Mr Trump does, it seems the world might yet adapt and carry on with or without his assent.

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India and the Politics of Nonproliferation By Saima Aman Sial

With the upcoming plenary of the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) this June, India's contentious bid for NSG is making headlines again. Whereas New Delhi sees Beijing as the sole stumbling block in its ambition to be part of the group, this portrayal is far from reality on the ground. Several countries have reservations about India's entry upon consideration of all they have already lost by waiving nuclear trade with it without any reciprocal nonproliferation commitment. The important question is this: if the nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT) is the cornerstone of the Nuclear Nonproliferation Regime (NNPR) and the Non-Nuclear Weapon States (NNWS) have been fulfilling their end of the bargain in the NNPT, why are states outside the NPT being selectively rewarded for behaviour, which cannot be objectively judged as 'good nonproliferation record'? The waiver given to India in 2008 by the NSG gives credibility to this argument. India did not tangibly fulfill any of the nonproliferation obligations that it paid lip service to while signing the Indo-US nuclear deal, yet received a subsequent waiver for export of nuclear goods and related sensitive technologies.

From a normative perspective, the NSG proves to be a weak link in the nonproliferation regime since priority is given to commercial interests and geopolitics, rather than to nonproliferation criteria. This is one of the critical reasons why the group that governs the dual-use and sensitive nuclear technologies is kept as a voluntary arrangement. Its participating governments decide, based on consensus but in accordance with their national regulations and states' interest, on the export policy of nuclear material and related dual-use items. This national interest typically champions commercial gains instead of nonproliferation norms.

Consider the case of India. What grounds substantiate its alleged 'good' nonproliferation record, except for geopolitics and a market for global nuclear suppliers? This selective application of rules is the chief hurdle in the way of standardisation of a nonproliferation norm; the second obstacle is the non-uniformity of rights and obligations among nuclear possessor and non-possessor states. If the states that propagate the rule-based nonproliferation system interpret and reinterpret rules to suit their commercial interests, they no longer possess the moral high ground to preach nonproliferation to others.

So where is India's NSG bid now? After doing everything in its power, the United States has failed to force all members of NSG to recommit to the old commitment-free bargain. At the Vienna plenary in November 2016, 12 NSG participating governments called for

a criteria-based approach. These included China, Turkey, Kazakhstan, Belarus, Italy, Ireland, Switzerland, Austria, New Zealand, Belgium, Brazil and Russia.

China's latest statement from the foreign ministry before the next NSG plenary states that India's application for membership is "a new issue under new circumstances and it is more complicated than previously imagined". Although China is not rejecting India's admission outright, it is seeking a two-step approach, stipulating that the NSG members should decide upon a set of principles for the admission of non-NPT states into the NSG as a first step, followed by discussion in view of country-specific application.

The geopolitics between China and India provide a broader context to where this may be heading. Thus far, India has employed all possible tactics to prevent China from standing in the way of consensus, but Beijing has stood its ground. Beijing's position is complicated by India's Indo-Pacific strategy through which it patrols the South China Sea, a territory that China considers its primary area of interest. What is also taken into account is India's hostile attitude towards China's One Belt, One Road (OBOR) initiative, the latest evidence of which was New Delhi's boycott of the recent OBOR summit in China this May. This summit was even attended by the US, a country that earlier showed reluctance over this project.

Nonetheless, Beijing is aware of the geopolitical game being played out against it. With India in the Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR), the exports to India by MTCR member states are aiding the development of India's nuclear capable missiles programmes as well as its military satellite programme. In addition, the export of missile systems by India to East Asia would further complicate China's perceived threat. The contradicting geopolitical agendas of India and China foreshadow ugly order in Asia and this may lead to competitive security dynamics being pursued.

As far as the NSG is concerned, hypothetically, if an exception were to be made for India again, it may well be the last nail in the 'global nonproliferation norms' coffin, as NNWS of NPT are already disgruntled by a lack of compliance with nuclear disarmament.

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Trump's Mideast Approach and South Asia Consequences By Shahid Javed Burki

The already unsettled Middle East became even more so after the visit to the region by President Donald Trump. What he said in a speech delivered before an audience of 50 Muslim heads of state, most of them non-Arab, has torn apart alliances that had brought some stability to the perennially disturbed area. Events that occurred soon after Trump left were the direct consequence of his visit.

There were two terrorist attacks in Tehran, a city that had largely been spared by those who want to bring chaos to the Muslim world. A quartet of nations — Bahrain, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, UAE and Yemen — severed relations with the tiny but oil-and-gas-rich nation of Qatar. This action by the rulers in the Middle East drew other nations, in particular Turkey, to come out openly in support of the small sheikhdom. President Trump took great pride in the fact that it was his discussions in Riyadh with the Saudi monarch that created the rift.

How will this spreading crisis affect South Asia, home to 500 million Muslims out of the world's total of 1.6 billion? Not only does South Asia possess the largest Muslim community in the world, there is also a large Shia presence in the region. Of the estimated 225 million followers of this sect of Islam, 60 million, or more than a quarter of the total, live in Pakistan, India and Afghanistan. Judging by the type of politics Trump's America is encouraging, there can be no doubt that the sectarian divide in the Muslim world will be exacerbated.

The rise of Shias following the Iranian Islamic Revolution of 1979 sharpened the sense of identity of this community in Pakistan and India. The reaction to this increase in Shia self-consciousness was violence aimed at identifiable members of the community. The Hazaras, a Persian-speaking community with distinct physical features (who reside mainly in central Afghanistan, Hazara Town in Balochistan and Karachi) are overwhelmingly Shia. Of the estimated seven to eight million people belonging to this sect, two and a half million are in Afghanistan and close to one million reside in Pakistan. They have been targeted by extremists in both countries. Over the last few months, there were a number of Hazara deaths in acts of terrorism in Quetta and Karachi in Pakistan.

Nonetheless, the sharpening sectarian divide is not the only likely consequence of Trump's approach to the Middle East. In recent years, there has been a palpable increase in the influence of Wahhabism in South Asia. All of the reasons that explain

this development can be traced to Saudi Arabia. First, the large-scale migration of young men from South Asia became a conduit for the arrival of Wahabism into the region.

Since most labour-importing countries in the Middle East allowed only males to come for work for limited periods of times (3 to 5 years) there was a fast turnover among the migrants. Over the last more than four decades, approximately 15 million Pakistanis have moved in and out of the Middle East. About the same number of Muslims from India (in particular from the state of Kerala) similarly migrated. Upon return they brought conservative Islam back to their countries, changing the more liberal traditions of the areas from which they originated.

Second, Saudi Arabia in particular but the well-to-do individuals in other oil-rich countries as well have financially contributed to the establishment of madrassas in South Asia, particularly in Afghanistan and the tribal belt of Pakistan. The first generation of the Taliban was typically graduates from these seminaries.

Third, the flow of official development assistance from Saudi Arabia to Pakistan as well as private direct investment in all parts of South Asia gave the kingdom considerable leverage. Not only Pakistan but India, especially under Prime Minister Narendra Modi, has also been active in bringing in Arab capital.

Fourth, Saudi Arabia has strong military ties with Pakistan. Although the Pakistani National Assembly turned down the Saudi request to send troops to the country to bolster its ability to defend itself, there is possibly an understanding between Riyadh and Islamabad to do so in the event that there is a violation of the Kingdom's sovereignty. Earlier this year, Raheel Sharif was appointed to a new position to head a multinational force the Saudis were assembling from two-score Muslim countries. Dealing with terrorism was the declared objective of this move.

By openly supporting an anti-Islam approach, Trump has further churned up the already turbulent waters of the Middle East. It is unlikely that there will be a state-to-state confrontation between Saudi Arabia and Iran. What is probable is a fight involving proxies with the restive minorities in Bahrain and Saudi Arabia rebelling against the established order. This is already taking place in Yemen.

The Trump regime is likely to fuel the rise of sectarianism in the Middle East and parts of South Asia. Bangladesh and Pakistan are busy developing participatory and inclusive political institutions. Such institutions must provide space to religious and ethnic minorities. That is the only way sectarian divergences will not translate into violence and

killing. In the past, Pakistan was a more tolerant society in which differences among different sects of Islam did not result in violence. Political development emphasising inclusion will help to return the country to tolerance, and this is the policy the United States should be supporting. Unfortunately, this approach is not high on the list of Trump's priorities.

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UK Election – A Surprise? By Dr Kamal Monnoo

After weeks of wrangling, there was no outright winner of the UK general election, with both the Conservatives and the Labour party failing to secure a majority.

Commentators had suggested that UK Prime Minister Theresa May called an election back on 18 April to achieve a stronger negotiating position as Britain leaves the EU, with polls generally suggesting that the Conservative government will end up bagging more seats and comfortably returning to power.

June 8th's results obviously showed differently.

This unexpected result has a number of implications, including what it means for Brexit negotiations, and whether a hung Parliament may result in a 'softer' Brexit than markets had been anticipating.

Market reaction within UK: As with other recent geopolitical events that resulted in an unexpected outcome, there is some inevitable volatility for currency and stock markets. The FTSE 100 index of Britain's biggest companies jumped in the wake of the election result, but the Pound fell in value.

Sterling fell, amid heightened political uncertainty, in turn pushing up share prices.

Falls in sterling have typically supported Britain's biggest stock market, which holds a large proportion of multinational companies that earn much of their revenues overseas. The exchange rate can have a marked impact on their earnings when these are converted back into sterling and this may not be very good for their long-term business cum investment.

Political uncertainty: Despite the surprise outcome, the result of the general election does not mean a change in government, which in-turn means that Mrs.

Theresa May remains in office with her pre-elections policies intact, albeit with less conviction.

It also means greater political uncertainty in the UK in the coming period, which is bound to take some toll on economic growth of the UK's Economy.

Pre-election, the UK's economic growth forecast was positive over the long-term – While the Bank of England had lowered its economic growth forecast from 2.

0% to 1.

9% for 2017, it had increased forecasts for 2018 and 2019 to 1.

7% and 1.

8% respectively (original 1.

6% & 1.

7% respectively), provided there is a “smooth” transition to Brexit and also that the government adds to ‘wage growth’ during this period.

This now may need to be revised again and this time downwards.

So, why this supposedly surprise outcome? The answer in fact can be traced back to some deep-rooted personal insecurity of the British people that gradually built-up over the last two to three decades.

As most recent governments in the UK supported the phenomenon that has come to be known as neoliberalism, what in reality it meant was a rise in corporate power and monopolies, in-turn giving rise to inequality in the society and a focus on finance rather than creating hardcore manufacturing jobs.

It is these very policies that directly fed into the crash of 2008 from which Britain is still to fully recover.

What an average person on the street wants is not continuation of the same but for the next government to change past priorities and policies that failed to address his concerns.

To instead: bring about an appropriate balance between government and market.

When an economy is weak, as the UK economy has been in recent years, there is a need for governments to invest in people, technology, infrastructure and sectors that create jobs, which not only grows the economy today but also in the future.

This was clearly not happening.

So no real surprise, that with not enough investment, growth and jobs in the UK economy for more than a decade, this time in elections the voters decided that there was a need to break from the past! They felt that with neoliberalism discredited and austerity failed in Britain the new government needs to rewrite the rules of the economy once again.

However, this time in the right way that not only focuses on long-term economic growth, but also brings about the kind of sustainable prosperity that subsequently gets equitably shared.

What the election results depict is that it was Jeremy Corbyn's Labour that got it right in advocating the kind of economic plan that concentrates on the well being of the common people and not the markets or the big corporations.

Also, it was impressive on how the Labour planned on financing its economic plans: No voodoo money, but carefully thought-out proposals based on taxing those at the top and ensuring that corporations pay what they should.

Their leaders successfully argued that though their actions may slow down growth in the short-term, ultimately their policies would strengthen the UK's economy and place it on a more secure footing.

So will this be a wake-up call for the Conservatives? It should be, as now with a minority government, Mrs.

May will do well by revisiting her election time manifesto and align it closer to the policies Labour had been promising the voters.

That is, a long list of investments that going forward the government could and should be making: strengthening infrastructure, such as transport and communications; investment in education; and investment in families, particularly that allows women to make a choice between raising a family and work.

By swallowing her pride and adopting such policies – even though they were the brainchild of the opposition – Mrs.

May would in fact be taking a step in the right direction, as it would make the Great Britain more unified and Brexit a trifle easier.

The lessons though from such a surprise result could be quite far reaching.

For example, at home while the PML-N currently feels rather secure in winning another term in the upcoming 2018 elections, they need to be careful.

The real underlying sentiment of the voters can sometimes get lost in the euphoria of media publicity and rulers' over confidence.

Going by the present state of the economy, with no real focus on the common man and job creation, PML-N could be making the same mistakes as the Tories made in UK!

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Fault lines that Stoked the Gulf Crisis By Moazzam Husain

Is the present Gulf crisis going to blow over soon or does it reflect a deeper fault line? How significant are Pakistan's stakes and what do we need to consider in adopting a position on this crisis?

Confounded by the complexity of the nature of conflicts across the Middle East there's a tendency for most Pakistanis to turn to conspiracy theories. Instead, the most plausible framework to interpret these events is the prism of religious ideology. And the reason for this is simple: the foremost challenge to incumbent regimes is from competing religious ideologies and not from power politics, oil politics or the Arab-Israeli dispute. The actions of these regimes are driven more by fear than by opportunity. Above all is their need for survival.

Viewed from that standpoint, it would appear that the sectarian schism is the primary and more visible fault line, a religious rivalry that extends deep into the vault of Islamic history. The clergies on both sides of the Persian Gulf wield substantial authority and both the Iranian and Saudi political regimes owe their 'legitimacy' and survival to their religious establishments.

Yet, even as that rivalry plays out in Iraq, in Syria and Lebanon, in Yemen and other theatres, the two have not severed diplomatic links nor imposed a land, sea and air blockade on the other. That rivalry falls almost exclusively in the realm of power politics and is not a huge domestic worry for either regime.

On the other hand, there is a less obvious fault line, one that has become particularly worrisome following the events of the Arab Spring and that is at the heart of the present crisis. While both are modern fundamentalist movements Wahhabism and the Muslim Brotherhood differ along a key ideological axis. Wahhabism looks towards a strong central authority to oppose innovation and enforce a strict moral code. It is essentially reactionary.

The Muslim Brotherhood uses grassroots activism towards achieving social and economic justice. It is essentially progressive. One is top down where the state is an adjunct of religion. The other is bottom up, focused on educational programmes and social services with the more distant goal of participating in electoral politics.

The Saudi rulers are deeply suspicious of the Brotherhood's political and social mobilising capacity. It feels that would be a destabilising influence and pose a challenge to its status as the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques and finds Qatar's support of the Muslim Brotherhood unpalatable. So how deep is this compulsion for Qatar? Foreign policy, after all, is an extension of domestic policy. And the Brotherhood has no domestic roots in Qatar which in fact allows no political activism of any kind. Neither does the country have a strong clergy like Saudi Arabia. This is just a small country trying to punch above its weight and project power in the playing field of the Arab Spring.

A recalcitrant Qatar is also posing a challenge to Saudi efforts to coalesce the region to pose a unified front against Iran. Qatar and Iran share the same gas field and are tied in a working relationship. While Qatar may be able to yield on support for the Muslim Brotherhood, it could yield less here. By all indications the Qatar regime will stay; it will likely even soften its stance on the Muslim Brotherhood. With that the crisis may resolve soon. Perhaps the words of Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu provide an insight into how this will happen: "Although the [Saudi] Kingdom is a party in this crisis, we know that King Salman is a party in resolving it. We want to hear the views of Saudi Arabia regarding possible solutions and will share with them our views in a transparent way ..."

As for Pakistan, our stakes with Saudi Arabia and the UAE are substantial. This means a policy of neutrality but perhaps more 'neutral' on one side than the other. Saudi Arabia is a country that has also strongly diplomatically supported Pakistan at all forums. Pursuing neutrality should not come at a cost to us. We have very few diplomats that are experts on the Middle East and the ones that are may not be able to convey these intricacies to the political and military leaderships.

Finally, while there may be other things wrong with General (retd) Raheel Sharif's presence in Saudi Arabia as head of the Islamic Military Alliance but — and this may sound counter-intuitive — it has little bearing on the present standoff. Our response should be based on practical as opposed to moral or ideological considerations. That's what the government seems to be doing and with small fine tuning, Pakistan must stay that course till the maelstrom is over which it will soon be.

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Dynamics of Afghan Conflict By Dr Raza Khan

The United States has finally understood that it is not winning in Afghanistan and that it needs to forge a fresh strategy to attain its objectives. Its long-running objective has been to defeat the Taliban insurgents so that they could neither assume power nor provide sanctuary to al Qaeda and other terror groups again.

In order to do that, Washington had rightly strategised to fill the political vacuum in Afghanistan which previously provided an enabling environment for militias like the Taliban and its affiliated foreign militant groups. The immediate panacea for the US in Afghanistan since the dislodging of the Afghan Taliban regime in 2001 was to occupy the country and run its affairs itself and to give the war-ravaged country its first-ever modern republican constitution and a viable political system.

The US and its Western allies gave Afghanistan a constitution and its present political system in the hope that it would address the longstanding power vacuum in the country. A decade and a half since then, however, Washington has not been able to install a viable option to fill that vacuum.

Last week US Defence Secretary James Mattis acknowledged that his country was far from winning the war in Afghanistan and that Taliban fighters were looking more menacing than ever in more provinces of Afghanistan. And despite all that the Middle East-based global terrorist network the Islamic State is making inroads into Afghanistan. This is a pretty candid assessment of the current situation.

Mattis has also warned that a new strategy would soon be put in place. The most important aspect of the new plan is to increase the level of troops in Afghanistan by 3,500 to 5,000 soldiers. At present, the US has around 8,500 troops in Afghanistan and the force is mainly providing crucial support to over 300,000 Afghanistan National Security Forces (ANSF) to fight the Taliban. The deployment of 5,000 US soldiers is not likely to turn the tide against the Taliban. It will take a lot more than that to achieve the desired results. Nevertheless, one hopes for the sake of Afghanistan that the new strategy is comprehensive, profound and all encompassing.

It is disappointing to note that US President Donald Trump has given a carte blanche to the Mattis-led Defence Department in crafting a new strategy in Afghanistan. Historically, the US Defence Department has a poor record in dealing with conflicts and crisis having one too many failures against its name. The department's strategies

mainly have been focusing on defeating the enemy militarily while it needed a comprehensive approach.

The truth is that the US and its allies along with hundreds of thousands of ANSF personnel have failed to defeat a few thousand Taliban fighters because they either could not come to terms with the dynamics of the conflict or simply did not want to.

The Afghans themselves have been averse to any organised state system. The West really did a great job to give Afghanistan a modern and civilised charter and political system but the point one wants to drive home is that the Afghans have been reluctant to adopt such a structure and system. The ultra-tribal nature of Afghan society and the failure of successive Afghan presidents to deliver have been major impediments to long-term stability. Anti-West feelings still run high in the country. The Taliban have so far deftly exploited those feelings in order to rally local support behind their insurgency.

Unless Washington takes these facts into consideration, its Afghan policy will continue to run aground.

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A Patchwork Afghanistan Policy | Editorial

In a surprising move that caught even the rank-and-file diplomats off guard, the State Department reportedly is getting rid of its special envoy for Afghanistan and Pakistan.

While the decision is not final yet, it is highly likely that it will be taken, as former President Barack Obama had already begun to slowly phase out the Office of the Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan (SRAP) as he drew down US military presence in the region.

On top of that, the position had been left open as the new administration failed to nominate anyone for the post for Senate confirmation, furthering the impression that it will be scrapped.

While the restructuring of the US diplomatic framework was in line with the gradual drawback, this rushed decision is anything but, especially since the US is considering substantially increasing its military presence in Afghanistan over the coming years.

All of which begs the question, what exactly is the US policy for Afghanistan, what endgame does it see in the region and how will it interact with regional players like Pakistan?

There are no easy answers, as the Trump administration has given no coherent policy on the matter.

While Secretary of State Rex Tillerson has called for a “regional” solution and floated the idea that India might be more involved, there is little evidence on what this could actually entail.

Even the decision to scrap the SARP position seems to be taken pursuant to the objective of cutting back the State Department jobs to free up funds, rather than a calculated Afghanistan policy.

Similarly, the decision to send more troops to Afghanistan seems to have come solely from James Mattis, the Secretary of Defence, and the military, which has been given increased independence and discretion to make foreign policy decisions.

Meanwhile two US lawmakers – with a history of anti-Pakistan advocacy – have introduced a bipartisan bill in Congress, seeking to revoke Pakistan’s status as a major non-NATO ally (MNNA).

The only predictable outcome from this situation is unpredictability.

With Afghanistan way down in Donald Trump's agenda, the policy is currently a patchwork of vested interests and legacies of different departments.

With violence flaring up in both Pakistan and Afghanistan and diplomatic relations between the two at their lowest, leadership from the US was expected and needed. However, the new administration seems to have very little capacity for that.

Source: <http://nation.com.pk/editorials/25-Jun-2017/a-patchwork-afghanistan-policy>

India Drone Deal With US | Editorial

India is set to purchase 22 unmanned Guardian MQ-9B drones from the United States, pending formal approval from the US Congress. The former country placed the request in 2016 for maritime monitoring in the Indian Ocean to ostensibly keep a check on Chinese movement about the waters. It must be remembered that India and the US are not allies, officially. However, relations between the two leaderships are heating up as the US has sidelined its usual policy of selling advanced defence technology to allies only. This bending of rules comes amid Prime Minister Narendra Modi's planned visit to Washington on a low key note to further develop and strengthen a personal bond between the two leaders. Counting that this is Modi's fourth trip to Washington in three years, and apparently a 'romantic', low-key and intimate one, it would not be surprising if the two eventually formed an alliance down the road.

Nothing builds a closer bond between two people than getting together and discussing — or gossiping about — a third person. In this case, the popular choice would be Pakistan because Mr Modi has a lot of grievances against it to lament about and the US wants to play it smart considering our strategic location and major undertaking of trade projects with China. Pakistan's name is most likely to come up in a discussion about combating extremism, especially noting that the country experienced three massive attacks on June 23 with the country's security apparatus rendered helpless.

Although India and the United States have differences on climate change, trade and the skilled work visa policies for Indians, it will be interesting to watch how the meeting plays out. Nonetheless, the \$2 billion sale indicates that their troubles might be pushed aside for now, recognising that defence sales since 2008 have totalled \$15 billion and that general ties between the two countries have generally been amicable for decades, possibly attributed to the huge population of Indians on its soil making their mark in industry, research, and entertainment.

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Source: <https://tribune.com.pk/story/1444794/india-drone-deal-us/>

Climate Policy in the Age of Trump By Ted Nordhaus, Alex Trembath, and Jessica Lovering

Of the many reasons that a slim minority of voters chose to elect a bombastic reality television star to be president of the United States, climate change was surely not high on the list. Nonetheless, Donald Trump assumed the office last week openly hostile to the environmental movement. He has threatened to withdraw from the Paris climate accord, gut the Barack Obama administration's Clean Power Plan, and cut funding for climate science research. Should he follow through, two decades of work trying to translate a growing understanding of human-caused global warming into explicit treaties at the international level and emissions policies at the federal level will have reached their denouement. And that, in the long run, might be a good thing for the climate.

THE STATUS QUO'S SMALL FOOTPRINT

Since international efforts to limit carbon emissions began in earnest almost 30 years ago, there has been little evidence that either international agreements or national commitments to cap and reduce emissions have done much good. Analysis published late last year by our research outlet, the Breakthrough Institute, found that the carbon intensity of energy systems fell faster before climate policies were enacted in California, Germany, and around the world through the Kyoto Protocol. Modeling by the Yale economist William Nordhaus (the uncle of one of the authors) released last year reached a similar conclusion.

Emissions growth rates in various economies around the world have risen and fallen over recent decades, mostly owing to macroeconomic factors or technological developments. The collapse of the Soviet Union, the reunification of Germany, the opening of China to the global economy and its subsequent entry into the World Trade Organization, and the Great Recession all had clear and demonstrable impacts upon emissions. So, too, did the shale revolution in the United States and France's and Sweden's decisions in the 1970s and 1980s to go nuclear. Carbon treaties, caps, regulations, and taxes, meanwhile, have not.

The trend will likely hold. The Intended Nationally Determined Contributions, to which nations committed in lieu of legally binding emissions reduction commitments in Paris, turned out to be mostly indistinguishable from business-as-usual decarbonization trends and policies that nations would have pursued for other reasons, such as energy independence or offshoring of industry. Recent MIT modeling concluded that, all told,

the emissions reduction pledges made by nations at Paris would reduce the projected global temperature increase by late this century from 3.9 to 3.7 degrees Celsius.

With or without the Obama administration's Clean Power Plan, the long-term shift from coal to gas is likely to continue. Cheap gas, not a war on coal, has been the primary driver of coal's decline, and the new administration has been clear that it intends to further promote shale production. There may be less than meets the eye to other controversial changes as well. U.S. Energy Secretary-designate Rick Perry may not have been able to remember that the Department of Energy (DOE) was one of the agencies he'd pledged to abolish while campaigning for president in 2012. But this vow, popular among U.S. conservatives since President Ronald Reagan, has never been realized. Both the DOE and the national laboratories it oversees have vocal bipartisan constituencies in Congress.

With or without the Obama administration's Clean Power Plan, the long-term shift from coal to gas is likely to continue.

Federal tax credits for renewable energy similarly maintain bipartisan support and are unlikely to be repealed by the new Congress. The Trump administration might even figure out how to do something to keep the nation's embattled fleet of nuclear power plants online, a step that would keep U.S. emissions heading in the right direction even as the Trump administration reverses course on other initiatives.

The reality is that the trajectory of emissions is unlikely to differ significantly under a Trump administration from what it would have been under a Hillary Clinton administration. That, however, is not much comfort, given the not insignificant long-term risks posed by climate change and how unwilling the world seems to do anything to significantly mitigate those risks. The situation should prompt some reconsideration of what a plausible path forward might look like and how the politics of climate, energy, and the environment might be reconfigured in ways that could offer both more successful policy outcomes and a more robust and sustainable political consensus for action.

A CLIMATE RESET

The necessary reset of U.S. climate policy and politics will need to start by properly valuing the low-carbon assets we have today. As long as production remains high and gas remains cheap, gas should continue to displace coal, with or without the Clean Power Plan, for the next several decades. With modest actions to prevent further closures of nuclear power plants, reforms to speed up the relicensing of hydroelectric

dams, and continuing federal and state incentives for wind and solar deployment, we should be able to reduce emissions from the U.S. power sector by about 40 percent between now and 2040, a not insignificant achievement but still far from the scale reductions that would be necessary to reduce emissions to levels consistent with limiting the global temperature increase to three degrees Celsius in the twenty-first century (much less the international target of two).

Limiting temperatures further will require that the United States entirely decarbonize the power sector as well as other key parts of the economy such as transportation, industry, and agriculture that have proven much more difficult to decarbonize. The technological options for doing so at present are not good. Light transportation might be electrified, but heavy transportation, shipping, and aviation present more daunting challenges. There are similarly, at present, no viable low-carbon technologies for the production of steel, concrete, or fertilizer. Whether through electrification, fuel cells, or fuels manufactured without fossil inputs, economy-wide decarbonization will require full decarbonization of all of these sectors. Neither conventional nuclear nor wind and solar offer particularly plausible solutions to do so today.

Even in the power sector, the United States and most other developed countries have mostly stopped building nuclear power plants. Demand for nuclear power is growing slowly, public fears of nuclear accidents and radiation are vastly out of step with the actual risk, and liberalized electricity markets have undermined the kind of long-term planning that a cost-effective build-out of large conventional nuclear power plants requires. In contrast, wind and solar have been growing at a rapid rate from a tiny base over the last decade. But wind and solar installation around the world has reliably stalled as their share has approached about 20 percent of electrical grids. At that point, sometimes intermittent wind and solar will generate nearly all the grids electricity needs and sometimes none at all, so the costs of dealing with high penetrations of variable renewable energy sources start to become prohibitive.

In the face of such challenges, climate advocates have engaged in one version or another of magical thinking. There is hope that some combination of better climate science and mounting climate catastrophes will motivate public support for a World War II–style mobilization of wind and solar energy. There is faith that pumping subsidies into existing solar and wind technologies will result in incremental improvements that over time will accrue to the sorts of radical breakthroughs that would be necessary to scale those technologies to levels beyond what is today technically and economically feasible. There is also the belief, not much supported empirically, that a price on carbon or other regulatory mandates will spur private entrepreneurs to come up with the breakthroughs we will need to move human societies wholesale off of fossil fuels once and for all.

THE NUCLEAR OPTION

Given the scale of what would be necessary to have much impact on the global climate, some level of magical thinking may be unavoidable. One way or another, the world will need to develop and deploy technologies that don't yet exist on a massive and unprecedented scale. But there is one other possibility that hasn't much been on the table until relatively recently. In recent years, a new generation of nuclear engineers has launched a slew of advanced nuclear energy start-ups. The technologies aren't anything like the nuclear reactors operating around the world today, nor are the companies anything like the midcentury goliaths that commercialized the current generation of nuclear reactors. The new designs are small, hyperefficient, and radically safe. They can't melt down, are often a tenth or less the size of conventional light-water reactors, can be manufactured in factories just like wind turbines and solar panels, and can operate at sufficiently high temperatures to provide heat and power for steel, cement, hydrogen, and fertilizer production. Like wind and solar, these reactors produce energy with zero carbon dioxide. Unlike wind and solar, they produce it 24/7.

The new nuclear reactor designs are small, hyperefficient, and radically safe.

The United States is unlikely to embark upon the kind of state-led, top-down nuclear build-out that allowed France and Sweden to virtually entirely decarbonize their power sectors with nuclear power, but it might be able to embark on an entrepreneur- and venture-led effort to radically disrupt the nuclear sector. Doing so might allow the United States to once again lead the world in developing nuclear power on a planet that will soon enough have nine billion energy-hungry consumers. Reforming the Department of Energy, the national laboratories, and the Nuclear Regulatory Commission so that this sort of radical innovation would be possible might be just the sort of thing that congressional Republicans and the new administration would be able to get behind. And a climate mitigation effort that featured an innovative, entrepreneurial nuclear sector competing for growing global energy markets might persuade many U.S. conservatives to take the climate challenge a lot more seriously.

In the meantime, the prospects for a coherent climate policy in a Trump administration are exceedingly dim. But one thing the Trump era ought to do is challenge climate advocates to grapple seriously with why their politics and policies have failed so consistently for the last several decades. More than anything that is likely to happen in the next Congress, such a reckoning might offer a more hopeful and optimistic path for climate advocacy in the years to come.

Source: <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/north-america/2017-01-24/climate-policy-age-trump?cid=int-lea&pgtype=hpg>

Chinese Push For Pak-Afghan Détente | Editorial

WEEKEND visit by Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi to Kabul and Islamabad, being seen as a start of efforts on the part of China to normalise relations between the two sides came at a very critical when the country is reeling from state of mourning over the loss of scores of lives in Friday's terrorist attacks which undoubtedly manifest linkages with terrorist sanctuaries in Afghanistan operating under the patronage of NDS and RAW. During talks, we expect the evidence and concerns in this regard would have been shared with the Chinese FM in order to help him better understand the actual situation and Pakistan's position on it which remains that the Afghan side needs to take action against terrorist groups posing threat to peace and security across the border.

Whilst China is an important global player and also has excellent relations with regional countries, its effort for mediation, indeed, is a welcome step and we pray for its success as well in the context of regional peace and security. We expect the mediation effort taken by China on its shoulders will be pursued with utmost urgency and both the sides will also avail this offer to ensure peaceful relationship which is necessary to fighting the curse of terrorism plaguing both the countries for well over a decade now. Similarly the US has also an important role to play in ending the mistrust between the countries. The emphasis of both China and the US must be preparing the two countries to fully coordinate on security issues, for which Pakistan has always shown willingness but the other side never reciprocated in the same manner rather created hurdles in the way of steps such as a robust border management. We believe the revival of QCG process involving both the powers has become all the more imperative in the present circumstances in order to steer the matters towards improvement. All the stakeholders in Afghan peace, however, will also have to understand Pakistan's genuine concerns about the terrorists and their financiers operating on Afghan soil against our interests. As also pointed out by COAS Qamar Bajwa on Friday, it is now time for the other side to overcome its internal weaknesses and take action against terrorist sanctuaries being used for rendering blood in Pakistan. To dent a blow to terrorist elements, both Pakistan and Afghanistan will have to tightly join hands and fulfil their responsibilities with utmost seriousness and commitment. We understand the QCG can serve the purpose of monitoring and verifying the anti-terror actions by both sides which will go a long way in offsetting the environment of mistrust and blame game.

Source: <http://pakobserver.net/chinese-push-pak-afghan-detente/>

Trump's Agreement With India | Editorial

The US decision to sell 22 Guardian drones to India – the first such American transaction with a non-NATO ally – reinforces the strong defence ties that the two nations have established over the last decade. The deal, however, comes at a time when India's relationship with the US is not at its warmest. Since Donald Trump took office, he has made overtures to China over reigning in North Korea; an act which has irked some quarters in India and led to fears that Donald Trump might not consider India a priority. The deal, therefore, comes at an important time of India-US relations and will lay a solid background for PM Modi's upcoming visit to the US.

The defence deal will, however, have a difficult time masking the issues currently having a negative impact on India-US ties. Although Modi and Trump both consider themselves strongmen with a penchant for social media, the truth is that India does not currently enjoy the same relationship with the US that it did under Barack Obama. Donald Trump has openly criticised India for having a trade surplus with the US, and also accused India of unscrupulously negotiating at the Paris Climate Accord. In fact, Trump cited 'favours' accorded to India and China as one reason for pulling out of the Paris Accord. Modi's "make in India" campaign also directly contrasts with Trump's "make America great again" rhetoric which aims to return manufacturing to America. This contradiction has already manifested itself in Lockheed Martin's decision to produce F-16s in India instead of in America. Such underlying tension perhaps explains why the US is not celebrating Modi's visit with much fanfare, as was the norm under Obama.

Modi and Trump will likely find common ground in castigating Pakistan for its alleged role in supporting jihadist movements throughout the region, especially considering how speculation is rife over Trump adopting a tougher stance on Pakistan. The decision to sell the drones also overrides Pakistan's concerns that these drones will escalate instability in the region, further depicting how the US is drifting increasingly away from Pakistan. All signs therefore portend a deepening of the schism between the US and Pakistan – and that is never a good omen for peace in Afghanistan and in South Asia.

Published in Daily Times, June 26th, 2017.

Source: <http://dailytimes.com.pk/editorial/26-Jun-17/trumps-agreement-with-india>

Trump-Modi Nexus & Regional Stability By Dr Muhammad Khan

THE “New India” vision of Prime Minister Modi and President Trump’s vision of “making America great again” have indeed added a new dimension in the bilateral relationship of India and United States. Declaring India as a major defence partner, the joint statement, issued after the Modi-Trump meeting, “pledged to deepen defence and security cooperation”. As a proof of this cooperation, United States announced sale of 22 ‘Sea Guardian Unmanned Aerial Systems’ to India, which dawdled since 2016. This defence sale, the first ever to India by US would cost \$2 billion. Besides, US agreed to sell Boeing C-17 transport aircraft of worth \$366 million to India. It is worth mentioning that as per the arms sale purchase data of Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) India has attained the status of world’s largest major arms importer from 2012 to 2016 with 13% of global arms imports. From 2007 to 2016, India has increased its arms imports by 43%. Surprisingly, US has been the leading supplier of the defence equipment to India, ‘signing contracts worth more than \$15 billion since 2008. After the Modi-Trump meeting of June 26, 2017 both countries have decided to work together on ‘advanced defence equipment and technology at a level commensurate with that of the closest allies and partners’.

Understandably, U.S has to revive its defence industrial complex and create job opportunities for its nationals. Then, in order to introduce new technological developments in war munitions, the older ones have to be disposed-off and India offered itself as the end user of these weapons and equipment. Earlier, Trump visit of Saudi Arabia could fetch for US over \$400 billion which included \$110 billion for military equipment only. Qatar is purchasing is F-15 US aircraft worth 12 billion and UAE worth \$1 billion military hardware.

Whereas, these defence purchases would significantly sustain the falling US economy, the regional stability of these regions would be endangered to a greater level. The Middle Eastern region is already in turmoil and the new purchase would further destabilize it to the likes of its strategic planners. In South Asia, a region with two nuclear powers (India and Pakistan) and China in the immediate neighbourhood, the US strategic partnership with India may not augur well for the regional peace and stability. The Indo-US enhanced cooperation with major focus on defence and security related aspects may initiate a new beginning towards regional conflict.

In this regard, the US callousness towards the resolution of Kashmir dispute has indicated its preferences for India. Then, declaring Syed Salah-ud-Din, a native

Kashmiri leader and freedom fighter, as a global terrorist is total US leaning towards India. This announcement is in fact, disrespect to International Law, UN Charter, UN resolutions on the issue and many international covenants on human rights. In this regard, characters of three recent US presidents (Clinton, Obama and Trump) are questionable. They all promised a US role for the resolution of this core dispute between Pakistan and India, but surrounded to Indian wishes.

Out of many aspects of Modi-Trump Joint statement, terrorism remained another point of focus. With a commitment to be and act, "Shoulder-to-Shoulder Against Terrorism", there was a mention of Pakistan, both directly and indirectly. Whereas, as a rhetoric India has been accusing Pakistan of 'cross-border terrorism', the US leadership and particularly President Trump should have a sagacity, familiarity and needed audacity to speak truth, as who is doing terrorism against whom. Indian political leadership and military commander including NSA have been publically claiming destabilizing, bleeding and disintegrating Pakistan into parts through an organized network of terrorism.

Indeed, American President should not tell a lie and cheat the world after an open confession of terrorism inside Pakistan by Indian RAW, Jadhav being a very recent case in point. US should understand as to who is the beneficiary of Uri attack, Pathankot, Mumbai and earlier the attack on Indian parliament in 2001. Does, U.S has any justification of Indian state sponsored terrorism inside Pakistan, the massive human rights violations in IOK and negation of its own sponsored UN resolutions on Kashmir. United States must stop deceit and double standards in South Asia. The role of Pakistan against the terrorism is un-parallel, what India has done against global terrorism, except terrorising Pakistan and Kashmiris.

In fact, the new heights in Indo-US bilateral relationship with major focus on defence and security will pose a greater threat towards destabilization of South Asia in particular and Asia in general. Beijing and Islamabad are major focus of Indo-US strategic alliance; the former as a peer competitor and later as its supporter. Since US mainland is thousands of miles away from South Asian region, therefore, any conflict in this part of the world will have serious consequences towards regional and international peace and stability where India cannot remain unscathed. Therefore, India must shun its malevolent designs of destabilizing the region by massive purchases of US war munitions and threatening postures towards Pakistan and China. On its Pakistan must enhance its diplomatic clout in all major capitals to enlighten the international community about the consequences of Indo-US defence collaboration and emergence of possible conflicts in this region.

Source: <http://pakobserver.net/trump-modi-nexus-regional-stability/>

Indo-Israeli Embrace | Editorial

Nothing is permanent in international relations; alliances are constantly shifting and relationships between states are made and broken. The current global scenario is no different.

Amidst the tumult in global affairs, the Indo-Israeli relationship has emerged as a steady bilateral alliance, surprising to some, while others have been watching the ties between Tel Aviv and New Delhi grow over the decades.

Narendra Modi's recent visit to Israel seems to have cemented this alliance, as the warm embrace between the Indian premier and Benjamin Netanyahu on the tarmac of Ben Gurion International Airport on Tuesday showed. However, the visit has sparked an interesting reaction from Iran, which has enjoyed cordial relations with India, but is at daggers drawn with the Zionist state.

Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei on Monday called for support for the "oppressed Muslims in India-held Kashmir"; he also referred to Kashmir in his Eid sermon. There is little doubt Ayatollah Khamenei's response has been triggered by the growing bonhomie between Israel and India.

The Indians have come far from their past policy under Congress's watch regarding Israel/Palestine. India only established relations with Israel in 1992, while late PLO chief Yasser Arafat enjoyed great rapport with Indira Gandhi, calling her his 'sister'. Clearly, those days of mutual support are gone and Mr Modi has no love lost for the Palestinians; it was reported that a meeting with Palestinian leaders was not on the cards during his visit.

While the comparison would be anathema to New Delhi, there is a clear parallel between Israel's atrocious behaviour towards the Palestinians, and the brute force India has unleashed upon the Kashmiris. Despite the passage of several decades since these crises emerged, both Palestinians and Kashmiris have continued to be subjected to state oppression on their own land and have been denied the freedom and dignity they desire.

Both right-wing governments in Tel Aviv and Delhi seem to be sharing notes on how to keep these restive populations in check, with the Israelis stifling Gaza and the Indians using the jackboot to crush the Kashmiris.

Perhaps the Indo-Israeli embrace has provided an opportunity for Pakistan to highlight the Kashmir issue with Iran and others, in order to build world opinion against the atrocities unleashed upon both the Kashmiris and Palestinians.

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Source: <https://www.dawn.com/news/1343476/indo-israeli-embrace>

Where to Go From Here By Richard N. Haass

Every new U.S. administration takes several months to staff itself properly, master new and often unfamiliar responsibilities, and develop a comprehensive strategy for American foreign policy. The Trump administration's start has been especially rocky. But the administration has already executed a noticeable course shift on foreign policy and international affairs, exchanging some of its early outsider rhetoric and personnel for more conventional choices. If it can continue to elaborate and professionalize its new approach, it could achieve a number of successes. But for that to happen, the administration will have to act with considerably greater discipline and work to frame its policies toward regional and global issues as part of a coherent, strategic approach to international relations that benefits the United States, its allies and partners, and the world at large.

THE CHALLENGE IN ASIA

President Donald Trump has properly concluded that the greatest threat to U.S. national security is North Korea's accelerating nuclear and missile programs, which may give Pyongyang the ability to launch nuclear-tipped missiles at the continental United States in a matter of months or at most years. The president also seems to have concluded, correctly, that several decades of U.S. policy, mostly consisting of sanctions and on-again, off-again negotiations aimed at ridding North Korea of nuclear weapons, have failed. The challenge now is to choose among the three plausible alternative options for moving forward: acceptance, military intervention, or more creative diplomacy. A fourth possibility, that of regime change, does not qualify as a serious option, since it is impossible to assess its chances or consequences.

In theory, the United States and other powers could accept a North Korean nuclear capability and rely on deterrence to lower the risk of an attack and missile defenses to reduce the damage should one occur. The problem is that deterrence and defenses might not work perfectly—so the acceptance option means living with a perpetual risk of catastrophe. Moreover, even if Pyongyang were deterred from using the weapons it developed, it would still be able to transfer them to other actors for the right price. And even if its nuclear capability were never used or transferred, acquiescence to North Korea's continued possession of nuclear weapons would further dilute the nonproliferation regime and conceivably lead Japan and South Korea to rethink their nonnuclear postures.

Military intervention could be either preventive (moving deliberately to destroy a gathering threat) or preemptive (moving quickly to head off an immediate one). The

problem here is that any such strike would be a huge leap into the unknown with possibly devastating consequences. Officials could not know in advance just what a military operation would accomplish and how the North Koreans would react. Given Pyongyang's ability to destroy large parts of Seoul using conventional, nonnuclear forces, the South Korean government is understandably leery of the intervention option, and so any moves along these lines would need to be planned and coordinated with extreme care.

The unattractiveness of both acceptance and intervention is what keeps bringing policymakers back to the third option, trying to cap and reverse the North Korean nuclear threat through negotiations. But as decades of failed efforts have proved, diplomacy is no panacea. So the challenge on this front is not just getting back to the table but also figuring out how to make rapid progress once there. This could be done by breaking the issue's resolution into two stages, with an interim deal that would freeze Pyongyang's nuclear and missile programs, followed by longer-term efforts to reduce and eliminate the programs entirely.

The interim deal could best be executed as a bilateral agreement between the United States and North Korea, with other governments kept involved and informed through consultations. The negotiations should have a deadline for reaching agreement, to ensure that Pyongyang doesn't use the talks simply to buy time for further progress on its weapons programs. The North would have to agree to pause its testing of warheads and missiles while the negotiations continued, and the United States and South Korea would have to agree not to strike North Korea during the same period. In exchange for accepting a comprehensive, open-ended freeze on its nuclear and missile programs, intrusive inspections designed to ensure that the freeze was being honored, and a ban on any transfers of nuclear materials or missile technology to third parties, North Korea would get some sanctions relief and an agreement formally ending the Korean War, a form of de facto recognition. Follow-on talks would deal with denuclearization and other concerns (such as human rights) in exchange for an end to the sanctions and the normalization of ties.

An interim agreement would not solve the North Korean nuclear problem, but it would keep it from getting any worse and lower the risks of war and instability—as positive a result as one could imagine in the current circumstances. Since Chinese pressure on North Korea would be essential to achieve such a deal, this option would build logically on the administration's early investment in good relations with its counterpart in Beijing. And even if diplomacy failed again, at least the United States would have demonstrated that it tried negotiations before turning to one of the other, more controversial options.

Over time, “America First” will lead others to put themselves first.

As for the U.S. relationship with China itself, the administration’s primary goal should be to emphasize cooperation over North Korea, the most urgent item on the national security agenda. The two countries’ economic integration gives both Washington and Beijing a stake in keeping relations on course. China’s leaders are likely to focus for the foreseeable future on domestic concerns more than foreign policy ones, and the United States should let them do so. That means leaving in place long-standing U.S. policies on bilateral issues such as Taiwan, trade, arms sales, and the South China Sea; the Trump administration should avoid adopting positions on these issues that could either trigger a distracting crisis or compromise U.S. interests. The result would be a “North Korea first,” but not a “North Korea only,” U.S. policy toward China.

Regarding the Asia-Pacific more generally, the administration should reassure U.S. allies about the United States’ continued commitment to the region—something that has been called into question by Trump’s abrupt withdrawal from the Trans-Pacific Partnership and by various statements from the president and other administration officials. It would have made more sense for Washington to work with the other signatories to amend the TPP (as it appears to be doing in regard to the North American Free Trade Agreement) and join the modified pact. This remains an option, although it may be difficult to achieve. Failing that, the administration could attempt to work out an understanding with Congress that would allow the United States to join the TPP but commit the country to certain courses of punitive action in specific circumstances (currency manipulation, intellectual property theft, large government subsidies, and so on), similar to what was done when it came to U.S.-Soviet arms control agreements. The understanding would be codified and voted on at the same time as the trade agreement itself, as a binding package, to reassure the agreement’s critics.

FRIENDS AND FOES

In Europe, Washington should pursue stability. The EU is imperfect in many ways, but it remains a source of peace and prosperity on the continent. Its continued erosion or breakup would represent a major setback not just for crucial U.S. allies but also for the United States itself, both strategically and materially. The EU’s next few years will already be tense thanks to the negotiations over Brexit and possible crises in Italy and elsewhere. The United States has little leverage to bring to bear on the continent’s immediate future, but at the very least, Washington should voice its support for the EU and stop signaling its sympathy for its opponents.

Russia has been aggressively supporting just such anti-EU forces in order to weaken and divide what it sees as a hostile foreign actor, and Russia's interference in Western elections needs to be thoroughly investigated and aggressively countered. Washington's challenge will be figuring out how to support Europe and NATO and check Russia's political skullduggery while remaining open to cooperation with Moscow on making at least parts of Syria safe for residents, on counterterrorism, and on other issues of mutual concern. The administration has made its point that NATO members ought to spend more on defense; going forward, it would be more useful to discuss how to get more defensive bang for the bucks being spent. And although there is no case for bringing Ukraine into NATO, there is one for doing more to support its self-defense. Consistent with this, the sanctions against Russia levied over its actions in Ukraine should continue until those actions stop or, in the case of Crimea, are reversed.

In the Middle East, the Trump administration helped itself significantly with its quick, limited air strike in April in response to the Syrian government's use of chemical weapons. The strike reinforced the international norm against the use of weapons of mass destruction and sent a reassuring signal to local partners, who, during the Obama years, had become increasingly worried about Washington's willingness to back up its threats with actions. The challenge now is to embed such actions in a broader strategy toward the Syrian conflict and the Middle East at large.

However desirable a change of regime in Syria may be, it is unlikely to come from within anytime soon, and it would be incredibly difficult and costly to accomplish from without. Nor is the United States well positioned to ensure that a successor regime will be more desirable. For the foreseeable future, therefore, Washington should concentrate its attention on attacking the Islamic State, or ISIS, and weakening the group's hold on territory in Iraq and Syria. The Iraqi army is capable enough to control liberated areas in Iraq, but there is no counterpart to it yet in Syria, so getting such a force ready, drawn primarily from local Sunni groups, should be a priority.

Turkey is a U.S. ally, but it can no longer be considered a true partner. Under Recep Tayyip Erdogan's increasingly authoritarian rule, the chief goal of Turkish foreign policy seems to be the suppression of Kurdish nationalism, even at the price of undermining the anti-ISIS effort. Washington correctly chose to increase its armed support for Syrian Kurds fighting ISIS—and because this will cause friction with Ankara, it should reduce U.S. dependence on access to Turkish military bases for these and other operations.

The Iran nuclear deal is imperfect, but the administration has been right not to tear it up and start over. Doing so would leave Washington isolated and Tehran unconstrained. What the United States should do instead is insist on full compliance with the

agreement's terms, counter Iran's regional push for influence where it can, and prepare for how to constrain Iran's nuclear might after the deal expires. At the same time, Washington should resist being drawn in too deeply on the side of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates in Yemen. The conflict there is fast becoming a military disaster and a humanitarian tragedy, and the fact that the rebels are backed by Iran is insufficient justification for getting trapped in a quagmire.

The struggle against terrorism will be long, difficult, and never fully successful.

The Trump administration has said various things about its intentions regarding what used to be called "the Middle East peace process." The unfortunate fact is that neither the Israelis nor the Palestinians appear ready to move forward; the most Washington can achieve right now may be to keep the situation from deteriorating further (which is actually very important, because in the Middle East, things can always get worse). There is no reason to believe that the situation is ripe for resolution or ambitious diplomatic efforts. The administration should concentrate instead on reducing the odds of violence around Jerusalem's holy sites (something that argues against moving the U.S. embassy to Jerusalem), strengthening the hand of Palestinian moderates, limiting settlement activity, and exploring unilateral but coordinated arrangements that would improve on the status quo and set the stage for more ambitious diplomacy should the parties decide they are prepared to make meaningful compromises for peace.

The Middle East is not the place to look for quick or easy victories. The struggle against terrorism, jihadist and otherwise, will inevitably be long, difficult, and never fully successful. Terrorism cannot be eliminated, only combated, and such an effort will continue to require a mix of intelligence sharing and cooperation with friendly governments, persistent pressure on terrorist financing and recruitment, and occasional military action. The number of U.S. forces deployed in Iraq, Syria, and the region more generally will likely need to be maintained or selectively increased.

A TIME TO LEAD

Back during the George W. Bush administration, in trying to articulate what the United States really wanted from China, Robert Zoellick, the deputy secretary of state, framed the question as one of whether Beijing was prepared to act as "a responsible stakeholder" in the international system. The concept is a useful one and applies now to the United States, the founder and dominant power within that system. So what constitutes responsible behavior for Washington in the world at large at this juncture?

One element is giving appropriate attention to both interests and ideals. The Trump administration has shown a clear preference for not involving the United States in the

internal affairs of other countries. Such realism is often warranted, given Washington's multiple priorities and limited leverage in such matters. But there is a danger in taking this approach too far, since prudent nonintervention can all too easily shade into active support for deeply problematic regimes. Careless relationships with "friendly tyrants," as such rulers used to be called, have burned the United States often in the past, and so it is worrying to see Washington take what look like the first steps down such a path again with Egypt, the Philippines, and Turkey. Friends need to speak candidly to friends about the errors they may be making. Such communications should normally take place privately and without sanction. But they do need to occur, lest the United States tarnish its reputation, encourage even worse behavior, and set back efforts to promote more open societies and stability around the world. The president should also understand that what he says about U.S. institutions, including the media, the judiciary, and Congress, is listened to closely around the world and has the potential to reduce respect for the United States while encouraging leaders elsewhere to weaken the checks and balances on their rule.

Another element of responsible behavior is continued support for international aid and development, which is a cost-effective way to promote American values and interests simultaneously. In recent memory, for example, Colombia was racked by civil war and served as a major source of drugs coming into the United States. Since then, the provision of hundreds of millions of dollars in U.S. aid has helped stabilize the country and secure a delicate peace—saving countless lives and dollars as a result. Similar stories play out when Washington helps foreign partners address terrorism, piracy, drug trafficking, poverty, deforestation, and epidemic disease. When it gives aid wisely and conditionally, the United States is not a soft touch but a smart investor.

The administration would do well to tone down some of its rhetoric on trade. Technological innovation has been a much more important source of domestic job losses than trade or offshoring, and embracing protectionism will only encourage others to do the same, in the process killing off more jobs. What is needed is a full-fledged national initiative to increase economic security, consisting of educational and training programs, temporary wage support for displaced workers, the repatriation of corporate profits to encourage investment at home, and infrastructure spending. The last, in particular, is a multipurpose tool that could at once create jobs, increase competitiveness, and build the country's resilience against natural disasters and terrorism.

Something similar holds for immigration, which should be treated as a practical more than a political issue. However the American body politic ultimately decides to handle legal and illegal immigration policy, the danger to the country supposedly posed by

immigrants and refugees has been exaggerated and is not a major national security threat. The administration should cease gratuitously insulting its southern neighbor (and promoting anti-Americanism there) by insisting that Mexico pay for a border wall. And singling out individuals from Muslim countries for special scrutiny and differential treatment risks radicalizing significant numbers of their coreligionists at home and abroad.

The administration (and Congress) needs to be careful not to set the country on a path of rapidly increasing debt. The danger is that a combination of steep corporate and individual tax cuts, higher levels of defense spending and higher interest rates, and no reform of entitlements will do just that. Financing the debt will come to crowd out other useful forms of spending and investment (reducing American competitiveness) and leave the United States more vulnerable to market forces and the politically motivated decisions of governments that are large holders and purchasers of U.S. Treasuries.

Russia's interference in Western elections needs to be thoroughly investigated and aggressively countered.

One last policy matter involves the climate. The intensity of the opposition in some quarters to the 2015 Paris accord and to acceptance of climate change as the result of human activity is something of a mystery. The agreement is a model of creative multilateralism, one totally consistent with sovereignty; the administration would be wise to embrace it. The targets set for U.S. greenhouse gas emissions are goals the United States set for itself; as a result, the government retains the right to change them, when and how it sees fit. The good news is that the availability of new technologies, state and local regulations, and the requirements for access to many global markets will likely mean that the United States can meet its Paris goals without sacrificing economic growth.

As for personnel and process, the administration hurt itself at first by underestimating the complexity of running the government and taking a petulant and idiosyncratic approach to appointments. As a result, most senior national security and foreign policy staff positions are being filled on a temporary basis by civil servants or have been left open entirely, hamstringing effective government operations. Any thoughts of a major bureaucratic restructuring should be postponed until the administration is filled with the requisite number of qualified officials.

Trump clearly prefers an informal decision-making process, with various voices included and many points of entry, and presidents get their way. But such an approach has downsides as well as upsides, and if the administration wants to avoid the dangers that

come with excessive improvisation, it needs to ensure that the formal National Security Council policy process dominates the informal one—and that significant informal deliberations are ultimately integrated into the formal process rather than carried on separately.

The president also clearly prefers to be unpredictable. This can make sense as a tactic, but not as a strategy. Keeping foes off balance can be useful, but keeping friends and allies off balance is less so—especially friends and allies that have put their security in American hands for generations. The less steady they judge those hands to be, the more they may decide to look out for themselves, ignoring Washington's requests and considering side deals to protect their interests. Frequent policy reversals, even those that are welcome, come at a substantial cost to the United States' credibility and to its reputation for reliability.

Down that route lies the unraveling of the postwar order that the United States has worked so hard to create and maintain. It is important not to forget that the United States has been remarkably well served by this order. Where things have gone the most wrong—in Korea, when U.S. forces marched north of the 38th parallel in what would become a costly and unsuccessful effort to reunify the peninsula by force, in Vietnam, in Iraq—it was because of overreach by U.S. policymakers rather than a requirement to act on behalf of the order.

But that order is now in decline. Many of its components need to be modernized or supplemented, and new rules and arrangements are needed to deal with the various challenges of globalization. But the international project should be a renovation, not a teardown. New challenges may have arisen, but the old challenges have not gone away, so the old solutions to them are still necessary even if they are no longer sufficient. The strategic focus for U.S. foreign policy should be preservation and adaptation, not disruption, so that the United States and those willing to work with it can better contend with the regional and, even more, the global challenges that increasingly define this era.

The EU is imperfect in many ways, but it remains a source of peace and prosperity on the continent.

In that regard, the president's campaign slogan of "America First" was and is unfortunate, because it appears to signal a narrower U.S. foreign policy, one lacking in a larger purpose or vision. It has been interpreted abroad as suggesting that friends and allies now come second, at best. Over time, "America First" will lead others to put

themselves first, which in turn will make them less likely to take into account (much less give priority to) American interests and preferences.

The slogan also unfortunately reinforces the mistaken notion that there is a sharp tradeoff between money and effort spent on international affairs and those spent on domestic concerns. In a global world, Americans will inevitably be affected by what happens beyond their country's borders. The United States needs both guns and butter, and national security is determined by how well a country meets its external and internal challenges alike. The good news is that the United States, which now spends only half the percentage of its wealth on defense that it did during the Cold War, can afford both.

If the administration does decide to retain the phrase, it should at least recognize its shortcomings and counteract them. This means finding ways to make clear that although the United States does follow its own interests, it does not do so at its friends' and partners' expense. American patriotism can be defined and operationalized in ways compatible with responsible global leadership. And figuring out how to do that from here on in is the Trump administration's central challenge.

Source: <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2017-06-11/where-go-here>

Under Trump, U.S.-Russian Relations Hit New Low By Jenna McLaughlin & Emily Tamkin\

President Donald Trump came into office with hopes of establishing a “fantastic relationship” with Russia, praising his counterpart in Moscow as “very smart.” Instead, after almost six months in office, his administration is mired in a growing investigation into its possible collusion with the Kremlin during the 2016 presidential election, and, ironically, U.S.-Russia relations are at an all-time low.

Now, just a day before Trump’s first in-person meeting with President Vladimir Putin at the G-20 summit in Germany, U.S. officials are keeping their distance. “There are people frozen in fear they’re going to be tarred by the ‘Red Scare,’” said Rolf Mowatt-Larssen, the former head of intelligence and counterintelligence at the U.S. Department of Energy.

Mowatt-Larssen, now the director of the intelligence and defense project at the Harvard Kennedy School’s Belfer Center, spent more than two decades working for the CIA, including in the Soviet Union during the Cold War. He argues that reporters, lawmakers, military personnel, and intelligence professionals are afraid of inadvertently appearing too “pro-Russia” simply by mentioning small areas of possible coordination. “We’re making excuses for ourselves,” he said during a phone interview.

For Russia hawks and isolationists alike, Trump’s interactions with Russia have been disappointing. “One of the casualties is the opportunity to develop constructive relationships with Russia in areas where we need a constructive relationship, like nuclear matters,” former Defense Secretary William Perry told journalists at a recent dinner in Washington, D.C., sponsored by the Hoover Institution. “Nobody dares talk with Russia today even with good reasons.”

Added to those troubles is the Trump administration has, since the early days of the transition, made almost no effort to engage with the Russia experts on the National Security Council (NSC) — or “at least take them seriously,” according to one source informed on the internal meetings. Efforts to coordinate informal policy conversations with different government agencies on very basic positions toward Russia fell on deaf ears, never reaching the level of even a principals committee meeting, the source said.

Trump political advisors on at least two occasions tried to push for rolling back sanctions on the Kremlin in an effort to “work with Russia,” blind to the policy

implications and the public relations nightmare it would cause — though those proposals never made it past informal discussions, according to the source and reporting by the Daily Beast.

Now, that source says, the only people trying to make decisions on Russia are at the top levels of the State and Defense departments — ignoring both their staffs and the entire NSC along the way.

The NSC staff aren't the only ones without a compass. One former CIA official told Foreign Policy that colleagues still working in the agency are floundering, unsure of what policy is in place when it comes to Russia. "Nobody really knows what foreign policy they're supposed to be following ... because there isn't one," the former official said.

The Trump administration has recently started speaking with Russian policy experts outside of the White House, including at the Center for a New American Security, though it's unclear what influence that will have. "While we can't go into the specifics of private conversations, our experts have had discussions on Russia issues with the NSC, Department of Defense, and Department of the Treasury," a CNAS spokesman wrote.

The tension between Russia and the United States certainly didn't start under Trump. Under former President Barack Obama, the two countries in 2009 agreed on a "reset" in relations but found little common ground. Instead, Syria and President Bashar al-Assad became major points of contention. Then, in 2014, Russia invaded and annexed the Crimean Peninsula in Ukraine, followed in 2016 by a massive campaign to meddle in the U.S. presidential election. Obama continued to reach for economic sanctions in response — a decision many Republicans described as inadequate.

While President Obama's responses to Putin's misbehavior attracted criticism, there was at least an interagency process in place, led by the NSC. "In 2014 the administration realized that our relationship with Russia was fundamentally adversarial," Jeffrey Edmonds, the former acting senior director for Russia during the transition at the NSC, wrote in an email to FP.

The obvious consequences of failing to talk to Russia on issues like nuclear weapons, Syria, and counterterrorism is provoking an unintentional war. "The situation isn't good.... We should be working things out," Mowatt-Larssen said.

Some areas of U.S.-Russia cooperation continue, however. On June 20, the Russian Cultural Center — part of the Russian Embassy in D.C. — hosted an event honoring research being jointly done by Moscow and Washington on U.S. and Russian military personnel who went missing during World War II. At least one person from the Pentagon was in attendance.

The Arctic and space exploration also still offer common ground. “Despite all the kind of overdrawn and very nervous press articles that appear about resource wars and shipping wars and militarization of the Arctic — in fact, the Arctic is a pretty peaceful place today,” Kenneth Yalowitz, a former U.S. ambassador to Belarus and Georgia who is now with the Wilson Center’s Polar Initiative, told FP.

The United States has also “continued without any complications in our cooperation with Russians on the international space station,” Todd Harrison of the Center for Strategic and International Studies told FP. The Russians rely on the United States for operations and control, while the Americans rely on Russia for passage to and from the space station.

Mowatt-Larssen told FP that the relationship between intelligence agencies might be fertile ground for rebuilding some sort of connection, however tenuous. While he couldn’t go into detail, he said there is now preliminary work underway to try to improve relations between the two nations’ intelligence agencies, at least on a limited basis.

It’s not the first time. Last July, the United States and Russia announced a tentative plan for a joint command center for military and intelligence professionals to cooperate on Syria. It’s a “traditionally very productive area,” Mowatt-Larssen said. “It sounds difficult because of the tension, but they are practical parties, action-oriented.”

Even those small areas of cooperation, however, could be threatened if the United States levies stricter sanctions, a position that has received broad support from Congress.

Edmonds, now at CNA, a nonprofit research organization, said the NSC team spent a year working on an interagency process to determine how to respond to Russia, given its aggressive behavior. “We questioned assumptions, derived Russia-related end states from the National Security Strategy, and developed a strategic framework through which principals could work out a national strategy on Russia,” he said.

But now the investigation into the Trump team's connections to Moscow has overshadowed the policy issues, making any new strategy, or even normal contact with Russian government officials, suspect.

"There are things that are in our common interest," Mowatt-Larssen told FP in an interview. There are opportunities for cooperation in areas "like nuclear terrorism, terrorism in general, international disorder caused by climate change, regional conflicts that grow because of water scarcity, infectious disease," he said.

Yet cooperation on those high-level issues is precisely what's lacking, and Perry, the former defense secretary, warned that the United States is slipping into conditions "worse than the Cold War."

"I had thought up until a few months ago there may be a silver lining in what I considered the dark cloud of the Trump presidency: that we might actually have the opportunity to start talking constructively with Russia again," he said. "That's gone. For I don't know how long, but a long time I think.

Source: <http://foreignpolicy.com/2017/07/06/under-trump-u-s-russian-relations-hit-new-low/>